



**Sussex**  
Wildlife Trust



# Volunteer Handbook

*Welcome to the team*



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# Welcome

**from Tor Lawrence, Chief Executive**

Sussex Wildlife Trust is the largest nature conservation organisation in Sussex and connecting people with Nature is at its heart. We have been championing wildlife and wild places, deepening people's understanding of our vulnerable and beautiful natural world since 1961.

Volunteers are an essential and vibrant part of the team. We believe that volunteering should be fun and engaging. There are lots of ways you could volunteer with us, from practical conservation, to supporting community events, to helping at Wild Beach workshops or getting muddy in the woods. Thank you for offering your time, energy and skills, it is much appreciated.



# About us

The Sussex Wildlife Trust is the County's leading nature conservation organisation managing over 5,000 acres of prime woodland, heathland, wetland and meadow habitat including some of the finest wild places in Sussex. We speak out and are listened to on local conservation issues, influencing decisions of local, regional and national authorities. We also engage with farmers and landowners to ensure wildlife is not restricted to nature reserves but can flourish, moving freely through interconnected habitats.

We work with communities and local schools, encouraging volunteering by offering a wide range of opportunities, including working with the fishing industry and government towards sustainable fishing practices and designations of Marine Conservation Zones off the Sussex coast. We run an extensive programme of courses and community events to help people learn about and enjoy the wildlife in Sussex. Our Forest School, Nature Tots, family events and education programmes are all aimed at connecting children with nature to promote a life-long love of wildlife. Do look at our website for more information about our work.

Please take a few minutes to read this booklet to ensure your volunteering experience is safe, rewarding and beneficial. If you have any questions please feel free to ask your team leader or one of the Volunteer Development Team who will always be happy to help.



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# Volunteering: What is it all about?

## What to expect from us

You can expect a warm welcome at the Sussex Wildlife Trust. You will be assigned a member of staff who will be your volunteer manager, they will introduce you to the other volunteers and staff. They will also explain the role and let you know where everything is. Training and support will be provided to ensure you feel happy and confident enough to undertake your role. If you have any specific training requests please discuss them with your Volunteer Manager.

## Induction

It is important that you attend an induction session within your first year of volunteering. General

Sussex Wildlife Trust induction runs at various geographical locations or online via webinar at different times each year. Your Volunteer Manager will talk to you about with your induction and help to book you into a suitable session.

Thank you sessions are run by the Volunteer Development Team on an annual basis each at different locations throughout the year. You will be invited to a volunteer information event or guided walk. This will be an afternoon or evening at one of a number of different locations across the county. This is your opportunity to learn more about our work, receive additional support and training as well as the chance to meet with other new volunteers in a social setting.



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## Our responsibilities to you

- To offer you support, information and have systems in place that are clear
- To be given tasks that you are capable of and that are of benefit to the Trust
- A clearly defined outline of the task we would like you to undertake
- To have a member of staff nominated as a key contact for the task involved
- To have expenses reimbursed, at the appropriate rates, where possible and pre-agreed
- That we strive to ensure equality of opportunity
- Safe working conditions
- That you feel able to say no to inappropriate requests outside the task or volunteer charter
- That you have access to a Complaints and Dissatisfaction procedure via an independent member of staff

- That you feel your contribution is valued by paid staff, who are fully aware of the nature and purpose of volunteering
- That you are able to see how your contribution fits into the broader objectives of the Sussex Wildlife Trust

## What we expect from you

- To work with us to help us achieve our aims and objectives
- To be reliable
- To give commitment
- To air any problems/issues immediately to the appropriate person
- To respect confidentiality and diversity
- To attend relevant training
- To provide notice of your intention to stop volunteering with us, where possible



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- To comply with Sussex Wildlife Trust health, safety and environmental policies, procedures and safe working practices
- Maintain good relations with other volunteers, Sussex Wildlife Trust staff and members of the public
- Enjoy yourself!

Please note that acceptance of this handbook will be deemed to be acknowledgement of an agreement with the principles outlined above. This agreement is binding only in honour and is not intended to be legally binding.

### **Becoming a volunteer**

There are lots of different reasons why people volunteer, it can be to try something new, learn skills or to meet new people. Volunteering comes in many different forms.

### **Example volunteer opportunities:**

There are volunteering opportunities you might expect at a conservation organisation and those that might be a surprise. It is good to hear about them in case there is something you are interested in but didn't know existed. For all roles you will have a volunteer manager who will explain the role and go through safety briefings, tool use and explain any projects.

### **Practical Conservation**

Management of our nature reserves and partner sites through creating new habitats, constructing gates, coppicing, scrub bashing and tree planting.

### **Education**

Curriculum linked school visits to our education centres at our nature reserves, Forest School or Wild Beach workshops for students and teachers.

### **Volunteering with young people**

We have Nature Tots for 3-5 year olds, Watch for 5-11 year olds, Wildlife Rangers for 12-16 year olds, Youth Rangers for 16-25 year olds. Helping with practical activities and equipment while guiding attendees.

### **Events**

Everything from art fairs, festivals, pop up cafés, bioblitz ecological recording and school holiday clubs. A chance to chat to the public and take part in creative activities. This is a great opportunity for flexible and one off volunteering.

### **Youth Volunteering- Youth Rangers for 16-25 year olds**

#### **Administration**

This could be helping with the membership team, evaluation assessment with the education team or research and data entry for WildCall.

#### **Professional Skills**

Perhaps you have design skills, ecological survey skills or storytelling skills. Let us know and if we have the right project to fit, you could be using your skills to help the Sussex Wildlife Trust.

#### **Work experience**

For secondary school students (under 16) and university work placements (over 16). We have a limited number of places each year for work experience students. We hope to offer under 16s a week of varied Trust experiences. Post 16s might have a specific work experience route to meet their course requirements. For example; education students would spend most of their time with the Learning and Engagement team, whereas ecologists would mostly be on reserves. Please fill in the application form on our website so we can consider what might be the best fit for you and Sussex Wildlife Trust. There are limited work experience places available each year but there are always other, one off volunteering experiences as well.

[sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/workexperience](https://sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/workexperience)

Volunteer vacancies are shown on our website and these include role descriptions and details about activities.

[sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/volunteervacancies](https://sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/volunteervacancies)

# Safety and Policies

## Health and Safety

The Trust is committed to looking after the health, safety and wellbeing of everyone who volunteers for it and any activities carried out on a voluntary basis are subject to the same health and safety requirements as those carried out by Trust staff. Health and safety is everyone's responsibility and it is therefore important that you understand and accept your role in promoting and maintaining our high health and safety standards in order to provide a safe working environment for all.

Please take a few minutes to read our General Code of Practice below. Your team leader will be able to brief you on the safe working procedures relevant to your role. Full details are provided in our Occupational Health and Safety Policy which will be sent to you when you register to become a volunteer. Before you begin work on a site, your team leader will complete a Daily Task Assessment Form and brief you on the risk assessments and safe working practices relevant to the tasks you will be working on.



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## General Code of Practice

Whilst on a task/activity for Sussex Wildlife Trust all, staff and volunteers must:

- Take reasonable care of the health and safety of themselves and of others who may be affected by their activities while volunteering for Sussex Wildlife Trust
- Co-operate with staff to ensure that the working environment remains safe
- Only tools and equipment issued by or approved by the Trust can be used
- No-one may use or operate any tools, equipment, machinery or vehicles unless they have been trained and authorised to do so – training certificates may be required
- No-one may use any tool, equipment, machinery or vehicle while under the influence of drugs or alcohol

## Fire Procedures

### In an office

Fire evacuation procedure notices are displayed in all offices. All staff and volunteers are required to understand what to do in the event of a fire. This includes knowing the location of fire exits and fire exit routes. Please ensure that you know the fire meeting point outside each office site where you are volunteering. Please note that only trained members of staff should use a fire extinguisher and only if it is safe to do so.

### On our nature reserves

Natural hazards occur on our nature reserves and your Volunteer Manager will alert you to the risks. Those nature reserves that are highlighted as at more risk (e.g. heathland sites) have a Fire Plan that has been agreed with the relevant fire authority and is included in the Management Plan. The Volunteer Manager will make clear to you what constitutes safe fire management procedures including water and any necessary personal protective equipment (PPE).



## Forest School Fires

While Forest School fires are often smaller or contained in a fire bowl, they can still be dangerous. There will always be water and personal protective equipment present for use. Please listen to the safety instructions from the Volunteer Manager

## First Aid

First Aid kits are provided at all Sussex Wildlife Trust locations and must always be available at events. There are appointed First Aiders at Woods Mill, Southerham Farm, Seven Sisters, Tilgate Park and Rye Harbour Nature Reserve. No conservation tasks can take place on any of our nature reserves or other conservation sites unless a trained First Aider is present. A First Aid kit is kept in each of the Trust's vehicles. For guided walks there will always be at least one First Aider present, depending on size of the group. For Education volunteers, Walk Leader volunteers and Volunteer Reserve Managers there are opportunities to train in outdoor first aid, if relevant to your volunteering role and of interest to you.

## Reporting Accidents

Please report all accidents, however small, to a First Aider. All accidents, including near misses must be recorded and submitted through the online accident record system, which can only be completed by a member of staff. A First Aider will be asked to record all details of the accident, injury, time and contact details for injured person. A paper version of the accident book is provided but notifications should be submitted via email and then destroyed to protect privacy and follow General Data Protection Regulations.

It is the responsibility of the Volunteer Manager or person in charge of the site to ensure that accident reporting requirements are observed.

The Trust promotes good general health through the provision of good working practices and environments. It is important that if you are a practical conservation volunteer that you read and agree to the Health, Hygiene and Working Outdoors Procedures which covers information regarding Tetanus and Lyme disease. There is also information on the NHS website: [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) All those volunteering outdoors should have an up-to-date Tetanus inoculation (please check your current status with your GP).

Good personal hygiene is essential in preventing illness and disease whilst volunteering.



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Please remember to:

- Cover small cuts and abrasions immediately with a sterile dressing and ask for First Aid assistance if necessary
- Remind your doctor of the nature of your work so he/she can be aware of occupational illnesses
- Wear any personal protective clothing or equipment that has been issued

## Dead Animals

If you come across a dead animal on one of our reserves, do not touch it and report it to your Volunteer Manager or the Grazing Officer on 07884 496807 as quickly as possible. The handling of dead animals should be undertaken by Trust staff only.

## Safeguarding

If you ever have concerns about a child, please report details to a member of staff as soon as possible. You can also report to a Safeguarding Officer or the Safeguarding Lead, these officers are identified on posters in each building and at each site. They will refer this to social services when appropriate. Please do not worry about reporting, this is about the safety of children and promoting a helpful culture around the positive impact that safeguarding can have on protecting and supporting children. The Safeguarding officers are the Community Engagement Manager and the Safeguarding lead is the Head Facilities.

## References and volunteering with children

If you are volunteering with the education team or Forest School where you are regularly volunteering with children, we will ask for two referees who have known you for at least two years.

We will also complete a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certification, which would show any criminal convictions. Once completed this can move to the update service so it will update automatically without you having to fill it in every three years.



### **Lone Volunteering**

The Trust is committed to the health, safety and wellbeing of our volunteers who may be alone while undertaking activities on behalf of the Sussex Wildlife Trust. When volunteering alone (for example on an ecological survey), please ensure you have a person who knows where you are and that you will text to let them know when you are home safe, this person is your 'Buddy'. Please follow the buddy system and ensure your volunteer manager knows when you are going to be on site and when you are leaving. This is easiest to complete by text or using the What's App location sharing function.

### **Buddy System:**

- Arrange this before attending Volunteering alone (e.g. for Lookinging)
- Agree with Trust member of staff which day and time you are going to be on site
- Have a person (friend or family member) who you are texting before and after visit to say you are safe. This person is your 'Buddy' Give an approximate time of return
- Ensure your 'Buddy' has the number of the Trust staff member just in case
- If phone signal is poor, have an agreed time by which you will let your Buddy know you are home
- Buddy will call Trust staff if you are not home safe by agreed time

Lone volunteers are defined as those who volunteer by themselves without close or direct supervision in locations away from regular contact with other people. No volunteer should work alone without prior knowledge of their Volunteer Manager.

Volunteer Reserve Managers (VRM), Volunteer Reserve Wardens (VRW), Ecological Survey Volunteers and lookers often undertake tasks when alone. These tasks should only proceed if they have been assessed and deemed as low risk. Please discuss with your team leader what is considered low risk.

If a lone volunteer does not report back on within a few hours of expected time, then their 'buddy' should contact the Reserve Manager so that the follow up procedure is actioned. All volunteers will be given up-to-date contact details for the Reserve Managers and the Director of Land Management to use in the event of an emergency.

### **Dealing with difficulties**

We aim to make all volunteering experiences positive and enjoyable and to treat all volunteers fairly, objectively and consistently. We encourage regular two-way communication as a way of becoming aware of issues before they become problems. However, we do realise that problems sometimes do arise: a volunteer may have a complaint or a complaint may be made about a volunteer.

If you encounter a difficulty with any aspect of the role or the role is not working out as hoped, please talk to your team leader as soon as possible for advice and support. Together you should try to work out any difficulties. Although dealing with complaints can be difficult, it can give us a positive opportunity to improve the way things are done and provide a better service. If you wish to make a complaint or you receive a complaint from someone about anything to do with your volunteering role with the Trust, please pass the information to the Volunteer Development Manager as quickly as possible. We will work together to find resolution to the issue.



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## Diversity

We are committed to a policy of treating all volunteers and volunteer applicants equally and fairly. We will not discriminate against any volunteer on the basis of their age, ethnic origin, race, religion, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, disability or any other factor unrelated to a person's ability to carry out their volunteer task. We will not accept such discrimination by staff or other volunteers. A copy of the Dignity at Work and Equal Opportunities policies are available on request from the Volunteer Development Team.

## Insurances

The Sussex Wildlife Trust carries Third Party insurance cover in respect of volunteers who are undertaking tasks on their behalf, either on Trust property or under direction of the Trust. Should you need a copy of the Public Liability Insurance certificate for your records, please email [swtvolunteering@sussexwt.org.uk](mailto:swtvolunteering@sussexwt.org.uk). The Trust also provides limited Personal Accident insurance for volunteers; however you are advised to check you have adequate personal insurance cover for your own requirements under your own policies, in respect of any work carried out on behalf of the Trust.

## Car drivers

If you're volunteering in an activity for the Trust that involves using your own car, such as driving a group of other volunteers to a Nature reserve or driving to locations around Sussex to put up posters, you must inform your insurers. Your car is not covered by the Trust's insurance.

## General Data Protection Regulations and IT policy

The Trust's email, internet and telephone systems are only to be used for business purposes. Misuse of the Trust's systems will be regarded as misconduct and will therefore be dealt with in line with the Trust's IT Policy.



The Trust needs to gather and use certain information about individuals, including members, volunteers, business contacts, staff and other people with whom we have a relationship. Sussex Wildlife Trust will store your details securely, and we will never sell, trade or rent your personal information to other organisations. We would also like to send you occasional information about aspects of our work, such as conservation news, events and fundraising campaigns. You can update how (phone, email, text and letter) and whether or not you receive such information at any time in writing. All volunteer details are kept under strict control within our database network.

## How we talk: Sussex Wildlife Trust Culture

Please be kind and patient with each other and towards the Sussex Wildlife Trust staff and the public. Our aim is to behave respectfully towards each other, without aggressive language or rudeness.

# Keep in Touch

If you have an interest in local wildlife or would like to hear more about local projects we also have a number of social media accounts.



## Twitter:

Useful for articles and links on Wildlife. Short text and a few images.

@SussexWildlife  
@GGPWildlife  
@Ryeharbour\_NR



## Instagram:

Beautiful images of Sussex

@sussexwildlifetrust



## Facebook:

Our Sussex wildlife Trust nature table is a group you can join, with opportunities to share your own local wildlife sightings and even get help identifying the creatures you find. Our Gatwick Greenspace Partnership has its own Facebook account with great updates on events and local wildlife.

Sussex Wildlife Trust Nature Table  
Gatwick Greenspace Partnership



## You Tube:

We have various videos including practical information on how to make woodland crafts, identify butterflies or even some nest box cameras. Great for all the family.

Sussex Wildlife Trust

# Useful Information

## Expenses

We can reimburse travelling (up to a maximum of a 40 mile return journey) and, in some cases, other out of pocket expenses that arise as a result of your volunteering with us. These must be agreed in advance by your volunteer manager. Not everyone claims expenses but this is your decision as we do not wish to place any financial hardship on our volunteers.

Please claim authorised expenses monthly or quarterly using a volunteer expense form which you can request from your volunteer manager or from [swtvolutneering@sussexwt.org.uk](mailto:swtvolutneering@sussexwt.org.uk).

Please attach all tickets and receipts (or photos/scans) to the completed volunteer expense form (except mileage claims). Once completed, you should pass it to your Volunteer Manager for processing. When claiming expenses for the first time, you will also need to complete a BACS request form so that we can reimburse expenses into your bank account.

## Branded Clothing

As our thank you for giving your time we would like to provide some Sussex Wildlife Trust branded clothing, which also shows you are a volunteer, for specific roles. We will aim to provide everyone with a t-shirt and hat. For outdoor volunteers we will also be providing a raincoat, fleece jacket (as part of 3 in 1 raincoat) and a hoodie. We would be delighted if you wear this branded clothing while volunteering but it is not essential. Some volunteers find it helpful to have branded clothing when they are completing practical work, to demonstrate to the public that they are helping with conservation.

## Keeping in Touch

If you would like to receive our quarterly volunteer e-news with information on events, volunteer vacancies and training, please ensure that you have ticked email for Sussex Wildlife Trust contact on your volunteer registration form. We can also send this to you in the post if you prefer, please let us know on 01273 497500.

## Our Thanks

Even if your Volunteer Manager does not have the opportunity to thank you personally after every event, please know that Sussex Wildlife Trust truly appreciates all your volunteer hours, whenever and wherever you give them. The strength of the Trust is built on the partnership between volunteers and staff, working together for our common cause.

**Thank you for choosing to volunteer with the Sussex Wildlife Trust.**



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