

Volunteer Handbook



**Herts &
Middlesex**
Wildlife Trust

Your guide to being a volunteer with Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust

Updated February 2024

Welcome

**to a team of over 1000 volunteers who are helping to make
a Wilder Hertfordshire and Middlesex**

Welcome to Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and thank you for volunteering your time to help wildlife. The strength of the Trust is built on the partnership between volunteers and staff, working together for our common cause. We strive to encourage and support all our volunteers and to offer a friendly and enjoyable environment in which to volunteer. As a local charity, volunteering has always been, and remains, fundamental to every aspect of our work.

So whatever volunteering time you can give – thank you.



Peter Tallantire
Chair



Lesley Davies
Chief Executive

About Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust

The Trust is a charity supported by people who care about their local wildlife. We have over 23,000 members and 1000 volunteers. We are one of 46 Wildlife Trusts across the UK working to give wildlife a better future. We have an ambitious target of seeing 30% of land in recovery for nature by 2030 and we want to see a step change in the number of people taking action for wildlife.

Volunteers play a key role in achieving these goals, helping to manage our nature reserves and working with other landowners to improve land for wildlife. Raising awareness of wildlife and the importance of its conservation is paramount, and volunteers play a key role in this, in our partnership projects, engagement programmes, and in our office.

The Trust abides by the Charity Ethical Principles published by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations which helps us to be more inclusive, open and ethical in how we work and treat people. These Principles apply to how we manage our volunteering programme – <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/policy-and-research/ethics/ethical-principles>.

[The Trust is committed to the principles of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.](#)

There are opportunities for volunteers to support work across the whole Trust.

Volunteer Commitment

Anyone who volunteers for the Trust must be registered with us. As part of registering, volunteers are agreeing to abide by the Volunteer Commitment.

Volunteers are expected to:

- Maintain and uphold the good name and reputation of the Trust.
- Act in accordance with the role that they have been assigned.
- Be accountable and cooperate with members of staff to accept constructive comments, instructions and guidance.
- Keep in regular contact with the Trust to ensure each is aware of any updates or changes to their role or activities and raising concerns or comments with the staff team.
- Be reliable and aim for high standards of efficiency and quality.
- Act in a courteous and respectful manner to their fellow volunteers, members of staff and the public.
- Abide by the Trust's policies, procedures and standards, including Health & Safety, Data Protection, Equality and Safeguarding.
- Accept that ultimate responsibility and decision-making for the charity and its activities rests with the Board of Trustees.
- Take reasonable care of their own health and safety and that of others who may be affected by their actions.
- Respect the need for confidentiality.
- Ask for support and take part in training required for their volunteer role.
- Avoid handling money unless specifically authorised to do so by the Trust.
- Inform the Trust if they no longer wish to volunteer or, if their circumstances change (including their health), if they require adjustments to their role.

The Trust will at all times endeavour to:

- Recognise and celebrate the importance of volunteering.
- Create a friendly and supportive atmosphere so that volunteering is a rewarding and enjoyable experience.
- Provide a safe and healthy environment in which to work.
- Match the needs of the Trust with the skills, experience, interest and time of the volunteer, providing training and support as required for the role.
- Make volunteers feel part of a team where they are treated respectfully, fairly and consistently.
- Listen, learn and encourage two-way communication.
- Ensure volunteers have a good understanding of the work of the Trust and its aims, providing appropriate information about our work, policies and procedures.
- Resolve any complaints or issues in a fair and consistent manner.
- Evaluate our volunteering activities to develop what we do well and address areas for improvement.

About volunteering

Why volunteer?

The benefits of being a volunteer include:

- Knowing you are contributing to wildlife and habitat conservation, whatever your volunteer role.
- Sharing your knowledge, skills and experience.
- Meeting people with similar interests.
- Developing new skills and experience that enhance employment prospects.
- Helping to improve your physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- Making a positive impact on awareness of wildlife in your community

The benefits to the Trust include:

- Helping to increase the delivery of wildlife and habitat conservation on the ground.
- Increasing the public's understanding of wildlife and wild places.
- Making more people aware of the Trust's work.
- Bringing in additional knowledge, skills and ideas.
- Strengthening our engagement with the local community.
- Helping extend our influence and supporting our work to stand up for wildlife.

Volunteer roles

We have roles across the Trust including:

- Trustees and Committee members providing strategic direction to the Trust
- Nature reserve volunteers e.g. Reserve Wardens, conservation work parties
- Surveying and monitoring wildlife e.g. Water Vole surveys, botanical surveys
- Leading guided walks and helping at events
- Community outreach projects in schools and local organisations
- Helping in the office – administration, data entry, finance
- Helping in the Wildlife Garden
- Helping with fundraising

Available volunteer roles are advertised on our website here:

<https://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/volunteering-opportunities>

Who can volunteer?

The Trust encourages volunteers of all ages and abilities as long as they are able to take part safely; we will take into account the capabilities of volunteers and the requirements of the role. Our volunteers come from all backgrounds, bringing a variety of skills and experience.

The minimum age for volunteering is 11. Children aged 11 to 15 years of age must be supervised by a parent or guardian. Volunteers aged 16 or 17 do not need to be accompanied but we require a signed parental consent form and they must work as part of a group. Volunteer requests from children aged 11 to 17 will be considered on an individual basis and suitability to a particular role will be assessed.

The maximum age for volunteering is 86, due to insurance, however exceptions can be made in some circumstances if authorised by the Trust's insurance company.

We understand that, for a range of reasons, some volunteers need extra support. We aim to reduce the barriers to volunteering, whilst ensuring the health and safety of all our staff, volunteers and members of the public. If you have extra support needs, we ask that these are discussed with your primary contact at the outset to assess whether you can volunteer safely.

Is prior experience needed?

We encourage people with a variety of life experiences to become involved and generally you do not need experience - you can learn as you go along, or you may be offered training. However, some roles do require specific skills or experience and we closely assess the suitability of these for any volunteer. You will always be fully briefed about your role and the tasks you will be involved in.

Do volunteers have to be a member of the Trust?

The support we receive from our volunteers is fundamental to the success of the Trust. There are only a few volunteer roles where an individual must be a member. We encourage all our volunteers to be members of the Trust but you will be equally valued and welcome if you choose not to join.

How much time is required?

Every contribution helps. Some people volunteer regularly every week and have a specific role, whereas others just help whenever they can. When you enquire about volunteering you will be asked to indicate the amount of time you have available, when in the week you might be able to volunteer, as well as the type of activity you are interested in.

What happens when I start my role?

You must first register as a volunteer. When you start to volunteer, your induction process will include being assigned a role and given a role profile that will make clear your tasks and responsibilities. Each volunteer will have a 'primary contact' at the Trust, who may be a member of staff or another volunteer. Your primary contact will ensure you understand your role and is there to support you. At a later date, if you would like to change roles or take on an additional role, please speak to your primary contact and they will explore this with you.

Volunteering with the Trust

We aim to support our volunteers, and recognise and celebrate their valuable contribution to our work. All volunteers will have a primary contact who will be either member of staff or another volunteer, who will provide support, feedback and answer queries.

Volunteer registration and insurance

Volunteers are expected to carry out only those tasks that are suitable for their ability, taking into account factors including age, competency, medical conditions, without causing any harm or injury to themselves or others, or damage to property. The volunteer must discuss any issues which may affect their ability to carry out their role with their primary contact.

The Trust's Employer's Liability Insurance and Personal Accident Insurance provides cover against liability for injury sustained by volunteers as a direct result of their involvement with Trust activities.

We insist that volunteers register with us, and provide us with their date of birth, to ensure that they are covered by our insurance when carrying out volunteer duties on our behalf.

There are certain conditions that apply and these will be outlined when you register.

Your health

Volunteers should seek the advice of a medical professional prior to undertaking volunteering if they have any health concerns or questions or if their health changes and it may affect their volunteering with the Trust.

Volunteers should inform the Trust of relevant health information that could affect their volunteering. If an individual's health changes in a way which could affect their volunteering, they must let their primary contact know immediately and this information will be treated sensitively and held in accordance with our Data Protection Policy. The Trust will seek to make reasonable adjustments to the role.

The Trust may ask a volunteer to provide a note from their doctor before they volunteer for the Trust or if their health changes. If a volunteer fails to provide sufficient evidence proving they are fit to volunteer, they may be asked to cease volunteering with the Trust or to adapt their role. For some roles with a higher level of responsibility such as Reserves Wardens, the Trust may offer to arrange an assessment with an occupational therapist. Failure to comply may lead to the volunteer being asked to cease volunteering with the Trust.

Support and development

Volunteers receive training and supervision so they are able to carry out their role safely and effectively. We ask volunteers to highlight training needs when starting or taking on new activities.

Each volunteer's role will be reviewed with them from time to time to gather and receive feedback and to discuss any further training and development needs. For some roles with a higher level of responsibility such as Reserves Wardens regular discussions will be held.

There will be an initial 3 month probationary period for a volunteer new to one of these roles with a higher level of responsibility to ensure that it is working well for the volunteer and the Trust.

Expenses

The Trust will reimburse pre-agreed, reasonable, out of pocket expenses to volunteers. There is a cap of a 40 mile round trip on expenses per day for volunteers, except for volunteers such as Trustees, Committee Members and Wildlife Sites Surveyors where additional travel is required as part of their role. The Trust encourages the use of public transport wherever possible. Your primary contact will give you an expenses form on request.

Recording your time

To help recognise the invaluable contribution volunteers make to the Trust, it is very helpful to be able to record the amount of time they give. It is of particular use in applications for funding as it helps to evidence the level of support we receive. When you start volunteering your primary contact will agree with you how to record your time.

Copyright

Volunteers are asked if they would donate to the Trust the copyright to any original works they may produce whilst volunteering (e.g. photographs, artwork and biological survey data). For particular roles which specifically involve producing such work, volunteers will be asked to sign a copyright agreement.

Problem solving

For most people, volunteering at the Trust is an enjoyable and positive experience, and any issues which occur are normally resolved quickly. However, we realise that situations occasionally happen where a volunteer is unhappy about their volunteering experience, or where a complaint is made about a volunteer. Any such situations will be dealt with fairly, objectively and consistently.

The Trust sets a high standard of behaviour for its staff and volunteers, and does not tolerate inappropriate behaviour. In the case of a serious act of misconduct (violence, theft, harassment, non-compliance with a health and safety instruction, bringing the Trust into disrepute, abusive behaviour) a volunteer will be asked to leave immediately.

Keeping us updated

Please let us know if your contact details or contact preferences change, particularly if you have a new emergency contact, so we can update our records. We will store and use personal information in accordance with our Data Protection policy and privacy notices.

Stepping down

We understand that volunteers may wish to cease their involvement at any time, for a variety of reasons. We ask that if you decide to leave, you discuss this with your primary contact. This gives us the opportunity to may be find an alternative role; it also helps us learn and develop our volunteering programme and ensures that you are no longer formally registered as a volunteer.

Policies and procedures

When volunteering you automatically agree to follow the Trust's policies and procedures.

The main policies which relate to volunteering are summarised below. The full policies are published on our website at <https://www.hertswildlife.org.uk/volunteerpolicies>, and paper copies can be provided on request.

Health and safety

The Trust has a duty of care to ensure a safe and healthy working environment for all volunteers, and all volunteers have a duty of care to themselves and to others. All volunteers will be briefed on health and safety as part of their induction, and must follow the risk assessments and safe working practices relating to their role.

Lone Working

If your role involves working alone, this will be discussed with you at your induction. It is essential that you understand the Trust's Lone Working Policy and Procedures, as extra caution is necessary for situations where you need to carry out duties alone. Please make sure that your primary contact or another nominated person knows where you are and that you confirm with them that you have returned safely.

Telephones, Email and Internet

The Trust's email, internet and telephone systems are only to be used for Trust purposes.

Equal Opportunities

The Trust is committed to a policy of equal opportunity for all and strives to ensure that the work environment is free from harassment and bullying, and that everyone is treated equally and with dignity and respect. The Trust will not discriminate directly or indirectly in the recruitment or management of volunteers because of age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy, maternity, race (which includes colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins), sexual orientation, religion or belief, or because of someone's marital or civil partnership status.

Data protection

All personal data you disclose to the Trust is processed in accordance with our Privacy Policy. All volunteers must act in accordance with the Trust's Data Protection and IT Acceptable Use Policies and guidance. You may not store any Trust data on your personal devices, home computers or in hard copy. Where your volunteer role requires you to hold personal data we will arrange specific consent with you.

Confidentiality

We ask you to respect other people's privacy and keep sensitive information confidential. Volunteers are expected to respect the requirements for confidentiality in their work with the Trust and you may be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement if your role requires it.

Communications

While we would like volunteers to help raise the profile of the Trust through social media, the press, radio and TV, it is important that the Trust staff team always deal directly with

the broadcast media. If you are contacted by the media in your capacity as a Trust volunteer, please speak to your primary contact or our communications team – media@hmwt.org - prior to agreeing to take part in any media opportunities related to your volunteering with the Trust.

Volunteers must not make disparaging or defamatory statements about the Trust, its staff, other volunteers or members past or present, or other stakeholders. Volunteers should avoid any communications that might be misconstrued in a way that could damage the Trust's reputation, even indirectly. Volunteers who bring the Trust into disrepute are likely to have their volunteering permission withdrawn; concerns about this will be discussed with the volunteer and handled in a consistent and fair manner. Any further action required of the volunteer or the need for them to cease volunteering will be explained to them in writing.

Safeguarding

The Trust will follow its Safeguarding Policy and Procedure when recruiting volunteers, in order to protect children and vulnerable adults. The implications for your volunteering role will be explained to you by your primary contact.

**Thank you so much for volunteering with Trust,
your support makes all the difference.**