

Volunteer Handbook

Welcome to the team!

You've joined an extraordinary group over 600 volunteers who dedicate their time to support and champion wildlife in Cumbria.



Cumbria Wildlife Trust formed in 1962 and is the only voluntary organisation devoted solely to the conservation of wildlife and wild places in Cumbria. Volunteers are fundamental in supporting our vision of a Cumbria in which land and seas are rich in wildlife, and where people are closer to nature.

Together, we restore and connect wild places, inspire people in nature, work with nature to tackle the climate emergency and support people to take local action for wildlife. We really value your commitment, support and hard work. It is fair to say that Cumbria Wildlife Trust was created by volunteers, is maintained by volunteers and will only be able to continue its work thanks to its many volunteers. It really is that simple... So THANK YOU for volunteering with us!

This guide is designed to help and support you. It contains information to help you settle quickly into your role as a Cumbria Wildlife Trust volunteer and covers a number of important issues. It also aims to clarify what you can expect from us, as a valued team member and will be a useful resource as you progress with your volunteering. We really hope you value your time with us too.

Your Volunteering Coordinator

Name: Ruth Alcroft

Email: volunteering@cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk

Call: 07436 657653

VOLUNTEERING WITH CUMBRIA WILDLIFE TRUST

Volunteer opportunities are open to everyone at Cumbria Wildlife Trust. Volunteering is a great way to develop your skills and interests, meet new people, have fun, learn and be part of a community. Whatever your background or experience, we aim to offer valuable and diverse volunteer roles to suit your interests and abilities that are both satisfying and rewarding. Our volunteer roles vary in terms of time and commitments. However, we appreciate every contribution however great or small.

Who can volunteer?

Anybody is welcome to volunteer with us from all walks of life. All of our volunteers bring a variety of skills, experience and enjoyment to the Trust.

Do I need to have any prior experience?

You don't need to have any prior experience to get involved. Where some roles may be more specific, we will provide you with an induction for your role and the tasks you will be undertaking.

What kinds of opportunities can I get involved in?

We have opportunities on our reserves and within our communities, surveying roles, office-based roles, opportunities working with young people and helping at events. Cumbria Wildlife Trust is also supported by our active Local Support Groups, Board of Trustees and Honorary Reserve Managers.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Cumbria Wildlife Trust recognises the importance of equal opportunities and believes that volunteering should be open to all. We have an Equality, Inclusion and Diversity policy which states our commitment for providing equal opportunities to all of our volunteers.

The Trust are committed to taking all necessary steps to ensure that harassment and discrimination for any reason is not experienced by individuals or groups at sites and events managed by the Trust. We expect our volunteers to treat all other volunteers, staff, and people you support equally and with respect. If you have any queries regarding equal opportunities, please contact our Volunteering Coordinator in the first instance.

ABOUT CUMBRIA WILDLIFE TRUST

Cumbria Wildlife Trust is an independent countywide registered charity, affiliated to The Wildlife Trusts - a national partnership of 46 wildlife trusts covering the UK. We have our head office in Kendal and branch offices at our Gosling Sike nature reserve (Carlisle) and South Walney nature reserve (Barrow).

With a dedicated team of over 80 skilled and professional staff working closely with volunteers, partners and thousands of supporters, together we're creating a wilder future for Cumbria.

Our vision is of a Cumbria in which land and seas are rich in wildlife and where people are closer to nature. We look after over 40 nature reserves and work closely within communities to help wildlife too.

As well as hundreds of volunteers, the Trust is supported by over 15,000 members, who make regular donations to support our work. We also work in partnership with landowners, local authorities, businesses and other conservation organisations.

The Trust is led by a board of elected trustees, who volunteer their time and expertise to direct and check our plans and work.

OUR VALUES

- **Love for Cumbria and its nature**

We're rooted in Cumbria and its communities: the people, the place and our natural environment. Our love for nature is at the heart of our work.

- **Taking action**

We seek radical change and bold-thinking to make a positive difference through taking action for people and wildlife in Cumbria. We are evidence-led, innovative and solution- focused. We strive to find and deliver the best long term solutions for people and nature in Cumbria and are willing to act alone if necessary. We speak up for nature (in line with our agreed 'tone' which is assertive but respectful of others' views and interests) and act in the long-term interest of wildlife.

- **Passionate about our cause**

Everything we do is driven by our desire to make the World a better place. We work enthusiastically and with purpose in taking action to make Cumbria a better place for wildlife and people. Our passion for nature is the prime motivator for our skilled, motivated and dedicated team. We focus our energy on where we are best placed to deliver the most impact for wildlife, enabling us to work with purpose and focus.

- **Working together**

We are committed to achieving our vision for Cumbria with and through other people. We work with everyone and seek to find the common ground with others. We see collaboration, with partners and local communities, as being vital to achieving the outcomes to which we aspire (including farmers, landowners and local businesses). We are committed to transparency and inclusivity within our actions and projects, co-designing programmes to deliver the greatest impact for nature but without under-valuing or under-selling our contribution. We encourage, facilitate and support individuals and local communities in taking action for people and wildlife across Cumbria.

- **Inclusion and Diversity**

We champion inclusion and diversity within our organisation and local communities. We accept that difference, competition and conflict exist, but we work openly, collaboratively and with tolerance. We are outward-looking and open-minded and seek to find the common ground first. We seek to understand and listen first so that we can learn from others but equally, we are willing to share our own expertise, knowledge and experience to benefit others where appropriate.

- **Integrity**

We are committed to upholding high standards of integrity and honesty in the way we work. We acknowledge our mistakes and limitations – and strive to improve continuously by learning from our experiences. We question and challenge ourselves and seek to 'do as we say'. We strike an

appropriate and measured balance between being overly risk averse and foolhardy. We value the trust that our members and others place in us. We strive to use the precious resources they give to us to maximise the wildlife outcomes we deliver; whilst minimising waste or unproductive activity and acting ethically in our dealings with others.

- **Respect and fairness**

We work with respect for nature, respect for each other and respect for other people even if we disagree on the details. We work hard and effectively whilst respecting the work-life balance, health and wellbeing of our staff, volunteers, members and partners.

We nurture a supportive culture based on trust and care for each other and for our community. We value honesty and openness with each other whilst being sensitive to one another's feelings.

OUR COMMITMENTS

What you can expect from Cumbria Wildlife Trust

The Trust believes in investing in its volunteers for the benefit of both parties. Whatever type of voluntary work you do, we aim to ensure that you receive support, advice, a role-specific volunteer induction, agreement and/or training to match your needs and reflect the level of commitment you undertake.

By accepting this handbook, we deem you have acknowledged the agreement outlined by the principles in this handbook. *This agreement is in binding honour only and is not attended to be legally binding.*

We aim to ensure that you:

- receive a warm welcome to the Trust, a clear induction on the nature and purpose of all activities and are helped to fit in with the team
- have a safe and healthy work environment, access to appropriate PPE and clear instructions of correct use of tools and equipment
- are supported in your role and supervised where necessary
- are aware of all health and safety issues, policies and procedures
- receive and have the opportunity to attend training where appropriate
- have the opportunity to put your ideas forward about the work you are carrying out
- feel that you are able to say no to tasks outside of your volunteer role or character
- are reimbursed reasonable out-of-pocket expenses
- have your records kept in confidence in compliance with our GDPR and Privacy Policy
- enjoy your time, learn and meet new people
- are thanked and valued for your contribution

What we ask of you

As a volunteer you are an ambassador for the Trust and your personal recommendation is an invaluable way of recruiting more volunteers and promoting the work we do. As a representative of the Trust, we rely on you to reflect our values and aims. Wildlife conservation presents some surprisingly controversial issues at times, and it is possible to be drawn into debate with local communities, trust members and individuals over local and national topics ranging from land use and flood prevention to culling and wildlife crime. We understand that you will have your own point of view which may differ from the Trust's position, and if so, that it is important for us both to distinguish between them.

We therefore ask you to:

- work with us to help us achieve our aims and objectives, in line with our values
- show respect to others, regardless of their views, background and experience
- adhere to all relevant Trust policies and procedures including health and safety, equal opportunities, GDPR and confidentiality
- take all necessary care to protect the health and safety of yourself and of others
- ask for support if and whenever you need it
- report any problems to your staff contact or Volunteering Coordinator
- undertake training where it is mutually agreed to be necessary (e.g first aid training may be necessary for some roles)
- be reliable and inform your staff contact if you are unable to attend work or a session
- Enjoy your time volunteering with us!

HEALTH AND SAFETY

The Trust is committed to providing a safe and healthy working environment for all of our volunteers to enable you to contribute positively to your own and colleagues' safety at work. Current legislation also places the responsibility on you, as a volunteer, as well as the Trust, to take all reasonable steps to make sure safe working practices are carried out at all times. There are set Trust guidelines including risk assessments, tool use talks, provision of protective clothing & equipment and procedures in case of an accident. Your staff contact or group leader, who will be fully trained first aider, will explain these to you at the beginning of your task or role. If your voluntary role may involve leading groups or undertaking tasks without the direct supervision of staff, full training will be provided. However, if you ever feel at all uncomfortable with any particular task, then please stop and ask a member of staff for support. Please take time to read our general Code of Practice below. Our Health and Safety Policy is available on our website.

Code of Practice

During a conservation day, task or activity authorised or led by the Trust, we ask:

- All volunteers must take all necessary care to protect the health and safety of yourself and of others by adhering to all Trust policies and procedures
- Only tools and equipment issued or approved by Cumbria Wildlife Trust may be used
- Nobody may use tools, machinery, vehicles unless trained and authorised by the Trust
- Nobody may volunteer under the influence of drugs and alcohol
- Nobody may volunteer on their own without the knowledge of the Trust

Emergency Contact Cards

On attending a conservation day, volunteer task or activity authorised or led by the Trust, your staff contact will provide you with an emergency contact card for you to fill in on arrival. Your staff contact will collect these and give them back to you at the end of an event. You may keep hold of these for future. This is for the health and safety of yourself should an unlikely incident occur, and provide your staff contact with necessary detail, in confidence, of any allergies or medical issues they should be aware of.

Personal health and well-being

We do occasionally work with volunteers who are recovering from, or managing an illness or injury. If you think your staff contact needs to be aware of anything that might affect your fitness or ability to participate, please ensure they are made aware, at the earliest opportunity prior to volunteering with us. This is to ensure any reasonable adjustments can be made to support you and/or your safety whilst volunteering with us.

There is well-documented evidence that volunteering to help others and being outside has positive effects on people's health and well-being. We want to ensure that this applies for all our volunteers, and that no-one feels under pressure when volunteering with us, but we do rely on you acting to ensure we understand your personal circumstances, so that we can make suitable adjustments to support you properly.

Your Volunteering Coordinator, Ruth Alcroft, is happy to chat to you in confidentiality.

Lone working

Cumbria Wildlife Trust takes seriously its responsibilities to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of all volunteers who carry out their volunteer activity alone, without direct support or supervision. This may be in the case where a volunteer undertakes an ecological survey or a volunteer undertakes a task agreed by the Trust in advance.

We are committed to reducing the risks to volunteers and to ensure that there are adequate systems in place to reduce the risks of personal safety and lone working as far as is reasonably possible and practicable. It is the responsibility of the Trust to ensure volunteers are trained and provided with the appropriate PPE where necessary for carrying out lone volunteering. Lone volunteering can only be undertaken where the task has been assessed and deemed low risk and must not be undertaken without prior consent by the volunteer staff contact.

It is the responsibility of the volunteer to:

- follow our lone working policy, risk assessments and buddy systems
- do not knowingly put yourself at risk of harm in the course of your duties
- carry a fully charged mobile phone
- take and use any other personal protective equipment provided or identified in your risk assessment provided by us
- only carry out lone working where agreed with your staff contact

Our Working Alone Safely codes of practise is available on our website.

HOME BASED AND VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING

Cumbria Wildlife Trust have home based and virtual volunteering roles, enabling volunteers to help from the comfort of their own home. This may be where volunteers are able to share existing skills such as digital, social media, marketing and PR.

When working on the Trusts computer systems, we may need to obtain personal character/employer references (with your consent) to ascertain your suitability for such roles and ensure best safeguarding practice is used. We may also require that you sign a confidentiality agreement with the Trust.

Cumbria Wildlife Trust is keen to ensure that home-based volunteers are working safely and will support you with managing your health and safety e.g. by encouraging you to take regular breaks, sit correctly at your desk and keep your home exits clear, should you need to get out of your house in an emergency.

Cumbria Wildlife Trust will provide you with a VDU checklist to make sure your workstation is suitable and safe, this needs to be completed before any computer work starts and revisited once annually.

Whilst volunteering from home, we encourage you to keep in contact with your staff contact or Volunteering Coordinator for support. Virtual volunteers are a key part of supporting our organisation.

SAFEGUARDING

We believe that safeguarding is “everyone’s duty to protect individuals from harm and create a safe environment”. Most safeguarding practices are an extension of everyday common sense based on having respect for others. We appreciate that everyone has different viewpoints and perceptions and trust our volunteers to act appropriately at all times when volunteering with the Trust.

As we work with others, the Trust wants to ensure our staff and volunteers are safeguarded, as well as everyone that we meet in the course of our work and volunteering.

We work with local authorities and other agencies to ensure we follow and update best practice. We have a designated staff member responsible for safeguarding issues, Marian Jones, Head of the Community Team and Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL).

Please feel free to contact her if you have any concerns or queries regarding safeguarding issues. Email Marian: MarianJ@cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk

If you think a vulnerable person is in immediate danger or a crime has been committed then you should always contact the police on 999.

WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

If you wish to volunteer with children, young people or vulnerable adults, for example, running one of our “Wildlife Watch” clubs you will be required to complete a confidential online DBS check via the national Disclosure and Barring Service, which will be paid for by us, alongside two written references. You will receive training and an induction to our safeguarding policy and health and safety codes of practices for working with young people. Additional training may be required.

We recognise that information released on DBS certificates can be extremely sensitive and personal – please be assured that we only see the results of any such check with your consent. We also have a code of practice to ensure that any information is handled fairly and properly.

We recommend discussing this confidentially with our Volunteering Coordinator in the first instance, prior to submitting any DBS check.

***Safeguarding of children and adults at risk:** if we have concerns about a volunteer’s suitability or conduct when working with young people or adults at risk we may share information with other Trusts across the federation, including the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts, to help them make informed recruitment decisions around a candidate’s suitability for a role, which may not be flagged by disclosure and barring service checks or reference procedures*

DATA PROTECTION AND GDPR

In compliance with General Data Protection Regulations 2018 and our Privacy Policy, volunteer details are held on the Trust’s computer records. These are based upon the information supplied when you first volunteer.

We retain your records to make sure that you are kept up to date about local activities and volunteering opportunities that could be of interest to you. **Please note:** if you are taking on a role working with children or vulnerable adults, our insurers ask that your information be kept for a period of up to thirty years. Only the essential information will be kept.

Please let us know of any changes so we can keep your records up to date. Your personal details will be treated as confidential and kept no longer than necessary. If you ever want to change the way we communicate with you, or feel that the information we send is no longer relevant for you, please call or email our office (01539 816300 or admin@cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk) and we will update your records accordingly.

SUPERVISION AND SUPPORT

Dealing with difficult situations

The Trust aims to make all our volunteering experiences positive and enjoyable and to treat all volunteers fairly, objectively and consistently. We encourage frequent two-way communication as a means of preventing problems before they arise.

However, we realise that difficult situations occasionally arise, e.g. a volunteer may have a complaint regarding their experience, or about a volunteer or member of staff.

In such instances, the following course of action is recommended:

- Try to speak with the person in question, ensuring that your main staff contact is involved, to try and resolve the situation swiftly and amicably.
- If this fails to resolve the situation, then volunteers can raise their concerns to the Volunteering Coordinator who will try to resolve the situation and deal with the concerns raised. Email Ruth Alcroft at volunteering@cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk
- In the absence of the Volunteering Coordinator or if it is felt that the Volunteering Coordinator has not resolved the situation satisfactorily, the Head of Community Development, Marian Jones, should be contacted for guidance without delay. Email marianj@cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk

The Trust may cease volunteer opportunities in cases of breaches of policies or procedures for the health, safety and wellbeing of those involved or affected.

INSURANCE COVER

Public Liability Insurance: Any volunteer or volunteer group acting under the direction of any Cumbria Wildlife Trust employee is covered by our public liability insurance. This covers you for claims made against you of negligence or carelessness to others, including other volunteers. There is no age limit to this cover.

Personal property: Cumbria Wildlife Trust does not cover you or your personal property against accidental loss or damage.

Motor Vehicle Insurance: Any volunteer with a current Full UK driving licence to drive the relevant category of vehicle, can use the Trust's fleet vehicles and be protected by our policy, subject to the approval of our insurers and prior consent of the staff member you are volunteering with.

If you need to drive such a vehicle, you must sign a declaration form (available from our head office) and provide our Finance and Administration Team with your driving licence and a driving licence check code so that a full driving licence check can be carried out. This applies whether you are driving on or off-road and is irrespective of the type of vehicle being driven.

Use of your own vehicle

If you are using your own car for Trust business, for example carrying tools or volunteers, you must check with your own insurance company that you have adequate cover. This is usually a case of contacting your insurer in advance to check and should not normally incur any additional cost.

VOLUNTEER ADMINISTRATION

Volunteer recruitment and registration

The Volunteering Coordinator is responsible for volunteer recruitment, selection and induction of volunteers in line with Trust policies. Our volunteer opportunities are advertised on our website, newsletters, social media and externally. Some volunteer opportunities such as staff-led conservation days are available to book onto and other will outline the application process and how to register.

Volunteer roles and inductions

All volunteers will register with us in line with our policies, receive our volunteer handbook, a relevant induction and role description outlined upon advertisement. All volunteers will be invited to attend an online volunteer welcome induction session with our Volunteering Coordinator.

We have 'supervised volunteers', where volunteers are led by staff on a planned conservation or practical volunteering day. We have 'principal volunteers' where volunteers may not be supervised by staff which may include, and not be limited to, volunteer leaders, Wildlife Watch volunteers, Honorary Reserve Managers, office volunteers, Local Support Groups and Trustees. The division is to recognise the differing levels of responsibility and approach to recruitment and management. In some cases, especially where working with young or vulnerable people, supervised volunteers may require additional training or induction processes

For supervised volunteers, an explanation of how to carry out the task safely and all health and safety requirements will be covered on the day, including provision of PPE.

Principle volunteers may be required to complete training for specific roles not limited to: informal interviews, additional applications, DBS checks, confidentiality agreements, reference checks, safeguarding and first aid training provided by the Trust.

Volunteer role descriptions are outlined clearly and inductions created in line with our health and safety policy, safeguarding policy, GDPR and privacy policy and relevant codes of practise.

The Volunteering Coordinator, member of staff and volunteer are responsible for ensuring full completion of inductions, prior to volunteering.

Cumbria Wildlife Trust holds additional supporting documents, handbooks and/or policies for voluntary roles such as Honorary Reserve Wardens, Trustees, Wildlife Watch Leaders and Local Support Groups.

Volunteer expenses

To help reduce our impact on the environment, we encourage local volunteering, car sharing and use of public transport wherever possible. You may claim travel expenses at an agreed rate that will be reviewed regularly (45p/mile in 2024) with prior agreement by your staff contact. If you are using

public transport, we will reimburse tickets. Proof of expenditure in the form of receipts would be required.

Travel expenses will only be reimbursed for travel to and from the place of voluntary work or as part of your volunteering activity for Cumbria Wildlife Trust, agreed in advance with your staff contact. The maximum you can claim is a 30-mile round trip. However, there may be some exceptions stated in our volunteer expense policy.

Volunteer expense claim forms can be found on our [website](#). Please send completed forms directly to your staff contact or Volunteering Coordinator for approval.

LEARNNG AND DEVELOPMENT

The Trust runs open-to-all training from time to time including various species ID training days, workshops and events which are mentioned in Involve our bi-monthly e-newsletter, What's On members' guide and on the website, too.

Specific training courses such as first aid, brush cutter, risk assessment training and safeguarding training are provided for specific volunteer roles. If at any time you feel you need further training or support in your role, or if your training needs renewing, please contact your Volunteering Coordinator.

AGE 'LIMITS'

There is no upper age limit to volunteering. We recognise the value of experience and knowledge. We would not want anyone to volunteer beyond a point when tasks become too onerous, or possibly affect the health & safety of those concerned.

The term 'young people' is commonly used to refer to the 13 – 17 year age group. Volunteers under 16 may register as a young volunteer and are welcome to attend our staff-led Young Volunteer Days and Conservation Career Days individually with a completed consent form. Under 16's are also welcome to participate in group activities led by their own organisations, if accompanied by the appropriate number of responsible adults. Volunteers under 16 cannot volunteer individually on a Conservation Day but may do so if accompanied by a responsible parent or guardian aged 18 years or over. Accompanying parents or guardians are asked to register as a volunteer, book onto volunteer events for themselves and on behalf of the persons under 16.

Volunteers age 16 or over may volunteer on a Conservation Day and on other volunteer roles deemed suitable without a responsible adult present. However, a consent form will be needed to be filled in prior to the start and for any other specific volunteer roles deemed suitable at the discretion of Trust staff too.

We have a range of Wildlife Watch groups across the county for under 12's and we run family events too.

If you have a group of under 18's who would like to volunteer, or would like to know more, please liaise with our Volunteering Coordinator.

STAYING IN TOUCH

Website and Social Media

The volunteering pages on our website are full of useful information for new and existing volunteers. Here, you can find out and sign up to attend new volunteer opportunities. You can follow us on social media via Facebook, Instagram and Twitter too.

Volunteer Newsletter

We send out a bi-monthly volunteer e-newsletter called *Involve*. Here, you'll be first to know of exciting opportunities and be kept up to date with Trust-wide volunteering. If you would like to receive *Involve*, please ensure you have given us permission for us to email you about volunteer opportunities upon registration. We also show the latest edition of *Involve* on our website.

Sharing your experience

We're always wanting to hear how you are getting on and to learn about your stories through volunteering with us. If you'd like to share your stories for us to use on the website or in publications, please get in touch!

Moving on

If you decide to stop volunteering with us at Cumbria Wildlife Trust for any reason, it would be very helpful to let your staff contact or Volunteering Coordinator know that this is the case and why that might be.

On behalf of Cumbria Wildlife Trust, we would like to thank you for volunteering with us.

Best wishes,

Ruth Alcroft,
Volunteering Coordinator,
and the Community Development Team

January 2026