



# Somerset Wildlife Trust Volunteer Handbook

This handbook underpins the Volunteering Policy and Code of Practice and should be read in partnership with them. ([Links here](#))

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# Welcome.....

**...you are now part of a network of more than 300 volunteers who help Somerset Wildlife Trust**

Now you've made a commitment to volunteering, you will be helping to protect our wild places for future generations.

Somerset Wildlife Trust was originally founded by volunteers in 1964. Today our Trust staff work in partnership with a wide variety of volunteers who are absolutely vital to what we do. Volunteers, like you, share their time, skill, experience and expertise and help us shape and improve the way we work together as an organisation.

In return, the Trust offers you an opportunity to develop your skills, learn new ones and work as part of a team to value and protect nature. Whether you are volunteering with us to gain further experience to help you in employment, would like to meet new people, maintain your existing skills or learn new ones in retirement, we hope you will find it enjoyable and rewarding.

This handbook includes all the general information you'll need to know about volunteering with Somerset Wildlife Trust. As well as outlining what you need to know when starting out with us, we also hope it becomes a useful reference document as you progress.

This is the start of your volunteering journey with us. Welcome and thank you.

**Rhiannon Route  
Volunteer Coordinator  
Somerset Wildlife Trust**

# Volunteering with Somerset Wildlife Trust

## Frequently asked questions

### **What is a volunteer?**

At Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT), the term volunteer means any person who freely chooses to carry out a task or role that we have specifically agreed for them to do, which contributes to the aims and objectives of the Trust and for which they do not receive financial or material reward.

### **What do volunteers do?**

SWT volunteers carry out a range of roles, from taking part in surveys, building fences on our nature reserves, teaching children a love of nature, raising money to buy tools, administration and so much more.

### **Who can volunteer?**

If you are interested in wildlife, helping people or the great outdoors then we will have something for you. We have volunteers of all ages and abilities, who bring a variety of skills and experience.

### **Why volunteer with us?**

Volunteering has many benefits for both you as a volunteer and us as an organisation. It is an excellent way to stay fit and healthy both in body and mind, being educational, inspirational and fun; plus, it's a brilliant opportunity to meet new and like-minded friends.

### **Do you need experience to become a volunteer?**

No. We encourage people from all walks of life to become involved. Some roles require specific skills or experience, but most allow you to learn as you go. You will always be fully briefed about your role and the tasks you're involved in, and will receive relevant training, as and when it is needed.

### **What about young volunteers?**

SWT encourages volunteers of all ages, as long as they are able to take part safely. Children under 16, will require parents or guardians to supervise them. Young people aged 16 or 17 can volunteer without the need for an accompanying adult, but a signed parental consent form would be required.

### **Do volunteers have to be members?**

Some volunteers do give donations of money or join SWT as members; some people offer their time as volunteers. Whichever you do, SWT are extremely grateful. All our members and volunteers are incredibly important to us. Members help fund up to 27% of the work we do, receive regular communications from the Trust keeping them updated about the work that we're doing in the county and also receive 2 editions of our brilliant members only magazine "Somerset Wildlife". They also get preferential booking at our biggest events as well as member only events.

### **What if I am in receipt of state benefits such as job seekers allowance or incapacity benefit?**

You can still volunteer - it is a good way to maintain your skills and could provide potential employers with good examples of what you can do. Volunteering does not prevent you from looking for work, attending an interview within 48 hrs or being ready to start work within one week; these are the periods of notice you can expect from the job centre. There is no type of state benefit that automatically stops you from volunteering, but if you're unsure please speak to us or to your job centre advisor.

### **Who do I contact?**

The Volunteering Team are the main contact for any volunteering query \*.

Phone: 01823 652400

E-mail: [volunteering@somersetwildlife.org](mailto:volunteering@somersetwildlife.org)

Address: Volunteering  
Somerset Wildlife Trust,  
34 Wellington road,  
Taunton,  
TA1 5AW

\*Note: If your enquiry is a matter relating to your volunteering role, your designated contact may be the most relevant person to assist you, but the Volunteering Team are always there to help and support as required.

## **Your responsibilities to the Trust**

Each role will entail different tasks, offer different benefits and carry different responsibilities. These are outlined in the relevant role profiles which are produced for every volunteer role. Your manager or supervisor will go through these with you when you start. However, we expect all volunteers to:

- Make sure you are aware of the appropriate Trust policies and guidelines that are relevant to your role.
- Inform the Trust if you do not feel confident you have received the guidelines and information necessary to carry out your role.
- Respect confidentiality of information which you may become aware of whilst volunteering for the Trust.
- Be mindful of your status as a Trust ambassador in your community.
- Ensure that no illegal or criminal misuse of Trust assets takes place.
- Make sure you follow instructions with regards to safe working practices.

## **The Trust's responsibilities to you**

Some are covered in more detail later in this handbook or will be discussed with you when you start, but below is a summary:

- We will provide a friendly welcome, and a thorough induction to the organisation and your role within it.
- We will endeavour to show our appreciation and to recognise the contribution of volunteers wherever appropriate.
- We will provide proper supervision and support to you and will seek your feedback and views about your volunteering experience.
- We will make good use of your skills, knowledge and abilities to further our aims and objectives.
- We will provide volunteers with clear role description, instruction and any relevant additional training in all tasks you are asked to undertake.
- We will properly plan and budget for involving volunteers.
- We will handle all volunteer data properly and in accordance with law.
- We undertake to look after your health and safety in relation to your role and will insure you in the event of an accident that's not your fault.
- We will ensure everyone has equal opportunity to be involved.
- We will help you to deal with any problems that arise.

# About Somerset Wildlife Trust

Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT) is an independent charitable organisation. We are affiliated to and actively support The Wildlife Trusts (The Royal Society for Wildlife Trusts) which is the national partnership of 47 local Wildlife Trusts throughout the UK. Together we are the biggest movement in the UK aiming to protect and restore a living landscape for people and wildlife.

## Our Vision:

Our vision for Somerset is a county teeming with wildlife valued by everyone. We see landscapes full of flowers, accompanied by a chorus of birdsong and buzzing with insects. We envisage habitats, green spaces and natural places of all shapes and sizes that are enjoyed, shared and cared for by people and their communities, woven together into a rich, living tapestry - an environmental life support network for the entire county. We picture a healthy and resilient environment where the needs of wildlife, people and local economies are balanced in a way that will support our lives now, and those of our children in the future. The natural world is at the heart of our wellbeing and prosperity; we depend on it and it depends on us.

## Our History:

We were originally founded in 1964 by volunteers as The Somerset Trust for Nature Conservation. In the early 1960s, similar charitable trusts came into existence across Britain as local naturalists, encouraged by people like Christopher Cadbury, Francis Rose and Ted Smith, decided it was no longer enough just to identify and record wildlife, there was also an increasingly pressing need to take direct action to secure its future. In common with most trusts, the bedrock of the SWT was the support it received from members of local natural history societies. It was no coincidence that the first meeting to discuss forming a conservation charity was held at the headquarters of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society at Taunton Museum, with 15 people in attendance, who raised the initial capital by each of them contributing a £1 note.

## **Somerset Wildlife Trust now:**

Somerset Wildlife Trust is concentrating on creating ecological networks that rebuild the county's natural environment. We specialise in nature reserves, conservation policy, education and community involvement. We also give advice on conservation to developers, communities, businesses, local authorities and individuals.

- SWT manages 68 nature reserves across Somerset covering 1720 hectares
- SWT has over 20,000 paying members
- SWT employs 50 staff and engages 340 volunteers
- SWT spends on average £2,500,000 annually on nature conservation in the county

## **Our Purpose:**

The core focus points of our strategy for 2020 and beyond are:

- Help nature recover across Somerset's landscapes
- Inspire and connect people with nature
- Stand up for nature
- Provide positive solutions to climate change in the county

Whatever your role within the Trust, you will be contributing towards one or more of these areas. For more information please get in touch at [volunteering@somersetwildlife.org](mailto:volunteering@somersetwildlife.org)



## **Organisational Structure**

Somerset Wildlife Trust is registered as a Charity (no.238372). The following is a summary of the organisational structure and people involved in the Trust.

### **Our Partners:**

There are partnership organisations that work with us, who also rely on volunteer support.

Somerset Environmental Records Centre (SERC) is the main reference centre for biological and geological information for the county. It is part of a network of local record centres across the UK and is a partnership organisation based within Somerset Wildlife Trust. Any income it generates from commercial work is channelled back into nature conservation and supports recording within Somerset.

The data that the record centre gathers on sites, habitats and species across Somerset is used to inform conservation strategy, development planning, and for research. Individuals and organisations can access this information through the data enquiries service.

SERC also carries out survey work in the county, and for several years has run a highly successful training scheme in ecological survey and species identification.

You can find out more about SERC by visiting their website here: <http://www.somerc.com/> or contact the Volunteering team at [Volunteering@somersetwildlifetrust.org](mailto:Volunteering@somersetwildlifetrust.org) for more information.

## **The Council of Trustees:**

The Council of Somerset Wildlife Trust has overall responsibility for governance of the organisation. The Council meet at set times over the year to set organisational policy and oversee our work. They report each year in the Trustees Annual Report and accounts and in person at the Annual General Meeting (AGM).

Our Council is made up of 10 trustees who bring a range of skills, knowledge and experience to the organisation. All trustees are volunteers, give freely of their time and have no beneficial interest in the group or charity. Trustees are elected by the members at the Annual General Meeting and serve for a term of 5 years. Each trustee can serve for 2 consecutive terms of office and then must stand down for a year until they become eligible to stand again. The Chair, Vice-Chair and Treasurer are elected by Council following the AGM and serve one-year terms. No Trustee can hold the position of Chair, Vice-Chair or Treasurer for more than 5 consecutive years.

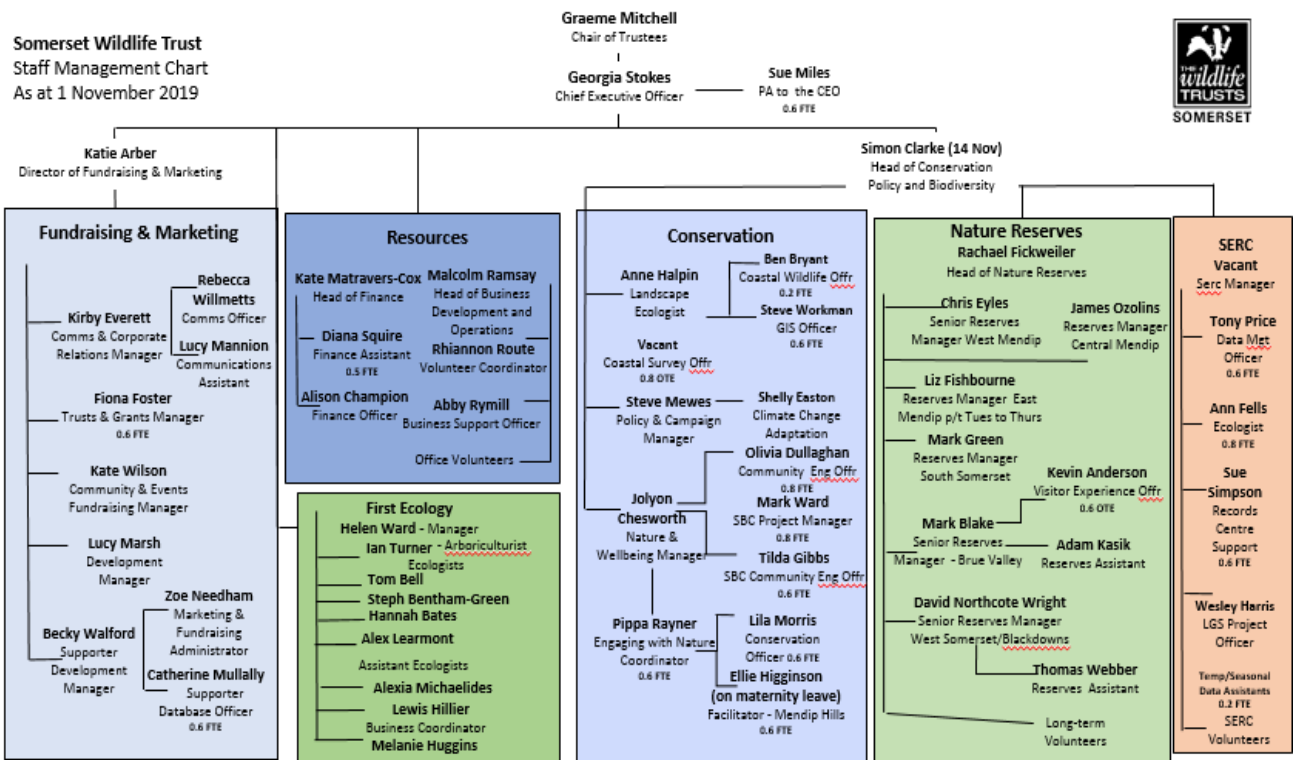
Our Council is assisted by 4 Committees:

- Finance and Resources Committee
- Conservation Committee
- Health and Safety Committee
- Risk Management Committee

In addition, the chairs of all committees meet with the Chair of Trustees and the Chief Executive twice a year to review governance performance.

# Staff and Volunteer Team

Altogether there are about 50 staff and over 300 volunteers. Some staff are part time or on fixed-term projects. The staff team, with your help, have responsibility for bringing the Trust vision to life.



## **Volunteering Structure**

### **Individual Volunteers**

Most volunteers are individuals who get involved in a variety of ways and sometimes in more than one role. In your role, you are part of the structure described overleaf and part of one of the teams described. You should know who your designated contact is - they may even be a volunteer themselves, who liaise with a staff member in one of the teams.

### **Area Groups**

Area groups are made up of individual volunteers who have come together around a specific area of interest and activity to support the Trust's work in their local communities. They usually have a volunteer who acts as chair, liaising with Trust staff and helping to organise and lead the group's workdays. Area groups are involved in fundraising, organising guided walks and supporting the goals of the Wildlife Trust.

### **Wildlife Watch Groups**

Wildlife Watch is the junior membership of the Wildlife Trust. Like adult members, children or families can join the Trust and receive a children's membership pack and Watch magazines 4 times a year. There are volunteer Wildlife Watch leaders who run local Wildlife Watch family events across the region.

# Getting Started

## **Forms:**

All volunteers, once they have made the commitment to volunteer, are asked to complete our volunteer registration form. This information is kept on our volunteer database and ensures that you are covered by our insurance while volunteering. It is only used for purposes relevant to your volunteering (unless you have chosen to receive additional information such as the volunteer newsletter).

The registration form should have been provided when you chose to sign up as a volunteer with us. It can also be found on our volunteering website page.

If you are a young volunteer (16 or 17), your parent or legal guardian will need to complete a parental consent form.

If you drive as part of your role (not just commuting), you will need to complete a driver declaration form.

## **Induction:**

This can vary considerably depending on the role or opportunity you have chosen. All volunteers should expect to receive:

- Information on who their designated contact is and how and when to contact them.
- Introduction to their area of work and any equipment/tools they may be using.
- Any relevant health and safety information.
- Information on how they fit into the wider volunteering network of SWT and opportunities to expand their role and socialise as needed. (This handbook is part of this).

## **Expenses:**

As an organisation, SWT encourages staff and volunteers to use green methods of transportation wherever viable. However, if this is not possible then SWT will reimburse out-of-pocket expenses to volunteers, as agreed beforehand with their designated contact.

Your designated contact will give you a simple form to claim any expenses incurred - it should be completed and returned with relevant receipts. Expense claims are usually paid via BACS within a couple of weeks; or payments can be made by cheque on request.

## **Recording Hours:**

We ask all volunteers to help us promote the recognition of the amazing contribution they make to SWT, by recording their hours with us. Volunteer hours data can be used in funding applications for new work and helps to evidence what SWT have achieved with the current funding that they receive.

If you take part in a group task day, the task party leader or designated contact usually records the hours undertaken so you won't need to record this yourself.

If it's not a group task day, a timesheet will be supplied so you can record your own volunteering hours. This should also be available on the Volunteering page of our website.

# Policies and Procedures

Like all large organisations, Somerset Wildlife Trust has many policies and procedures to ensure that we work effectively, fairly and consistently. Apart from those policies that relate specifically to staff (such as pay, leave, pensions etc), all our policies also apply to volunteers, depending upon what role you undertake. In most cases you will be introduced to policies as they affect you. A few are important and general enough to be introduced here.

## Equal Opportunities

Somerset Wildlife Trust does not discriminate unfairly on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, age, language, religion, physical, mental or emotional disability, financial, family, or other personal disadvantage; or any other factor unrelated to a person's ability to carry out their volunteering role. This applies to the selection of volunteers, carrying out your role and to training and development opportunities. We do not accept such discrimination by staff or volunteers. We have a full policy outlining our commitment to equal opportunities.

## Representing Somerset Wildlife Trust

As a volunteer, you are informally representing the Trust to the public, whether as an events volunteer or simply as a reserve volunteer who happens to be chatting to a dog walker. As you get more involved, you'll learn enough about the Trust to be able to chat to people about the basics of what we do, but if you'd like to know more, please speak to your designated contact. You can always refer members of the public or media enquiries through to a member of staff or to our Head Office, if they are asking about difficult or sensitive issues.

Formal representation with other organisations, the media, or individuals can only take place if organised by your designated contact. This may require more senior approval and is governed by further policies and procedures and guidelines. If you think this affects you and you have not done so already, please speak to your designated contact.

## **Health and Safety and Welfare**

Somerset Wildlife Trust has both a legal and moral obligation to provide and maintain working conditions, equipment and procedures which are safe and will not adversely affect the health of our staff and volunteers. They must also provide the information, training and supervision required to achieve this.

In most cases there will be risks specific to your volunteering role, which will be discussed with you individually as part of your induction, when undertaking a task in a group or in a group briefing, such as a task party tool talk.

The nature of the Trust's work means that some hazardous work is undertaken, so a risk assessment process is used to decide which potential hazards are acceptable and which are not. For all tasks and roles, a risk assessment will be undertaken by the organiser (staff or volunteer) and recorded in standard format.

To prevent accidents, appropriate training and personal protective equipment (PPE), to reduce or remove risks, will be identified and provided.

### **Your Health and Safety Responsibilities:**

By law, everyone is responsible for looking after their own safety and that of their colleagues at all times, this includes volunteers. You must read or listen to and follow any health and safety guidance you are given, and you must ask for clarification of anything you are unsure about.

You must provide us with details of any medical conditions relevant to your role and provide emergency contact details on the volunteer registration form. You should let us know if these details change, but you will also be given an opportunity to update your details each year.

Finally, if you observe anything that you think might be unsafe or you are involved in or see an accident, incident or near miss, you must report it to the nearest member of staff to action.



## **Accident Recording**

All accidents, however minor they might appear to be, should be recorded and advised to your designated contact. This also applies to any near misses where the potential for harm was recognisable, so that lessons can be learned. All offices and our staff or volunteers will have access to an accident reporting book - it is often located with the first aid kit.

## **Working Alone**

We try not to ask people to do volunteer tasks alone, but sometimes it's unavoidable, i.e. wardening or stock checking. You should always make sure your designated contact knows where you are, if you intend to work alone. If working alone is a regular part of your role, it will have been risk assessed in detail, and the implications and relevant procedures discussed with you in advance.

## **Insurance**

All registered volunteers are insured by the Trust for their volunteering, so long as they are undertaking work agreed by the Trust, have followed our policies and procedures and any instructions or guidance that have been given.

This includes cover:

- if you are injured by another person
- if you accidentally injure or damage someone or something else
- for adult volunteers, if you injure yourself by accident

Personal equipment and belongings are not insured.

## **Working with children, young people and vulnerable adults:**

Somerset Wildlife Trust works with children, young people and vulnerable adults on a regular basis. We recognise that these groups require extra care and attention when interacting with us. Our work with children is especially crucial to developing a caring and understanding for wildlife that will remain as they grow.

Volunteer roles that involve working with children, young people or vulnerable adults are assessed to determine the extent of that involvement. Generally, if parents, guardians, teachers or carers are present, the responsibility for supervision rests with them. Certain voluntary roles such as Wildlife Watch Leaders will require additional checks, references, induction, training and ongoing support. If necessary, you might be asked to undertake an enhanced disclosure check via the Disclosure and Barring Service. You will also be asked to become familiar with our policies and procedures for volunteering with children, young people and vulnerable adults.

The usual risk assessment-based procedures apply to volunteering with children, young people and vulnerable adults. The risk assessments will consider the likelihood of these groups having a lesser understanding or ability to undertake tasks, the need for specialist equipment, tailored instruction and extra supervision.

Restrictions are in place for young volunteers as follows:

Aged under 16: must be accompanied by Parent/Guardian

Aged 16/17: parental consent form to be completed

## **Information Management**

### **Confidentiality**

As a Trust volunteer you may become aware of or volunteer directly with information which is of a confidential nature. This might be about protected species, new projects, financial or personal information. You are expected to respect this confidentiality and to check with us if you are unsure about the status of any information you are party to.

### **Data Protection**

Data Protection law applies to personal data, whether it is stored electronically or in paper format. Your role might involve access to our databases or filing systems or to individual pieces of personal data such as home telephone numbers and e-mails. You will be shown how we process, store and use this data, if it is required for your role. If relevant, we will train you in the use of database software. In general, you should always treat personal data as confidential, to be used for specific purposes only and to be stored securely when not in use.

### **Copyright and Intellectual Property**

Through your volunteering you may produce new materials, data or ideas of use to the Trust; perhaps including educational materials, interpretation, photographs or other media, survey results, project ideas or new procedures. You retain copyright and intellectual property rights over this material. However, we ask you to give us the right to use this material free of charge, in perpetuity and for the furtherance of our charitable cause. This voluntary agreement is incorporated into the volunteer registration form.

# Supervision, Recognition and Support

Following your induction into the organisation, the amount of ongoing supervision and support offered will vary depending on the individual and the role. However, all volunteers should have the opportunity to ask questions, raise concerns and discuss the work they are involved in. For practical conservation volunteers this may require an open discussion over the tea break; for voluntary wardens a phone call may do; others will find regular one-to-one meetings with their designated contact is of use. This is up to you and your designated contact to discuss and agree.

## Training and Development

For most roles, you will receive relevant on-the-job training from your designated contact, or an experienced fellow volunteer. Often someone will continue to be on hand to give you further support, advice and help or a refresher (some practical tasks can often be quite seasonal and done only a few times per year). If you are unsure about what you are doing, please ask.

For some roles, external or more formal training may be required, and this should be discussed during your induction. It may be arranged immediately, or you might be put on a waiting list for the next session. Common types of training required are brush-cutting, pesticide use and first aid.

Some training is organised centrally by the Volunteering Team, HR Manager or others, e.g. first aid, manual handling, conflict management. Other training is organised by individual teams and managers, according to organisational needs. Sometimes unused training places become available on such courses and we will do our best to advertise these, for you to take advantage of.

Once you've started volunteering, if you feel you need further training to fulfil your role, please speak with your designated contact.

## Volunteer Recognition

We hold annual volunteer awards as part of our AGM in the autumn to recognise all our volunteers and to give special recognition to those who have gone above and beyond in their volunteering with us.

## Problems

We aim to make all volunteering experiences positive and enjoyable, but we recognise that problems may arise occasionally. You might be unhappy about your experience or a complaint may be made about an individual. Sometimes complaints are in relation to breaches of policy or procedure.

We encourage due process in resolving problems. The first thing you should do is talk to your designated contact and arrange a meeting of those involved, away from the immediate task. Most issues can be resolved in this way.

If this proves unsuccessful or you feel the matter is more serious please contact the Volunteering Team, who will mediate between those involved.

[Volunteering@somersetwildlife.org](mailto:Volunteering@somersetwildlife.org).

**Taunton Office:** 01823 652400

In rare circumstances, issues can also be referred to the Chief Executive and finally to the Board of Trustees, whose decision will be final. If it is decided that a volunteer is at fault and the matter is irresolvable, they could be asked to cease volunteering, but most issues are resolved before this.

Conduct which causes immediate danger to others will be handled swiftly by those leading on the day, and you may be asked to leave immediately. You will have the opportunity to discuss the incident before a final decision is made.

# Staying in Touch

## Website and social networking

The volunteering pages on our website are full of useful information for new and existing volunteers. You will find the latest news and opportunities as well as volunteer viewpoints...you may even be inspired to make a contribution to the website yourself!

[www.somersetwildlife.org](http://www.somersetwildlife.org)

You can also find and follow us on the following social networks:

XX XXXXX XXXX

## V-News- the Volunteering Newsletter

Our volunteering newsletter is produced 4 times per year and will be sent direct to you by e-mail or post, upon request, using the details you provided on the volunteer registration form. It seeks to provide relevant volunteering information, as well as a calendar of upcoming volunteer events and opportunities. For those without e-mail, we try and ensure that our core staff offices have a printed version of the newsletter in their break rooms.

Contributions are always welcome. Please e-mail

[Volunteering@Somersetwildlife.org](mailto:Volunteering@Somersetwildlife.org)

## Volunteer Meetings

The Volunteer Team organise meetings for volunteers to get together. Dates will be advertised in the newsletter and personal invites will usually be sent. Local teams sometimes organise local events for volunteers who do similar activities. Occasionally these events are for training and development, sometimes they are social, often both and hopefully always fun!

You are encouraged to attend these valuable opportunities to meet other volunteers and staff members to share experiences, find out about other opportunities which may be of interest and discuss wider Trust issues that could have some impact upon your voluntary role with us.

## Feedback and Moving on

Your feedback is valuable to us. If at any time you feel that any aspect of your involvement with us as a volunteer could have been dealt with better, please let us know so we can make improvements. From time to time, we send out volunteer surveys asking how we're doing. Your help in returning these to us, and your honesty, being critical where necessary, is appreciated.

Tell us about your experiences:

We are always looking for stories about our volunteers. It may be a 'day in the life of', a description of your role, a volunteer profile or a special achievement. These help us to paint a picture of volunteering for our newsletter, website, press releases and members magazine and crucially to help involve more people in volunteering. Please get in touch if you'd like to see your story in print! E-mail [Volunteering@somersetwildlife.org.uk](mailto:Volunteering@somersetwildlife.org.uk) or call the Volunteering Team on the phone numbers on the back page.

### Moving on

If you decide to cease volunteering with us, please let us know, either by telling your designated contact or the Volunteering Team. It would be helpful to us if you also tell us why you're leaving, positive or negative.

## Contact Details

We sincerely hope you will enjoy your time as a volunteer with Somerset Wildlife Trust. If you have any further questions about any aspect of volunteering, please contact us at:

Volunteering  
Somerset Wildlife Trust  
34 Wellington Road,  
Taunton,  
TA1 5AW

Phone: 01823 652400

E-mail: [volunteering@somersetwildlife.org](mailto:volunteering@somersetwildlife.org)

## Thank you!

Thank you for taking the time to read this handbook, we hope you enjoy your volunteering journey with Somerset Wildlife Trust and have many rewarding experiences from it.

This handbook will be reviewed annually:

Date last reviewed:	Name of reviewer