



Volunteer Handbook

All about volunteering with the
Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust

Welcome...

... To a team of more than 1,450 volunteers who help us make a difference and protect our natural heritage

Our volunteers help us in so many ways - by raising funds, working on nature reserves, leading walks, training others and much, much more. Without you we would not be able to carry out much of our work throughout Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. It is our aim to involve volunteers across the range of our work to ensure that we achieve our objectives.

This handbook is designed to give you information about the Trust and volunteering with the Trust. Hopefully it will answer some of the questions that may arise during your time with us. If you don't find the answer to your questions here, take a look at the volunteering pages on our web site - www.bbowl.org.uk/volunteer. Alternatively, please call us with your enquiries on 01865 775476 or email us at: volunteering@bbowl.org.uk.

Who we are.....

The Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) is one of 47 Wildlife Trusts working across the UK. Each is an independent, county-based charity, coming together under the umbrella of The Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts (RSWT) giving strength to our work at a regional and national level. Our collective vision is 'an environment rich in wildlife for everyone'. Together the Wildlife Trusts have:

- over 600,000 members
- more than 26,700 active volunteers
- 2,400 nature reserves spanning 80,000 hectares of land

This makes us the largest UK network of organisations dedicated exclusively to conserving all our habitats and species. For further information about The Wildlife Trusts please visit www.wildlifetrusts.org.

How it all started...

The Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Naturalists Trust (BBONT) was founded on 14 November 1959. This was a membership organisation, set up as a charity, to protect wildlife, establish nature reserves and foster enjoyment of and learning about the natural world. In 1999 the Trust celebrated its 40th anniversary and launched its new name: Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT). Since then the Trust has grown immensely both in size, influence and achievements.

Today we...

- Manage over 88 nature reserves throughout the three counties covering over 2,500 ha.
- Employ over 130 staff, both full and part-time, based across the three counties, who specialise in areas such as nature reserve management, biodiversity monitoring, planning, fundraising and marketing, education and community involvement.
- Have an ever-growing number of members - in 2016 more than 25,000 memberships, representing over 51,000 individuals.
- Work in partnership with businesses, local authorities and statutory bodies to support wildlife and conservation.
- Work with teachers and youth leaders across the region and manage 4 environmental education facilities for groups and schools. In the period 2015 to 2016, 12,000 school children visited these centres and thousands more visited with their families.
- Give advice on local wildlife and conservation issues to landowners, planners, developers and the general public.
- Work with more than 1,450 volunteers working across 46 local groups.
- Offer training and support to all members and volunteers and start some people on a career path in conservation.
- Organise over 300 events a year on our nature reserves to help people enjoy and learn more about local wildlife.

What we are about...

BBOWT's vision is an environment rich in wildlife, valued by all.

Our mission is to create a living landscape across our towns, cities and countryside and inspire our communities to act for nature. Our aim is to lead the way for nature's recovery and connect people with nature, so that:

- Our soil and water resources are managed to create functioning ecosystems and wildlife-rich places
- Local communities, decision-makers, landowners and businesses work with and for nature
- People recognise their dependence upon nature and its value to their mental and physical well being

For further information about our aims we would encourage you read '*Be part of nature's recovery*', a summary of our Strategic Plan 2016-2021. This document can be found at www.bbowt.org.uk/what-we-do

How BBOWT is managed...

BBOWT is a registered charity and a limited company, and is governed by a Board of Trustees. The Trustees, who have a wide range of experience and expertise and are selected to deliver the organisation's aims and objectives, are all volunteers elected by the members. The

Trustees carry ultimate responsibility for actions carried out in the name of the Trust. They decide on policy, agree the annual budget and work at a strategic level to ensure that we fulfil our responsibilities as a charity. The trustees delegate the general management of the Trust to the Chief Executive who is responsible for all members of staff and volunteers.

Our Chief Executive manages our organisation with the assistance of a team of directors. Our team has responsibility for bringing the Strategic Plan to life and enabling the organisation to achieve the aims set out in the Strategic Plan. The organisation is structured around five teams. There is a county team for each of our three counties with expertise for Conservation management (nature reserves), planning (advocacy with local Councils and Building Companies), Living Landscape projects (working with other landowners to create wildlife-friendly habitat on a landscape-scale), Community work and Environmental Education work with school children. The External Affairs team has responsibility for corporate relations, public relations, fundraising, membership, marketing, communications and events management. Finally the Operations team looks after Finance, Human Resources, Information Technology and Facilities.

About volunteers and BBOWT

Benefits of being a volunteer

As a volunteer, you'll have the satisfaction of knowing that you're helping to protect and enhance your local environment and in addition, all volunteers with a registered email address receive a copy of Grapevine, the volunteers' newsletter, three times a year plus access to free training courses. There are social events, including an annual 'BBOWT on your doorstep' event, throughout the year and the contributions made by our volunteers are recognised at the BBOWT AGM with presentations of the 'Volunteer of the Year' awards and Lifetime Achievement Awards.

Volunteer Opportunities

Here are just some examples of the type of volunteering opportunities available within the Trust. We update the volunteering webpages regularly (see www.bbowt.org.uk/volunteer) and also produce several regional volunteer opportunities leaflets if you require further information. Role outlines are available for all of our opportunities.

Practical volunteer work

Volunteers can help in a number of practical ways on reserves:

- As a reserve warden, helping to manage, monitor and maintain specific nature reserves.
- As an occasional or regular work party volunteer on a local reserve, carrying out practical conservation tasks as identified in the reserve management plans.
- By joining one of our mid-week teams in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire or Oxfordshire. These teams are staff-led and undertake weekly practical work on a number of nature reserves.

- As experienced volunteers who want more responsibility and who are trained to use specific equipment. These volunteers can join our county Field Teams. They help carry out more complex tasks where specialist skills are needed (with relevant training), and use general maintenance and DIY skills to benefit our sites.
- As a Conservation Trainee who makes a commitment to work with us three days a week for six to twelve months for whom we provide full training to help them further their environmental careers.

Regional and 'Friends of' groups

These help to provide a more local focus to BBOWT's work. They play a key role in raising the profile of BBOWT in their area, helping to raise vital funds and increase membership numbers by organising local events and work parties. These groups may appoint local committees to structure their work and need volunteers both to serve on committees and undertake various tasks locally, including fundraising and events organisation.

Key Volunteers

Key volunteers are defined as volunteers who:

- take on a regular commitment as a volunteer
- act as a representative of BBOWT
- handle money
- are responsible for other volunteers or for Trust property

Examples include local group chairs, treasurers, reserve wardens, work party leaders etc. Many are responsible for the health, safety and wellbeing of other volunteers and the condition of our nature reserves. All key volunteers are asked to sign an agreement outlining expectations on both sides. Owing to the importance of their positions, Key Volunteers are required to be members of BBOWT. This means the people who fill these vital roles:

- are part of the organisation
- have a say in what the Trust does through their voting rights at the AGM
- have access to up to date information via the Trust magazine, *Wildlife News*, and our regular events diary.

Volunteer Work Party Leaders

Volunteer work party leaders are volunteers who:

- take responsibility for leading practical work parties on behalf of BBOWT
- ensure our work parties follow the relevant BBOWT Codes of Practice found in the health and safety manual
- have undertaken BBOWT induction and training, if required, on leading practical groups and relevant health and safety matters.
- are experienced in the work being undertaken.

Volunteer work party leaders will normally be part of a BBOWT local group and receive management communications, such as updates to relevant BBOWT policies, either via a Key Volunteer or BBOWT staff member.

Event Volunteers & Guided Walk Leaders

These volunteers help at and run events and walks on behalf of BBOWT and must have knowledge of and comply with the relevant BBOWT Codes of Practice and health and safety manual.

Visitor and Education centres

We have visitor and education centres at College Lake, Didcot, the Nature Discovery Centre at Thatcham and Woolley Firs. Volunteers carry out a valuable role in meeting and greeting visitors, delivering education programs and helping with events, and helping in shops and cafes.

Wildlife surveys

Volunteers are needed to help carry out surveys of various species groups including birds, butterflies, plants and water voles.

Stock watching

Volunteers are needed to help us check our livestock. No previous experience is necessary and full training is provided.

Other opportunities

These are only a few of the opportunities that may be available. If you would like to offer your services in some other way or check out other opportunities please contact our volunteer team or look on our website at www.bbowt.org.uk/volunteer.

Practical Matters & standards

Key documents for volunteers

An outline of the policies most relevant to volunteering is provided in this handbook. However, for further detail please visit our website. There are a number of documents listed below with which you should make yourself familiar. Our volunteer policy and volunteer agreements are available for download from the BBOWT website.

Diversity statement

BBOWT is committed to diversity in all areas of its work. We believe that we have much to learn and profit from diverse cultures and perspectives and that diversity will make our organisation more effective in meeting the needs of all our stakeholders.

We are committed to developing and maintaining an organisation in which differing ideas, abilities, backgrounds and needs are fostered and valued and where those with diverse backgrounds and experiences are able to participate and contribute. We will not discriminate on the basis of

race, age, religion, gender, 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 volunteers. We have a policy outlining our commitment to equal opportunities.

Volunteer Policy

The main features of our volunteer policy are to:

- Demonstrate our commitment to volunteer programmes and individual volunteers.
- Ensure fairness and consistency in our dealing with volunteers.
- Enable volunteers to know where they stand, offering them security, information on how they will be treated and what they can do if they feel things are going wrong.

Volunteer Problem Solving Process

With any role, it is important that two-way communication is frequent and consistent as this will help to iron out any misunderstandings or issues which may be cause for concern and also allow you to seek solutions for any problems you encounter with your volunteer role. We especially encourage volunteers to keep in touch with their supervisor regularly if the role involves lone working or working without direct supervision.

We hope nothing will go wrong but if it does, we recommend you discuss the problem with your supervisor or your supervisor discusses it with you. If this does not resolve the matter, it should be taken up with their supervisor or key staff contact. If things are still not resolved, we do have a problem solving procedure for volunteers in case issues need to be resolved in a more formal way. Where a complaint about a volunteer's behaviour is received, this will be dealt with in the same way.

Being a BBOWT representative

Please remember that as a volunteer, you may be in a position where you are informally representing BBOWT to the public, e.g. visitors to nature reserves or participants at events. If you would like any information or guidance about BBOWT or our work so that you feel more confident about representing us in this way please contact the HR team at Head Office. Remember, you should always refer people to a member of staff if they are asking about sensitive issues and never express your own opinions, thoughts or feelings as being those of the Trust.

Formal contact with other organisations, groups or members of the public which is made on behalf of BBOWT must only take place if authorised by your supervisor. If your agreed role involves officially representing BBOWT to external groups you must operate within the guidelines laid down in our policy.

Standards of behaviour

Conduct which endangers others will be handled swiftly by authorised leaders, by demanding that the person(s) involved cease activity and they may also be required to leave the site immediately so that secure and safe working conditions are maintained for all.

Other instances of misconduct such as fraud, theft, harassment, misuse of BBOWT assets or confidential information, and disruptive or inappropriate behaviour will likewise be dealt with swiftly and will be cause for an immediate cessation of voluntary activity.

In both cases, a meeting between the person involved, their supervisor and the Chief Executive will be called to discuss the matter.

Starting Out

We aim to ensure all new volunteers receive an appropriate welcome and induction – either at their first volunteering session or just after they start. This will equip them to carry out the duties for which they have volunteered and help them understand their contribution to meeting BBOWT's aims. It will also identify a key person to help them with their volunteering – either a member of staff or a Key Volunteer. Asking for emergency contact information will be the first part of this process, and then registering your volunteering with our registration form - all information provided will be kept strictly confidential in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

For volunteers on practical work parties

Inexperienced volunteers are advised to wear old clothes, appropriate for the weather, that they don't mind getting dirty and strong shoes or boots. Gloves and any special equipment necessary should be provided by the group or Trust. It is recommended that tetanus cover is up to date and all volunteers carrying out practical work should complete an emergency contact form which should be held locally.

Management and support

All volunteers should be given the name of a specific person who will provide support to them in their volunteering. This person may be another volunteer or in the case of a Key volunteer, a member of staff. Key volunteers will have a minimum of two meetings a year with their supervisor. As a volunteer you should be given the opportunity to review your volunteering and make appropriate changes to your role in agreement with your supervisor. We do encourage feedback from volunteers and this is communicated within the organisation to ensure improvements in practices and policies. It is expected that communication between volunteers and staff will always be timely and courteous.

Health, safety and welfare

For health and safety reasons, BBOWT staff members must have absolute authority over voluntary activities. These authorised leaders have responsibility for the safety of the site, all participants and the public in the area. This does not mean that staff will always be present to work with volunteers.

BBOWT has a duty of care to ensure that volunteers are not exposed to unnecessary risks. Our policy is to provide and maintain working conditions, equipment and procedures which are safe for all volunteers and staff, and will not damage your health.

BBOWT has a Health and Safety Policy and individual Codes of Practice. As a volunteer you should be aware of the policy and have access to appropriate health and safety information or guidance. Training will be provided where necessary. If in doubt please ask your supervisor or line manager.

BBOWT's responsibility

- Every event or activity that takes place must be thoroughly planned beforehand by the event leader. A risk assessment must be completed as part of this process to identify the site hazards and the risks associated with the tasks involved, to suggest ways to minimise those risks and to outline the course of action in the unlikely event of an accident.
- It is essential that the event leader makes participants aware of any risks by giving a health and safety talk at the beginning of the activity.
- For practical conservation tasks, volunteers must also be given a 'tools talk' and follow up supervision to ensure that tools are used correctly and safely.
- A staff member or a volunteer with basic first aid training must be present at all practical tasks (but this is not necessary for walks and talks).

Your responsibility

- By law, everyone is responsible for looking after their own safety and that of their colleagues at all times.
- It is important that you listen to the health and safety talk, which may include a tools talk, which is given at the beginning of any practical task or activity and clarify any points which you do not understand.
- If you join an activity later in the day, approach the leader and make him or her aware that you have arrived.
- Before beginning volunteering, please provide emergency contact details so we can contact the right person in the unlikely event of an accident.
- If you see unsafe work practices, please speak out to ensure these do not continue and notify the supervisor.
- Please inform supervisors of all accidents and near-misses as these must be recorded.

Your health

It is up to you to inform us, and anybody else who needs to know, of relevant health information. This information will be treated as confidential. If you have any medical conditions or illnesses, or if you are taking medication, and you'd like to draw it to our attention, please do this by filling in the appropriate section of the form given to you. If you are not given a form to record this information, please ask for one.

Lone working

If you are in a situation where you need to carry out duties alone, extra caution is necessary. Please make sure that friends, family or your supervisor know where you have gone and then confirm with them that you have returned safely. It is essential that you consult our Working at Risk Code of Practice, which is in the Health and Safety Manual, for full guidelines on safe working in these cases.

Volunteers using their own vehicle for volunteering activities (over and above just going to and from an event) should inform their insurers that they are doing so – otherwise, their insurance may be invalidated if something were to happen.

Advice and guidance on insurance is available from the BBOWT website or Facilities Manager at our Oxford Head Office.

Safety Code

As with any other activity, there are hazards in our offices, on our nature reserves and at unfamiliar venues or other events. Volunteering carries a responsibility for everyone. We are each responsible for our own safety and that of others around us. BBOWT and its volunteer leaders should do everything possible to identify and reduce hazards and ensure all our activities and events are safe and accessible. You can help by:

1. Advising people to wear appropriate clothing for the weather, appropriate footwear and any safety equipment necessary.
2. Slip, slap, slop! – if working in bright sunshine, especially in the summer make sure you slip on a shirt, slap on a hat and slop on your sun cream at regular intervals throughout the day – and encourage others to do the same.
3. Make sure you have adequate food and drink, especially if you're going to be out all day. Let other people know in advance that they need to bring refreshments/provisions.
4. Leaders should provide a briefing before volunteering activities – ensuring people listen carefully to any mention of particular hazards and what to do in an emergency. Please ask people to let you know if they have a mobile phone or an up to date first aid qualification.
5. If traversing uneven or hidden ground or if attention is diverted by something off the main track please warn people to be aware of hazards such as rabbit holes, fallen or hanging branches, barbed wire, boggy areas, and wet grass, particularly on sloping ground.
6. Children are welcome on many of our activities and events but anyone under 18 must be accompanied by an adult – at least one adult for two children. Children may attend some educational activities alone but they must have written parental consent. If you are unsure, need advice on these issues or parental consent forms please talk with your supervisor. (Parental consent forms can also be downloaded from the BBOWT website.) The safety of any children is the responsibility of the accompanying adults, who should also ensure the activity is within the children's ability. (Also note some tools should not be used by children below certain ages – if you need details check our website or ask your line manager).
7. Dogs may be allowed on some activities. This should be indicated in the advertising. Leaders should ensure that owners keep dogs under control at all times to avoid disturbing wildlife, livestock or other participants.
8. If you are uncertain about any details of leading an activity please ask your supervisor beforehand.
9. In case other people need further details, make sure you or another person can be contacted and is able to provide the necessary information.
10. Try not to lose anyone along the way – count them out and count them back in.
11. ...and above all enjoy yourself – it's infectious – everybody else will too!

Confidentiality

BBOWT will deal with information about volunteers confidentially at all times. In return volunteers are expected to respect the requirements for confidentiality in their work with the Trust.

Communication with our volunteers

Our website pages include more information for our volunteers at www.bbowt.org.uk/volunteer. Please let us know if there's something else you would like to see on them.

Our email volunteer newsletter, Grapevine, is produced three times a year and sent to all volunteers who are on our database. We would like this to be a chance for all our volunteers to share their experiences of volunteering with others so please make it your newsletter and let us have your contributions. Email them to: volunteering@bbowt.org.uk.

An annual social event, BBOWT on your doorstep, provides an opportunity for county staff to update volunteers on BBOWT's work within the county and beyond, and a chance for you to meet other volunteers and staff,

Help us to improve

We want to be sure that you have a good experience as a BBOWT volunteer and feedback is welcome at any time. Please let us know what we do well and/or what we could do differently. If you decide to stop volunteering for BBOWT, please let us know so that we can update our records. Your supervisor may also ask you to complete an exit form to evaluate your volunteering experiences with us. [If appropriate, on request, volunteers may be provided with a reference or other statement of their achievements.]

Contact details

To contact us by email: info@bbowt.org.uk or volunteering@bbowt.org.uk

At the point you volunteer with us you will be provided with the contact information for your primary contact however if you need to contact us, all the contact numbers for the sites are available at www.bbowt.org.uk. Alternatively contact our Oxford office at The Lodge, 1 Armstrong Road, Littlemore, Oxford OX4 4XT. Phone: 01865 775476.

And finally...

We sincerely hope that you enjoy your time volunteering with us at BBOWT. Don't forget to tell us when things go right! We are always looking for stories from volunteers who help to paint a complete picture of volunteering for our magazine, website and press releases.

If you have any questions about any aspect of your volunteering, please do not hesitate to contact the HR team at Littlemore, Oxford. We will do our best to help you out and if we don't know the answer - will find it out for you!

If are not already a member of the Trust and are interested in finding out what the benefits are or how to go about joining why not visit our website at www.bbowt.org.uk or talk to our supporters office - 01865 775476

Frequently asked questions

Why does BBOWT have volunteers?

Without volunteers we would not be able to do half as much as we do! Volunteers bring their skills and expertise to many different roles and do a great job representing the Trust at a local level. They are able to focus on tasks and projects to which staff cannot commit uninterrupted time and also bring a new and local perspective to our work. Above all, volunteer commitment to and belief in our work strengthens our profile in the community.

Do I have to be a member?

Membership subscriptions are the foundation on which BBOWT is built and is the primary way people support the Trust. Membership also enables supporters to keep in touch through a regular member's newsletter and diary of events. However, we do recognise that people offer their help in a variety of ways. Some give donations of money, some offer their time as volunteers. Some people are able to do both. Whatever you can do, your help is most appreciated. It should be noted though, that there are a few roles for which volunteers do need to be a member; this will be outlined in the role description where relevant.

Do I need previous experience?

No. We aim to encourage people from all walks of life, with a variety of life experiences to become involved in our work. Some roles require specific skills or experience, but most of them allow you to learn as you go along. You will always receive induction to a new role and on the job training and guidance as needed, either from a member of staff, or a more experienced volunteer. We also offer a range of training courses available to all our volunteers at no cost and our long term regular volunteers can take advantage of further training opportunities. If there is specific training you feel you need to enable you to be a volunteer with us, please let us know as we may be able to help out.

How much time do I need to commit?

This is entirely up to you – an hour or a day or several days - you decide how much time you can spare. Some people volunteer every week while others do so once a month or a couple of times a year. Some roles require a more solid block of volunteering, and we will always make sure you are aware of the time required for a particular role in the role outline.

Do I need to provide refreshments?

Tea and coffee are available for volunteers at our offices and visitor centres but if they are going out on practical tasks they should take refreshments with them as we cannot guarantee they will always be available. If volunteering for a whole day, please bring a packed lunch.

What are the rules around smoking?

Smoking is not allowed in any of the Trust's offices or vehicles but designated places for smokers are provided outside.

What should I do in the event of an illness?

If volunteers are ill on the day they have previously arranged to volunteer they should try to let the leader know. A contact number should be provided for this purpose. For volunteers due to attend staff-led activities, a message can be left at the appropriate office – see contact numbers at back of booklet.

Am I entitled to expenses?

BBOWT recognises that the reimbursement of expenses can make volunteering accessible to those on low incomes. BBOWT will reimburse travel expenses to Key Volunteers where such expenses present an obstacle to that person's volunteering and in doing so will respect issues of confidentiality. Unfortunately we cannot offer this facility to other volunteers as we simply do not have the funds to support such an arrangement. When claiming, BBOWT requires expense claim forms to be completed and proof of expenditure attached. Mileage, for your own vehicle use, is at a fixed rate. For further details contact the accounts team at Head Office. Under no circumstances can the Trust pay above actual, reasonable expenses related to the volunteering activity.

Do you require references or carry out checks?

No. However, any volunteer who will be in a position of sole responsibility when working regularly with children or young people (under the age of 18) or vulnerable adults must undertake an enhanced disclosure check via the Disclosure and Barring Service. This will be arranged by Human Resources at our Head Office in Oxford.

What insurance cover is provided?

Volunteers working for and on behalf of BBOWT are covered by our Public Liability, Employers Liability and Personal Accident insurance policies. But please note that our Personal Accident Insurance currently applies only to persons from 18 – 80 years.

As of 1 August 2015, volunteers over the age of 80 continue to be covered by Public Liability and Employers Liability insurance but are no longer covered for personal accident/death insurance.

Contact details

Oxford office and general enquiries

The Lodge, 1 Armstrong Road, Littlemore, Oxford, OX4 4XT
Tel: 01865 775476 Email: info@bbowt.org.uk

Berkshire office and Woolley Firs Environmental Education Centre

Hasker House, Woolley Firs, Cherry Garden Lane, Maidenhead, Berks, SL6 3LJ
Tel: 01628 829574 Email: berkshireoffice@bbowt.org.uk

Buckinghamshire office, College Lake Nature Reserve and Environmental Education Centre

Upper Icknield Way, Bulbourne, Tring, Herts, HP23 5QG
Tel: 01442 826774 Email: collegelake@bbowt.org.uk

Chimney Meadows Nature Reserve

Chimney, Bampton, Oxfordshire, OX18 2EH
Tel: 01367 870904 Email: louiseking@bbowt.org.uk

Meadow Farm

Meadow Farm, Thame Road, Blackthorn, OX25 1TW
Tel: 01869 245864 Email: meadowfarm@bbowt.org.uk

Nature Discovery Centre

Muddy Lane, Lower Way, Thatcham, Berkshire, RG19 3FU
Tel: 01635 874381 Email: ndc@bbowt.org.uk

Sutton Courtenay Environmental Education Centre

Sutton Courtenay Road, Didcot, Oxfordshire, OX14 4TE
Tel: 01235 862024 Email: sceec@bbowt.org.uk

Warburg Nature Reserve

Bix Bottom, Henley-on-Thames, RG9 6BL
Tel: 01491 642001