



Volunteer Handbook



"A healthy, well cared for natural environment which contributes to enjoyment, quality of life, prosperity, health and well-being."

Contents

Welcome	3
Volunteering with Ulster Wildlife	4
Volunteer Roles and Responsibilities	6
About Ulster Wildlife	9
Organisational Structure	10
Volunteer Registration Forms	11
Expenses and timesheets	12
Policies and Procedures	
Health, Safety and Welfare	13
Children and Adults at Risk	14
Information management	15
Dealing with Problems	16
Supervision and Support	
Training and Development	17
Feedback and Moving On	18
Contact Details	19

Welcome to Ulster Wildlife

Thank you for offering your time to volunteer for Ulster Wildlife. The strength of our organisation revolves on the partnership between volunteers and staff, working together to help conservation in Ulster, and your contribution, whether it is work, ideas or simply your company, is much appreciated. As a local charity, volunteering has always been, and remains, fundamental to every aspect of our work. We are dependent on volunteers to enable us to work to protect our environment for future generations. We therefore strive to encourage and support all our volunteers and to offer a friendly and enjoyable environment in which to volunteer.

Founded by volunteers in 1978, Ulster Wildlife staff work in partnership with volunteers who give time, skill, experience and expertise to the organisation across Northern Ireland.

Our Mission

We are a local charity that champions native wildlife. We work with local people to secure space for nature in our countryside, towns, coastlines and seas.

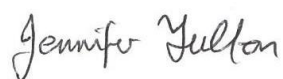
Volunteers are at the heart of Ulster Wildlife's vision of a Living Landscape and Living Seas; where both people and nature benefit from joined-up thriving countryside, coast and wildlife rich urban areas.

This handbook aims to tell you what you need to know to get started in your volunteering role at Ulster Wildlife. If you have any questions that are not answered in this handbook, please do not hesitate to speak to your supervisor.

If you would like to learn more about the benefits of becoming a member of Ulster Wildlife, we would be delighted to hear from you. Please telephone, email membership@ulsterwildlife.org or write to our Membership Team and they will be happy to talk with

you.

Welcome and thank you.



Jennifer Fulton
Chief Executive



Volunteering with Ulster Wildlife

What is a volunteer?

...

Volunteering is the commitment of time and energy for the benefit of society and the community, the environment, or individuals outside (or in addition to) one's immediate family. It is unpaid and undertaken freely and by choice.

What do volunteers do?

..

Ulster Wildlife volunteers carry out a range of roles, from pulling up invasive plants on our nature reserves, counting butterflies in our meadows, teaching children a lifelong love of nature, raising money to support the work of the organisation, assisting with administration in our office, carrying out research projects and so much more. Volunteer expertise in a range of areas is invaluable. For example, computing, mechanics, teaching, proofreading, digital technology, photography, graphic design, music, accounting, website creation, administration and carpentry have all made a difference to our work in the past.

Who can volunteer?

...

We have volunteers of all ages and abilities from children planting seeds to 80 year olds identifying trees. Our volunteers are from all over Northern Ireland, and sometimes beyond, and they come from all walks of life, bringing a variety of skills and experience. If you are interested in wildlife, helping people or the great outdoors we probably have something for you.

Why volunteer with us?

...

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

What volunteers gain from working with Ulster Wildlife

- Enjoyment.
- The opportunity to meet people with similar interests.
- The knowledge that they are contributing to nature conservation in NI.

- The chance to improve their local environment.
- A better understanding of the work of Ulster Wildlife.
- A wider range of knowledge, skills and experiences.
- Specific environmental skills.
- Employability, especially in the field of wildlife conservation, by gaining valuable experience.

What Ulster Wildlife gains from volunteers

- Volunteers provide much needed local representation which helps to raise our profile throughout NI, with the opportunity to make more people aware of Ulster Wildlife's work.
- We can involve volunteers with specialist knowledge for the benefit of Ulster Wildlife.
- Volunteers provide knowledge, skills, experience, ideas and enthusiasm.
- Volunteers can focus on specific tasks to which Ulster Wildlife staff are unable to devote uninterrupted time.
- Volunteers help to extend the budget (eg. volunteer hours can be used as match-funding for grant applications).
- Volunteers extend the sphere of influence of Ulster Wildlife.

Do volunteers have to be members?

...

Some people give donations of money or join Ulster Wildlife as members. Some people offer their time as volunteers. And others do both. Whichever you do, we are extremely grateful. Being a member of Ulster Wildlife does have additional benefits including a quarterly member's magazine. Please ask your supervisor at Ulster Wildlife to find out more.

What happens if I am uncomfortable carrying out a task I have been given?

...

That's fine. Volunteers can opt out if they feel uncomfortable with a specific task. Just have a word with your supervisor.

Do you need prior experience to become a volunteer?

...

We encourage people from all walks of life, with a variety of life experiences to become involved. Some roles require specific skills or experience, in this case we will detail this in the volunteer role description, but most allow you to learn as you go along, sometimes after receiving appropriate training. You will always be fully briefed about your role and the tasks you will be involved in and we will make training available as and when it is needed by a volunteer in order for them to undertake their role or enhance their skills relevant to their volunteering. We try to match your skills and experiences to a suitable role, or if possible help you to develop them. Some roles, such as our Butterfly Surveyors require some specialised knowledge, but many can be carried out with a little guidance and plenty of enthusiasm!

What if I am in receipt of state benefits such as Job Seekers Allowance or Incapacity Benefit?

...

You can still volunteer. There has been some confusion in the past, but volunteering does not prevent you from looking for work, attending an interview within 48 hours or being ready to start work within one week. These are the periods of notice you can expect from the Job Centre. There are also likely to be many volunteering opportunities that will not affect things such as incapacity benefit. If you are unsure please speak to us, or to your Job Centre adviser.

What about young volunteers?

...

Ulster Wildlife encourages volunteers of all ages as long as they are able to take part safely. For young people under 16 who are still at school we will require parents or guardians to supervise them. Young people aged 16 or 17 can volunteer without needing an accompanying adult but we would require parental consent (a signed form) for this to happen.

Can Ulster Wildlife give me a reference for my volunteering work?

...

Ulster Wildlife will be happy to support our volunteers in their future ventures by providing references confirming when you started and finished volunteering and which department you worked within.

Volunteer Roles and Responsibilities

Your Responsibilities to Ulster Wildlife

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

- Inform Ulster Wildlife if you do not feel confident you have received the guidelines and information necessary to carry out your role
- Make sure you are aware of relevant Ulster Wildlife policies and guidelines that are relevant to your role and comply with all relevant legal obligations placed upon Ulster Wildlife including health and safety and fire regulations
- Meet the general commitments necessary to carry out your role including any time commitments and appointments that you have agreed to, except in exceptional circumstances.
- Be mindful of your status as an Ulster Wildlife ambassador in your community including appropriate conduct whilst wearing branded clothing
- Show respect to other staff, volunteers and clients
- Follow safety instructions at all times
- Ensure that no illegal or criminal misuse of Ulster Wildlife assets takes place
- Respect confidentiality of information of which you may become aware whilst a volunteer for Ulster Wildlife
- Complete the tasks you undertake to the best of your ability. All activities you carry out must be agreed in advance with your supervisor
- Notify us if you wish to cease volunteering

*"I decided to volunteer with Ulster Wildlife to get experience and because this is a worthy cause. By volunteering with Ulster Wildlife I am hoping to get experience beyond conservation which is what I've learned about on my course; and experience of being in the workplace. I would advise anybody interested in volunteering to **just do it! Don't be afraid of not knowing - you'll learn on the way.**"*



Our responsibilities to you

Ulster Wildlife also has responsibilities to you, many of which are covered in more detail later in the handbook or will be discussed with you when you start.

In summary:

- We will provide a friendly welcome, and a thorough induction to the organisation and your role within it
- We will show our appreciation and recognise the contribution of volunteers
- We will provide proper supervision and support to you and will seek your feedback and views about your volunteering experience
- We will aim to include your skills, knowledge and abilities to further our aims and objectives
- We will provide volunteers with a clear role description, instruction and any relevant additional training in all tasks we ask you to undertake
- We will properly plan and budget for involving volunteers and will reimburse out of pocket expenses
- We will handle volunteer data properly and in accordance with the 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 is 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 Ulster Wildlife



Ulster Wildlife is a local nature conservation charity. We are the only local charity concerned with all aspects of wildlife conservation, both on our land and in our seas, in Northern Ireland. We are a locally-driven organisation, with all of our funds raised and spent in Northern Ireland. Ulster Wildlife was formed by a group of volunteers in 1978. We are affiliated to, and actively support, The Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts. The Wildlife Trusts partnership is the largest UK voluntary movement dedicated to protecting the full range of our native habitats and species, with support from over 800,000 members UK-wide. Individual Wildlife Trusts work for wildlife at a local grassroots level and together we have a powerful national voice. Together we are the biggest movement in the UK aiming to protect and restore a living landscape for people and all wildlife.

Ulster Wildlife is the operating name of Ulster Wildlife Trust, registered with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland NIC101848. A company incorporated in Northern Ireland limited by guarantee NI 12711.

What we do

We manage 18 nature reserves, covering over 850 hectares of land including ancient woodland, wildflower-rich grasslands, precious peatland and valuable wetlands. Each of these is a haven for wildlife, securing a future for our native plants and animals – and of course they are wonderful places for people too!

We are committed to involving local people in the conservation of their wildlife and countryside – that's why we work with businesses, landowners, politicians, local authorities, community groups and schools to promote concern and action for our natural environment.

We have over 13,000 members, employ around 40 staff and engage the support of over 200 volunteers.

Our Strategic Goals are to:

- **Inspire people** to champion wildlife and value nature
- **Protect and restore habitats and ecosystems** through practical action and research
- **Stand up for nature** by influencing government policy
- **Promote health and well-being** through enjoyment of the natural environment
- **Grow our success** and extend our reach

And our Vision is

A healthy, well cared for natural environment which contributes to enjoyment, quality of life, prosperity, health and well-being.

Organisational Structure

Ulster Wildlife is both a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee and has a large team consisting of the following people:

The Board of Trustees: Trustees are elected from the membership at the Annual General Meeting, and carry ultimate responsibility for Ulster Wildlife's actions. They meet 4 times a year to agree strategic plans and policies, set the annual budget and ensure Ulster Wildlife fulfils its numerous responsibilities. Our Trustees are all volunteers.

The Senior Management Team: This consists of the Chief Executive (who has overall authority) and the Operations Director. These people manage the day-to-day strategic and operational activities of the organisation.

The Staff Team: most Ulster Wildlife staff are based at the Belfast Headquarters but some staff work out of Belfast. All staff are committed to working closely with volunteers in order to achieve the objectives of the organisation. Some staff are part-time or on fixed-term projects. This staff team, with your help have responsibility for bringing Ulster Wildlife's vision to life.

The staff work through 5 teams

- Living Landscapes
- Living Seas
- Nature Reserves
- Fundraising & Comms
- Corporate Services



Volunteer Registration Forms

Registration Form

We have kept paperwork to a minimum. All volunteers, once they have made the commitment to volunteer, are asked to complete our volunteer registration form. We keep this information on our volunteer database and only use it for purposes relevant to your volunteering.



If you are a young volunteer (16 or 17) we also require a parental consent form from your parent or legal guardian. If you are going to be driving as part of your role (not just commuting) we will also need a driver declaration form from you.

Why do we ask what we ask?

Basic contact details: To keep you informed.

Emergency contact: In case you are involved in an accident whilst volunteering.

Medical details: In case there is anything we might need to know that will affect you in your role. All information is treated confidentially and access to this information is restricted.

Criminal records: We only need to know about unspent offences, in case you have done something that might make you unsuitable for a particular role. You will not automatically be excluded; it depends on the individual and the role.

Volunteer Agreement: This explains in more detail the responsibility between Ulster Wildlife and volunteers.

Starting out

All volunteers will receive an induction from the volunteer coordinator or their supervisor when they begin. This will vary depending on the nature of the role undertaken but should at least consist of discussing what will be required of them in their role, how the role fits into and contributes to the work of Ulster Wildlife and identifying a contact person for the volunteer, known as a supervisor. Asking for your emergency contact information will also be part of this process, as will ensuring you have filled out a volunteering registration form and received a Volunteer Agreement together with a copy of your Role Description. All information which you provide us will be kept strictly confidential in accordance with the Data Protection legislation.

Being an Ulster Wildlife representative

Please remember that as a volunteer, you may be in a position where you are informally /formally representing Ulster Wildlife to the public. If you would like any information or guidance so that you feel more confident about representing us this way, please talk to your supervisor. Remember, you should always refer people to a member of staff or to the Belfast office if they are asking about sensitive issues. Formal contact with external organisations, groups or

members of the public on behalf of Ulster Wildlife must only take place if authorised by your supervisor.

Expenses and Timesheets

Claiming Expenses

Ulster Wildlife recognises that the reimbursement of expenses can make volunteering accessible to all regardless of income. Volunteers are entitled to claim the following expenses, should they wish to do so:

- Travel
- Other expenses

Travel

You can claim for travel to and from your place of volunteering. Mileage is payable at a rate of 45p per mile for car use and 20p per mile for bicycle use. Public transport (bus, train, taxi etc) costs will be reimbursed too. Receipts must be provided. All journeys must be **previously agreed** with your supervisor.

Please note that if you are claiming for mileage, you should make your insurance company aware.



Other expenses

All reasonable out of pocket expenses incurred as part of your voluntary work and **previously agreed** with your supervisor, will be reimbursed e.g. telephone calls/stationary/postage etc. Ulster Wildlife will pay for any overnight accommodation, should this be required as part of your volunteering.

Claiming process

You must fill in a mileage claim form for any mileage expenses and an expenses claim form for any travel expenses or other expenses. These forms are available from your supervisor. You will be reimbursed your expenses in cash or cheque.

Expenses will only be reimbursed on production of valid receipts

Time Sheets

We are now asking some volunteers to help us to promote recognition of the contribution they make to Ulster Wildlife by registering their hours with us. We record volunteer hours and submit these in applications for funding new work and in helping to evidence what we have achieved as part of current funding that we receive. Your supervisor will talk to you about this at your induction.

Policies and Procedures

Introduction

Like all organisations Ulster Wildlife has a number of policies and procedures to ensure we work effectively, fairly and consistently. Apart from those policies that relate specifically to staff (such as pay, leave, pensions etc) **all of our policies also apply to volunteers** depending upon what role they undertake. In most cases you will be introduced to policies as they affect you. A few policies are important and general enough to be introduced here including those below on health and safety and information management. All policy documents are available to read or borrow from the Belfast office, or you can ask your supervisor to get a copy of the documents for you.

Equal Opportunities

Ulster Wildlife does 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 other volunteers. We have a policy outlining our commitment to equal opportunities.

Representing Ulster Wildlife

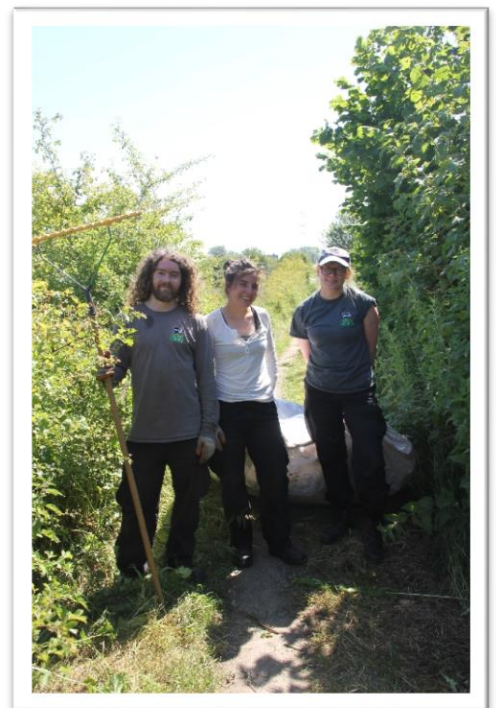
As a volunteer you are informally representing Ulster Wildlife to the public, whether as an events volunteer or simply as a reserve volunteer who happens to be chatting to a dog walker. As you get more involved you will learn enough about Ulster Wildlife to be able to chat to people about the basics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

Health, Safety and Welfare

Our Health and Safety Responsibilities

Ulster Wildlife has both a legal and a 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. We 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 or in a group briefing such as a work party tools talk.

The nature of our work means that we do undertake potentially hazardous work, so we use a risk assessment process for



deciding which potential hazards are acceptable and which are not. For all tasks and roles a risk assessment will have been undertaken by the organiser and recorded in a standard format.

To prevent accidents we will identify appropriate training and personal protective equipment (PPE) to reduce or remove the risk. Finally, we consider what to do in the event of an accident and what first aid provision is required.

Your Health and Safety Responsibilities

By law, everyone is responsible for looking after their own safety and that of their colleagues at all times, including 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 that you are unsure about.

If you want to join in with a task part way through the day and are unsure whether you might have missed their briefing you should approach the leader and ask first.

You must provide us with details of any medical conditions relevant to your role and provide emergency contact details as requested on the volunteer registration form. You should also let us know if these details change.

Nature Reserve volunteering - If you have completed your task for the day, or the team no longer require any further assistance, they may ask you to leave the work area for your own health and safety as full supervision of you as a volunteer at that time may not be achievable.

Finally, if you observe anything that you think might be unsafe or you are involved in or see an accident or near miss you must report it to us.

Volunteering alone

We try to avoid asking people to volunteer alone wherever possible; however, certain tasks can from time to time be difficult to do otherwise. You should always plan ahead for when you might have to volunteer alone. If it is a regular part of the role, we will have risk assessed it in detail and discussed the implications and relevant procedures with you in advance.

Insurance

All volunteers are insured by Ulster Wildlife for their volunteering so long as they are undertaking work agreed by the organisation, have followed our policies and procedures and any instructions or guidance we have given. This includes cover if you are injured by another person or if you accidentally injure or damage someone or something else. We also hold Personal Accident cover for adult volunteers, which covers you if you injure yourself by accident. Personal equipment and belongings are not insured under our policy

Accident Reporting

All accidents and near misses, however minor they might appear to be, should be recorded and submitted to your supervisor. All offices and out posted staff or volunteers will have access to an accident reporting book for you to use – often it is located with the first aid kit. This also applies to any near misses where the potential for harm was recognisable.

Safeguarding - Working with children, young people and adults at risk

Ulster Wildlife works with children, young people and adults at risk on a regular basis. Our work with children in particular is crucial to fostering a caring and understanding for wildlife that will be crucial to achieving our vision. However, we also recognise that children need extra care and attention when interacting with us.

As with staff roles, volunteer roles that involve working with children or adults at risk in any way are assessed to determine the extent of that involvement. Generally speaking 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. There may be certain roles for which we ask you to undertake an enhanced disclosure check via Access NI. We may also ask you to undertake online training on child safety and welfare and become familiar with our policies and procedures for volunteering with children and adults at risk.

The usual risk assessment based procedures apply to volunteering with children and adults at risk. They will take into account the likelihood of children having a lesser understanding or ability to undertake tasks, the need for specialist equipment, tailored instruction and extra supervision.

Information Management

Confidentiality

As an Ulster Wildlife volunteer you may become aware of information which is of a confidential nature. This might be about protected species, new projects, financial or personal information. We expect you 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 a retrievable 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 emails. You will be shown how we process, store and use this data if it is relevant to your role and if relevant we will train you in 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 might produce new materials, data or ideas of use to Ulster Wildlife, 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 objects. This voluntary agreement is incorporated into the registration form so you don't need to take any further action. If you produce something where you would prefer to make a more formal arrangement just let us know and we will sort that out too.

Supervision and Support

Following your induction to the organisation, the amount of ongoing supervision and support you are offered will vary depending upon 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 only require an open discussion over the tea break or for others a phone call may do. Others will find regular one to one meeting with their supervisor of use. This is up to you and your supervisor to discuss and agree. Should you have a query or problem that you do not wish to discuss with your supervisor, you can contact our Volunteer Coordinator who will be on hand to offer help and assistance.

Dealing with Problems

We aim to make all volunteering experiences positive and enjoyable, but we recognise that problems may arise from time to time. 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 procedures.

We encourage due process in resolving problems. The first thing you should do is to talk to your supervisor 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 Volunteer Coordinator who will mediate between those involved. If the complaint involves a member of staff we may involve the Senior Management Team.

In rare circumstances, issues can also be referred to the Chief Executive whose decision will be final. If it is decided that a volunteer is at fault and the matter is irresolvable, we may ask them to cease volunteering, but most issues are resolved before it comes to 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. This could be unacceptable behaviour towards children, other volunteers or staff members. Or it could be any of the following – fraud, theft, harassment (sectarian, sexual etc), misuse of Ulster Wildlife assets, physical violence. Where a criminal offence is suspected, it becomes a matter for the police not Ulster Wildlife. You will have the opportunity to discuss the incident before a final decision.

And always remember that volunteers can opt out if they feel uncomfortable with a specific task. Just have a word with your supervisor. This procedure is in place so that we can resolve any problems, grievances or difficulties you have, whilst volunteering with Ulster Wildlife, in a fair and consistent manner.

Please note that throughout this procedure, written records will be kept in a confidential manner.

Training, Learning and Development



For most roles you will receive relevant 'on the job' training from your supervisor 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 – we are all novices and learners in different things.

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

Some central training is organised from time to time, such as first aid and manual handling. Other training is organised by individual teams and managers according to organisational needs. Sometimes unexpected places become available on such courses and we do our best to advertise these in case you are able to take advantage.

Once you have started volunteering, if you feel you need further training to fulfil your role, please speak with your staff or volunteer contact.

Feedback and Moving On

Feedback

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 may conduct small focus groups, inviting volunteers in for an informal discussion about your volunteer experience, or we may send out volunteer surveys asking how we are doing. Your help in returning these to us, and your honesty in being critical where necessary, is appreciated.

Tell us about your experiences

We are always looking for stories about our volunteers. It might 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 on our website or in press releases and member's magazine and crucially to help involve more people through volunteering. Please get in touch if you would like to see your story in print!

Moving on

If you decide to cease volunteering with Ulster Wildlife please let us know, either by telling your supervisor or contacting the Volunteering Coordinator. It would be very helpful to us if you would also tell us why you are leaving, positive or negative and complete our Volunteer Exit Questionnaire.



Contact Details

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

Sheila Lyons
Volunteer Coordinator
Ulster Wildlife
McClelland House
10 Heron Road
Belfast, BT3 9LE

Tel: 028 9046 3114

Email: Sheila.lyons@ulsterwildlife.org

