



Volunteer Handbook



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

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Welcome to Ulster Wildlife

We are delighted to have you join our community of passionate volunteers who play a vital role in protecting and restoring the natural beauty of Northern Ireland. Your time, energy, and enthusiasm make a real difference to the wildlife and habitats we cherish.

At Ulster Wildlife, we believe that everyone can contribute to bringing nature back. Whether you're helping with conservation projects, community events, or within our admin teams, your involvement helps us create a healthier environment for people and wildlife alike.

This handbook is designed to guide you through your volunteer journey with us. Inside, you'll find useful information about our values, what to expect, and how you can make the most of your experience. We hope it inspires you as much as your commitment inspires us.

Thank you for choosing to volunteer with Ulster Wildlife. Together, we can protect the natural world for generations to come.

Welcome and thank you.



Dawn Miskelly
Chief Executive



Volunteering with Ulster Wildlife

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 nature 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.
- Volunteer FAQ's are available on our website - <https://www.ulsterwildlife.org/volunteer>

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
- Ensure your personal and emergency contact details are up to date on our volunteer registration form.
- 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 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 nature 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 bring nature back.

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 19 nature reserves, covering over 1800 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 80 staff and engage the support of over 200 volunteers.

Our Strategic Outcomes up to 2030 are:

- Outcome 1: Nature is in recovery and wildlife is thriving across Northern Ireland.
- Outcome 2: More people are taking positive action for nature and climate and are benefitting from time spent in nature.
- Outcome 3: Nature-based solutions are playing a central role in addressing climate change.

Organisational Structure

Ulster Wildlife is both a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee and has a team of people involved in its management and delivery:

The Board of Trustees: Trustees are appointed from the membership and carry ultimate responsibility for Ulster Wildlife's actions. They meet four 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 Leadership Team: This consists of the Chief Executive (who has overall authority), the Director of Development and Governance, Director of Land Management and Head of Nature Recovery. 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 outside 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

- Conservation Team
- Marine Conservation Team
- Nature Reserves Team
- Fundraising & Communications Team
- Community Engagement Team
- Corporate Services Team



Volunteer Registration

Registration

All volunteers, once they have made the commitment to volunteer, are asked to register and complete an online Volunteer Registration form with their own personal details including next of kin contact information. This information is then stored on a locked online database and used only for purposes of recording staff and volunteering information.

If you are a young volunteer (16 or 17), a parent or guardian will need to be elected to do this for you and attend volunteering with 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.

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.

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 Timelogs

Claiming Expenses

Ulster Wildlife recognises that the reimbursement of expenses can make volunteering accessible to all regardless of income. Volunteers are entitled to claim for travel or other expenses incurred as part of their volunteering should they wish to do so.

Travel

You can claim for travel to and from your place of volunteering up to a maximum of 30 miles per day. Mileage is payable at a rate of 45p per mile for car use and 20p per mile for bicycle use. Public transport (bus, train, etc) costs will be reimbursed too. Receipts must be provided. All journeys must be previously agreed with your supervisor.

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 complete our online mileage/expenses claim process for any travel expenses etc incurred via your Web expenses log-in. Full instructions on how to do this are available from the Volunteer Coordinator or your supervisor. You will be reimbursed your expenses via bank transfer, so you must provide a copy of your bank details to our finance department.



Expenses will only be reimbursed on production of valid receipts

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, but policies specifically relevant to volunteers can be found by visiting the volunteer section of our website - <https://www.ulsterwildlife.org/volunteer-handbook-policies>.

The key policies are:-

- Volunteer Policy – set out the principles for volunteer involvement within Ulster Wildlife
- Health and Safety
- IT Policy
- Dealing with Problems
- Recruitment
- Lone working
- Equal Opportunities
- Privacy Policy
- Covid Policy

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.

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 requirements 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 some potentially hazardous work, so we

use a risk assessment process for managing this. 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 and understand any health and safety guidance and appropriate risk assessments you are given and you be asked to sign and clarify you have done this. Please ensure you ask about anything that you are unsure of.

If you want to join in with a task part way through the day and are unsure whether you might have missed the safety 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 at registration. 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 outposted staff or volunteers will have access to an accident reporting App which can be used. 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, photographs, 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. 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 Leadership 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 is made.

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.

We utilise an online training platform to fulfil central health and safety training requirements and you may be invited to link into this. Courses such as manual handling, health and safety and risk assessment are available. Your supervisor will take you through this if it is a requirement. In-house training is arranged throughout the year as well as places on courses other organisations may run and where we can, we will make such training available to those who are interested in it.

Once you have started volunteering, if you feel you need further training to fulfil your role, please speak with your supervisor or the Volunteer Coordinator.

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 us 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

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