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| **Audience for Document** | Staff, volunteers, contractors and Trustees. External audiences. |
| How disseminated? | Staff, volunteer, Trustee and contractor induction. Stored on the shared drive and copies made available to staff and volunteers without access to this e.g. Local Groups. Available on website. Available upon request to external parties. |
| Who is responsible for dissemination and updates? | Dissemination: Volunteers Officer, Relevant Manager/s & Volunteer Supervisors. HR to track on BreatheHR  Updates: Appointed Director in charge, Volunteers Officer and IiV Steering Group |

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| **Related Policies and Guidance** | |
| **That form part of this Policy** | Volunteer Managers Handbook and Field Guide, incorporating the Problem-Solving Procedures. |
| **Related documents** | Individual Volunteer Agreements  Trainee Policy [to be drafted]  Work Experience and Student Placement Policy [to be drafted]  Charity Governance Code |
| **Guidance** | SGG1 Safeguarding Guidance for Staff and Volunteers  Investing in Volunteers Quality Standard. |
| **Other relevant policies** | Complaints Policy  Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct  Data Protection Policy and Guidance  Health and Safety Policy  Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy |

**1 Our Commitment to Volunteering and Volunteers**

1.1 At its very core, Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT) is a volunteer led and volunteer involving organisation. DWT was set up by an enthusiastic group of volunteers over 60 years ago, is accountable to and governed by a board of trustees and has over 300 active, registered volunteers who support our work in a wide range of ways. Volunteering programmes are an integral part of our engagement and conservation projects and developing our work with volunteers is a core strand of our *10 Year Plan* and *Engagement Strategy.*

Volunteers, along with our staff team, our members and other supporters, form a strong community of individuals who are passionate about wildlife and work hard, every day, to protect it for the future.

1.2 Our Commitment

1.2.1 **DWT will involve volunteers to maximise the impact of its annual work programme for the benefit of wildlife**. Volunteers provide a resource that enables DWT to do more to recover nature than it could with staff alone. They bring more and different skills and expertise as well as a broader point of view. They help to build strong links with the communities we engage, reaching more people and wider audiences thus supporting our engagement aims and cultivating conservation leadership within DWT and within communities of all kinds across Devon. They enrich our organisation with a wealth of experience, infectious enthusiasm and energy.

1.2.2 **DWT believes that in properly supporting volunteers, they will be more effective and will benefit from their experience**. We recognise that volunteering, and particularly in nature, supports a range of dimensions linked to wellbeing,[[1]](#footnote-1) helping people to be active, keep learning, connect with others and with the world around them, give of their time and skills (and be valued for that). It can be a great way for people to build confidence, develop new skills, find pathways into learning and into work and to feel a sense of purpose.

1.2.3 **DWT is committed to supporting the efforts of volunteers and recognises and values their contribution through formal and informal routes**. We will offer a range of widely advertised roles/avenues to getting involved with our work and will consider the barriers and motivations to volunteering from people of all backgrounds and abilities. We will create a positive and supportive environment for individuals and groups, investing appropriately in support for volunteers across the organisation so that they are managed to a high standard.

1.2.4 DWT is committed to the four principles of[[2]](#footnote-2):

* **Choice**: Volunteering must be a choice freely made by everyone. No coercion or compulsion will be used when encouraging volunteers. Volunteers are free to refuse tasks and staff will make no unreasonable demands.
* **Equality, diversity and inclusivity**: DWT welcomes volunteers of all backgrounds and abilities. DWT will proactively strive to ensure that we reach diverse audiences, will make reasonable adjustments to accommodate those with additional needs, and will ensure that our volunteer base reflects the composition of Devon’s communities. We will not tolerate prejudice or behaviours that exclude or marginalise others.
* **Mutual Benefit:** Volunteers will benefit from their contribution to DWT and feel their contribution is personally fulfilling. Benefits could include a sense of worthwhile achievement, gaining or making use of skills, gaining experience and contacts, meeting others and having fun. All volunteers should feel part of the life of the organisation and a valued part of the DWT community. DWT will endeavour to find out what volunteers wish to achieve through their volunteering and support them to do this where possible.
* **Recognition:** We believe that explicit recognition of the value of what volunteers contribute to the organisation, to the environment and to the community is essential.

1.3 Our Expectation of Volunteers

DWT expects volunteers to follow our policies and codes of conduct, to uphold the Volunteer Agreement and to work within the spirit of our organisational values which are as follows:

**Everyone Counts**

* giving everyone a chance to discover and enjoy Devon’s wildlife, wherever they live, whatever they believe and whatever barriers might exist

**An atmosphere of Trust**

* creating an environment where people feel their views and ideas count and where they are willing to take responsibility for leading

**Going the Extra mile**

* staying the course and delivering above and beyond what our stakeholders would expect

**Passion with reason**

* pursuing our work with drive and zeal, but making sure our arguments are reasoned and based on sound evidence

**Considerate partners**

* being aware of the needs and concerns of those we work with, recognising mutual strengths and sharing credit

**Inspiring minds**

* developing, experimenting and broadening our work, sowing enthusiasm with abandon bringing everyone under wildlife’s spell.

**2 Policy Scope**

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) defines volunteering as *“any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives. Central to this definition is the fact that volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual. This can include formal activity undertaken through public, private and voluntary organisations as well as informal community participation.”*

This policy sets out the rights of volunteers and responsibilities of DWT towards its volunteers.

It covers **formal volunteering** with the Trust; individuals or groups of individuals who have registered to volunteer with the Trust or who are volunteering through activities led or run by the Trust and individuals who run Local Groups. It covers those who volunteer on a ‘one off’ basis to help the Trust complete a specific task as well as those who volunteer regularly.

This policy does not cover:

* Informal Volunteering: those individuals who support our mission through responding to a campaign, fundraising for our cause, or by taking action for nature where they live, learn or work. We want to inspire everyone to act for wildlife and we offer advice and expertise to facilitate this. But informal volunteering is carried out by individuals acting under their own initiative and individual action of this kind does not fall within the scope of this policy.
* Employer-supported volunteers or community service/rehabilitation placements, which are managed through and by other agencies.
* Trainees, who are not volunteers and are covered by a separate policy.
* Anyone undertaking student placements or school work experience, who are covered by a separate policy.

Trustees are volunteers, but the entirety of this policy does not apply to trustees, who are subject to selection, induction and training processes overseen by the Board of Trustees in line with governance best practice and the Charity Governance Code.

**1.2 Definitions**

**Formal volunteering** is defined by NCVO as giving unpaid help through a group, club or organisation (including public, private and voluntary organisations). Formal volunteer roles typically have set hours, clear role descriptions and involve supervision by a member of staff within the group, club or organisation.

**Informal volunteering** is defined by NCVO as giving unpaid help as an individual to people who are not a relative. This type of voluntary activity is not coordinated by an organisation or institution and is carried out on a community level or through social action. Civic participation also comes under the umbrella of informal volunteering, which can be defined as an individual’s involvement in local affairs, including community decision making through formal roles or groups. They do not undergo any recruitment process, are not covered by DWT insurance or other policies. They undertake activities at their own risk.

**‘One off’ volunteering** is where individuals volunteer to complete a specific task that is organised or led by DWT on a ‘one off’ basis. This is often through events such as bio blitzes or that have a specific conservation outcome.

**Regular volunteering** is defined at DWT as a commitment to an ongoing role. This may be frequent or infrequent, for example Otter Spotters undertaking surveys four times a year, but where the same volunteer will cover the same site over a number of years.

**Registered volunteer** – A registered volunteer has completed a registration form and is recorded on the database as a DWT volunteer. This enables the volunteer to reap the full benefit of this policy, for example, they will receive volunteer newsletters and be invited to the Volunteers Forum. All regular volunteers will be registered, sometimes after completion of a taster day or trial period.

**Trainee** – a trainee is not a volunteer. They will have a training agreement with the Trust and specific learning outcomes. The main purpose of their involvement is training for the individual involved. Any benefit to the organisation is secondary. Our relationship with trainees is governed by a separate policy.

**Work experience -**A planned period of work-based learning or experience with learning outcomes usually undertaken as part of a programme of university, college or school study, as a short placement, work taster, temporary work, or a period of supported employment as part of vocational training. The placement is usually sourced externally with an employer in any sector (private, statutory, voluntary). Although the person may sometimes source their own placement, they will normally be accountable to the original agency for carrying out the placement to certain standards over an agreed period of time. Work experience is typically not paid, not contracted and short-term. This is often where people, especially young people, are offered the opportunity of a taster of a particular job and given the chance to try various tasks or shadow a member of staff. This may be part of an educational course or ‘into work’ programme.

**3. Volunteers and the Law**

**Employment rights:** volunteers are not employees and do not have employment rights.

The accidental creation of an employment relationship would put DWT in breach of a number of regulations, including the National Minimum Wage Act. This policy and associated processes will ensure that this does not happen.

**Equalities Act 2010:** Volunteers are not protected under equalities legislation. However, our internal policies will ensure that volunteers are treated fairly and with respect regardless of background or ability.

**Health and safety:** There is more protection under Health and Safety Law for employees and workers than for volunteers. Regardless, organisations have a duty of care towards their volunteers, and section 3 of the Health and Safety at Work act 1974 enshrines a similar duty in statute law. This means that we must take a systematic approach to protecting the health and safety of our volunteers, and they are included in our Health and Safety Policy and procedures.

**Safeguarding:** DWT has a duty of care towards children and adults at risk of neglect and abuse, including when they are volunteers.

**Data Protection legislation:** The General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) apply to volunteer records, and volunteer data must be collected and processed in line with GDPR. In addition, the Trust would be responsible for the consequences of any data breaches committed by volunteers who are processing or handling personal data on our behalf, and our GDPR policy and guidance reflects this.

**Copyright**: The Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 states that material produced by employees belongs to the employer but does not mention volunteers. This means the copyright belongs with the volunteer, not Devon Wildlife Trust, unless the volunteer has signed a copyright assignation form.

**4. Putting this Policy into Action**

**3.1 Staff and Organisational Responsibilities**

3.1.1 Dedicated Resource: DWT will ensure that volunteers are given appropriate support. The Trust will invest in a staff member or members who have expertise in volunteer development and who will act as a ‘centre of excellence’ within the Trust and ensure that the Trust adheres to best practice in volunteer recruitment, development and support.

3.1.2 Volunteer Supervisors: In addition, each volunteer will have a named ‘supervisor’ from within the DWT staff team whose responsibilities are outlined in their job descriptions. Volunteer supervisors will receive training and support to fulfil their roles to a high standard.

3.1.3 Line Managers: Will support their team to manage volunteers including, as appropriate, discussion at team meetings, 121 meetings and appraisal. They will ensure effective handover of volunteers should a volunteer supervisor leave.

3.1.4 Senior Leadership

* The Chief Executive Officer will take the lead, in partnership with the Board and senior managers, in ensuring that the needs of volunteers are considered in all strategic and business planning.
* Trustees – at least one Board member will be appointed to represent volunteers and volunteer interests at the highest level.[[3]](#footnote-3)
* A DWT Director will be given specific responsibility for ensuring that DWT adheres to this policy and Investors in Volunteers (IiV) principles and that volunteering is embedded within the Trust’s engagement aims and plans.
* The Trust will maintain an IiV Steering Group to ensure that DWT maintains the IiV standard.

3.1.5 A Volunteer Management Handbook laying out how DWT deals with recruitment, selection and evaluation of volunteer work, based on recognised national standards and DWT policy and principles, will be maintained, updated and distributed to all staff involved with volunteers to ensure consistency of volunteer management throughout the organisation.

**3.2 Volunteer recruitment**

* DWT will ensure that the recruitment of volunteers is fair, efficient, inclusive, consistent, and based on equality, diversity and inclusion principles as set out in the IiV framework (Quality area 3) and DWT EDI policy.
* The full process is outlined in the Volunteer Manager’s Handbook which includes:
  + Discussion with the Volunteers Officer,
  + Role risk assessments will determine the need for references and disclosures.
  + Roles designed using the template Role Descriptions which includes assessment of its accessibility to diverse audiences so that barriers to participation are identified early and, if possible, removed or mitigated.
  + Safeguards to ensure that no employment relationship is accidentally created with the volunteer.
* Potential volunteers will be provided with clear information about roles available, application processes, and reasonable expectations.
* Reference requests from and to DWT will be co-ordinated centrally.

**3.3 Training and induction**

* All volunteers will receive an induction fitting to their role, their abilities and their communications needs. It will be made clear to them that there is no obligation associated with their role. Where appropriate, DWT will provide training to enable volunteers to be effective in their role.
* DWT is committed to the production and regular review of volunteer handbooks which will ensure that volunteers know how they can play their part in DWT’s work.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**3.4 Communications**

* DWT volunteers will be encouraged to become members of the Trust to receive all the benefits, including regular information about our work. If they are not members, or do not wish to be, they will be encouraged to sign up for DWT’s e-newsletters to receive regular updates about the Trust’s work.
* Registered volunteers will be sent a volunteer newsletter at least quarterly, with news, articles and feedback of relevance to volunteers and including information about new volunteer roles. This is available in both digital and paper formats, with other formats available on request.
* Volunteers will be sent copies of our annual review – Your Support.
* Volunteer supervisors will keep volunteers updated with regard to news, information and changes specific to their role.
* Volunteers are invited to a twice-yearly Forums.

**3.5 Support**

DWT wishes to encourage volunteering by ensuring that DWT is as supportive as possible of volunteer effort and involvement. To this end, we:

* Make everyone feel welcome through widely promoting our commitment to EDI.
* Ensure that staff receive regular training[[5]](#footnote-5) and support in working closely with volunteers, with skills monitored through the appraisal system.
* Invest in central resource, including non-salary costs, to support volunteer development and best practice, and to enable adaptation, equipment or reasonable adjustments that facilitate inclusivity.
* Ensure that every new project or activity that involves volunteers has training and expenses budgets that are appropriate to the volunteering activity and reflect the need for volunteers from a range of abilities to be able to participate.
* Provide clear informal and formal avenues/routes for volunteers to express any concerns or complaints about their treatment or experience with DWT
* Ensure that all volunteers have an opportunity to raise queries, explore ideas, share best practice etc, both on a project and an organisational level. On an organisational level this is achieved by the Volunteers Forum, a gathering convened by the Board’s volunteer champion to which all registered volunteers are invited. [[6]](#footnote-6)
* Where we can, we will support and encourage opportunities for volunteers to socialise with other DWT staff and volunteers to build stronger connections with and within the organisation.

**3.6 Protection**

* DWT will protect its volunteers from physical, financial and emotional harm arising from their volunteering. This will be achieved through the organisation’s EDI, Data Protection, Safeguarding and Health and Safety policies and related activities. This includes risk assessments, safeguarding activities, insurance appropriate to the role, and adequate expense reimbursement and confidentiality arrangements. DWT’s Mental Health First Aider scheme will be made available to volunteers.
* Volunteers should not be out of pocket due because of their volunteering. Reasonable out of pocket expenses will be reimbursed in accordance with the guidelines laid down in the Volunteer Managers’ Handbook.

**3.7 Recognition and Reward**

* The Volunteers Forum, enabling opportunities to develop skills and seeking out feedback from volunteers are ways already mentioned in this policy that recognise volunteers.
* The contribution of volunteers is recognised in the Trust’s annual reviews and other relevant publications.
* All DWT staff and volunteer supervisors are encouraged to regularly recognise the contribution of volunteers informally through verbal and written thanks and praise.
* Formal Volunteers Awards will be given annually at DWT’s Annual General Meeting (AGM).

**3.8 Access to the Board**

* The twice-yearly Volunteers Forum provides direct access to the Board through a named trustee.
* In addition, the Board will publish the names of Trustees in communications with volunteers and encourage contact (by writing c/o Cricklepit Mill).

**3.9 Raising Concerns and Resolving conflict**

* The Board will ensure appropriate channels exist to raise and resolve conflict. These include DWT’s Complaints policy and procedures, as well as the Volunteer Problem Solving Procedures that are explained in the Volunteer Management Handbook and in the relevant Volunteer Handbooks.
  1. **Including volunteering within project planning.**
* Volunteers will be considered at the planning stage of new projects, as detailed in the project planning checklist, and included within funding bids. This will be discussed with the Volunteers Officer, and consideration given to ensuring roles are inclusive.
* Similarly, the needs of volunteers will be fully considered when a project closes down, as detailed in the project close down checklist, in communication with the Volunteers Officer. This will include appropriate thanks and recognition, gathering feedback, and assigning new roles and/or supervisors as appropriate.

**4. Working with Partners**

* Partnership projects have increased in number in recent years. Where partnership projects are set up, responsibility for volunteers will be clarified in the memorandum of understanding or other partnership agreements. Typically, volunteers will be the responsibility of the host or lead partner and will be registered as such. Where a volunteer activity is run by a non-lead partner, they will ensure they use standard lead partner paperwork which signs the volunteers up as lead partner volunteers. All details and paperwork, including risk assessment, should be passed promptly to the lead partner and the lead partner must consent to the activity before it goes ahead to ensure it is insured.
* Volunteer details will not be shared between partners without explicit prior consent.
* DWT will actively promote good volunteer management. It will only enter into volunteer-involving partnerships, if a reasonable standard of volunteer support can be assured.[[7]](#footnote-7)

**5 Monitoring, Reporting and Review**

* DWT will continue to engage with the Investing in Volunteers Quality Standard to ensure we are following best practice.
* We will monitor EDI through regular demographic questionnaires and volunteer satisfaction surveys that ask specific questions about experience of inclusivity within DWT**.**
* Complaints and issues will be logged and analysed on an annual basis to identify any trends. This will feed in to planning for the volunteer programme.
* This policy will be reviewed bi-annually.

1. A picture containing logo

   Description automatically generated [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Adapted from The Compact Code of Good Practice on Volunteering 2005 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This includes convening the Volunteers Forum, being invited to be part of the IiV Steering Group, occasional involvement with specific volunteer issues, and representing volunteers to the Board. Currently, the role is rotating around Trustees to enable more of them to become familiar with volunteering. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Currently this includes the Local Group Handbook and the Information for Volunteers pack for all new volunteers. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. All staff will receive an induction into volunteering, and those managing volunteers will be expected to have attended the internal Volunteer Management Training course in the last four years as minimum. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. DWT currently achieves this through maintaining a Volunteers Forum, which meets twice a year. The Forum:

   * Reviews the progress of volunteering in DWT for the previous two quarters
   * Allows individuals the opportunity to raise issues affecting volunteering in DWT
   * Develops ideas for making best use of volunteer effort
   * Advises the Board on matters referred by it to the Forum
   * Recognises the contribution of volunteers to DWT
   * Keeps volunteers informed about the work and development of DWT
   * Provides an enjoyable day out as a thank you to the volunteers.
   * The Forum usually lasts a full day and includes presentations, discussions and a visit to a site of interest.

   A Board member will act as Convenor of the Forum, with responsibility for reporting on meetings of the Forum to the Board, for representing the views of the Board to the Forum in all matters of policy. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The six Quality Areas of the Investing in Volunteers Quality Standard will be referred to when ascertaining the standard of volunteer support. Partners will pay due attention to volunteers’ safety and welfare, and will have appropriate support, development and recognition mechanisms in place. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)