



VOLUNTEER POLICY

This policy describes the Trust's commitment to volunteering and outlines general conditions for this area of the Trust's work.

1. Introduction

BBOWT, like other Wildlife Trusts, owes its very existence to volunteers and volunteering has remained at the heart of the organisation throughout its history. BBOWT is governed by a Board of Trustees who give their time voluntarily.

We recognise that volunteers are vital to our success in effectively achieving our aims. Volunteers are able to provide specialist expertise, resources to enable us to carry out work beyond the remit and capacity of the staff team, detailed local knowledge and a constituency for wildlife in local communities.

Volunteers at BBOWT undertake an extremely wide range of duties and cover every aspect of the Trust's work; from the practical to the academic, from education to marketing, from leading walks to selling plants and from biological surveying to greeting visitors at a visitor centre.

Volunteers at BBOWT come from a wide variety of backgrounds, are of all ages and have a wide variety of interests. Volunteers at BBOWT have different aspirations and abilities. Some people have volunteered with the Trust for decades, for others the Trust provides a first taste of volunteering.

BBOWT remains committed to volunteering and aims to be a friendly and welcoming organisation that will continue to involve volunteers across the range of its work, wherever this is appropriate.

Volunteers will be treated with respect, will be given all due recognition and as part of its Duty of Care, the Trust recognises that each individual's safety is paramount.

Definition of a Volunteer

For the purpose of this policy, volunteers are defined as people who, unpaid, contribute their time, energy and skills to benefit the aims and objectives of the Trust. Activities are carried out without the expectation of financial reward. No enforceable obligation, contractual or otherwise, can be imposed on volunteers to attend, give or be set a minimum amount of time to carry out the tasks provided. Likewise, the Trust cannot be compelled to provide regular work, or payment or other benefit for any activity undertaken.

BBOWT has a small number of volunteer roles categorised as 'Key Volunteers'. Key Volunteers are especially important to our work and can be defined as:

- Those with responsibility for assets of the Trust (nature reserves)
- Those with responsibility for handling Trust monies
- Those with responsibility for organising other volunteers (inc. vulnerable groups)
- Those with responsibility for a significant representational or ambassadorial role on behalf of the Trust.

Examples include group chairs, treasurers, reserve wardens and work party leaders. Many are responsible for the health, safety and wellbeing of other volunteers and support the conservation management of our nature reserves. All Key Volunteers are asked to sign an agreement outlining expectations on both sides.

In addition, a number of Wildlife Traineeships covering Reserves, Community, Biodiversity and Education roles are offered each year. Generally speaking, these Trainees commit to three days/week over a period of 6 to 12 months. The Trainees operate alongside and as part of the Reserves, Community, Education, or Biodiversity teams.

Volunteering within BBOWT is therefore significant (in terms of scale and reach), complex (it serves a number of inherent Trust aims) and challenging (it requires specific support across all departments).

2. Recruitment of Volunteers

BBOWT has a wide range of opportunities for volunteering, from major commitments, for example as a Wildlife Trainee, through to occasional involvement.

Recruitment will be carried out by appropriate means to attract volunteers from as wide a spectrum of society as possible. Recruitment will be designed to be accessible, using a variety of media, and words and images that do not create barriers to access. Additional efforts may be taken to reach communities and groups which BBOWT have been less successful at reaching. Volunteer enquiries come through a range of routes (centrally to the Volunteer Coordinator, direct to work party leaders, formal recruitment routes for Wildlife Trainees etc). Whatever the route, once the volunteers has started then information is registered centrally with the Volunteer Coordinator to help ensure good communication and consistent standards across the organisation.

Key Volunteer opportunities will be supported by volunteer role descriptions, a Key Volunteer agreement and clear line management. Wildlife Traineeships are generally advertised and are subject to selection and role agreements. Where volunteers are not suitable for a particular position, BBOWT will consider other opportunities and provide constructive feedback in explaining why offers of help may be declined.

Volunteers interacting with children and other vulnerable groups will be required at all times to follow the appropriate code(s) of practice and work under the direction of appropriately trained and qualified staff.

3. Management, Support and Communications

All volunteers will be given the name of the person who will provide support to them in their volunteering. This may be another volunteer or a member of staff. Volunteers should be given the opportunity to review their volunteering and make appropriate

changes to their role in agreement with their BBOWT contact or mentor. Feedback from volunteers is encouraged and communicated within the organisation to ensure improvements in practices and policies.

BBOWT will do its utmost to communicate effectively with its volunteers:-

- Key Volunteers will have a minimum of two meetings a year with their BBOWT contact or mentor in the location of their choice. Meetings may be either in person or by telephone if mutually agreeable.
- Volunteers who provide their e-mail address and request it will receive Grapevine (newsletter) usually four times a year, to keep them abreast of developments.
- Specific pages on the BBOWT website for volunteers are regularly updated and include key policies (Health & Safety Policy etc).
- A password-protected web-page is maintained where all relevant policies, codes of practice, and other information for volunteers is stored. All Key Volunteers will be provided with the password but the password is also available and accessible to all volunteers wanting or needing access.
- Volunteers are invited to BBOWT's annual Conference.
- A member of staff will visit all practical conservation groups that are volunteer led to review how they are doing and whether further support/resources are needed (known as Best Practice Reviews) on a biannual basis..
- Regular volunteers will be invited to one of the "BBOWT On Your Doorstep" events each year.

4. Recognition

BBOWT recognises the value of its volunteers and the time, skills, work and expertise they offer. Volunteers are invited to receive Grapevine, our electronic newsletter for volunteers which is produced usually four times a year, the BBOWT Annual Review, and other publications e.g. Wildlife News.

Recognition of outstanding contributions will be through the BBOWT Volunteer Awards. These awards are proposed by staff and volunteers and are presented at the Annual General Meeting.

Volunteers who represent the Trust when leading activities may be issued with BBOWT branded clothing.

5. Induction and Training

All new volunteers will receive an appropriate welcome and induction from a member of staff or another volunteer. This will equip them to carry out their activities and understand their contribution to BBOWT's aims. While the induction has a vital role in imparting information, its most crucial function must be to welcome new volunteers to the organisation.

All Key Volunteers will be required to complete an Individual Competency Assessment (ICA) form to support them in operating safely and effectively. Other volunteers may, on occasion, be required to complete an ICA at the discretion of the BBOWT contact/mentor or Leadership Team member.

BBOWT will run a programme of training that is relevant and accessible to Volunteers through the 'Developing Your Skills' programme. These will usually be offered free of charge. A bespoke training package will also be provided for all Wildlife Trainees.

6. Problem solving procedure

Staff and Volunteers should refer to the Volunteer Problem Solving Guidelines when dealing with a difficult situation. This may be a complaint raised by a volunteer, a member of staff or a member of the public.

BBOWT sets high standards of behaviour for all staff members and volunteers and does not tolerate any inappropriate behaviour.

In the case of a serious act of misconduct (for example violence, theft, harassment, non-compliance with a Health and Safety Code of Practice or a Risk Assessment) a volunteer can be asked to leave immediately. If necessary, a member of the Board will hear any appeals against such action once the internal appeals procedure has been exhausted.

7. Commitment to diversity and equality

BBOWT is 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. All employees and volunteers are required to adhere to these general principles. Further detail is set out in BBOWT's Diversity and Equality Policy.

8. General conditions

Expenses

BBOWT recognises that the reimbursement of expenses can help make volunteering accessible to all, regardless of income. Where out-of-pocket expenses are an obstacle to volunteering, BBOWT will consider reimbursing volunteers. BBOWT can under no circumstances pay above actual, reasonable out-of-pocket expenses related to the volunteering activity.

Insurance

Whilst undertaking agreed activities on behalf of the Trust, all volunteers under the age of 80 are covered by Public Liability, Employers' Liability and Personal Accident insurances.

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.

The minimum age for volunteering allowed by our insurance cover is 11; however, children between the age of 11 and 15 must be accompanied by a parent or authorised responsible adult. Children aged 16 and 17 are required to have written permission from a legal guardian (via completion of a parental consent form from Code of Practice 6: Safeguarding the welfare of children and vulnerable groups).

Unfortunately, the personal possessions of volunteers cannot be covered by BBOWT's insurance.

Health and Safety

BBOWT has a duty of care to ensure that a safe and healthy environment is provided for all volunteers. All volunteers have a duty of care to themselves and others.

BBOWT's Health & Safety Policy is available on the volunteering pages of the Trust's website and its full Health and Safety Manual is available to download via the BBOWT volunteer password protected web-page. Volunteers will receive a health and safety induction appropriate to their role and be given access to appropriate information and guidance, and, where necessary, training.

BBOWT will take seriously any breaches of health and safety good practice.

Confidentiality

BBOWT will deal confidentially with information about volunteers wherever appropriate. In return volunteers are expected to respect the requirements for confidentiality in their activities with the Trust.

9. Further Information

BBOWT produces a Volunteer e-Handbook, which is available on the Trust's website. This handbook will be revised regularly.

Policy approved Board of Trustees
March 2018