



Somerset
Wildlife Trust

Volunteering for Somerset Wildlife Trust

Our Action Plan for 2025-2030



Introduction

Somerset Wildlife Trust are committed to achieving an inclusive culture of volunteering, embedded across the Trust and subsidiaries: Somerset Environmental Records Centre (SERC), South West Wildlife Fundraising Ltd (SWWFL) and Somerset Wildlife Trust Consultancy (SWTC).

Staff will receive appropriate training and volunteers' involvement will be utilised, funded, planned for and celebrated. Volunteering will be recognised and valued as a key mechanism to achieving nature recovery and our Wilder 2030 Strategy goals across Somerset.

Volunteers are an essential resource to Somerset Wildlife Trust, and it's important that this is recognised, planned for and valued as we work toward achieving the goals of our Wilder 2030 Strategy; which aims to create more space for nature where wildlife thrives, with more people on nature's side.

This document is a five-year plan for volunteering, which sets out how we hope volunteers will support the Trust to achieve our strategy goals, how the Trust will support volunteers to do this, and how volunteering opportunities will evolve.

Volunteering for Somerset Wildlife Trust should be a mutually beneficial experience, enabling the Trust to achieve strategic goals and benefiting volunteers depending on their own motivation (e.g. wellbeing, community and skills development).

Please note this document focusses on volunteering directly for Somerset Wildlife Trust. Our work with those that volunteer their time for nature in other ways will be covered in the Engagement Delivery Plan.

Thank you to everyone who contributed their time, opinions and expertise to developing this – your plan for volunteering at Somerset Wildlife Trust.



Why now?

Somerset Wildlife Trust has a loyal and skilled team of volunteers, many of whom have helped shape the organisation we are today. The Trust is a desirable organisation to volunteer for and volunteer satisfaction is consistently high. However, we have experienced seismic shifts in the way we operate since 2020 with the launch of a new strategy, a global pandemic and the growth and change of the organisation in the face of the ecological and climate emergency.

At both a local and national level volunteer recruitment is more challenging than it ever has been, but the need is greater than ever, so we must look to new ways of working and making the most of new opportunities such as digitisation and corporate responsibility.

What this document is not

- A reinvention of our overarching Wilder Somerset strategy
- A wider engagement strategy
- A "vision"
- Full policies and procedures
- Looking at informal, independent volunteering

How we've got here

JANUARY – MAY 2024

Consultation and assessment phase. Reviewing previous satisfaction surveys, consultations and other key pieces of work as well as national evidence. All staff and volunteers invited to contribute to open consultation.

JULY 2024

The Volunteer Report (2024) established a clear picture of the current state of volunteering at the Trust, explaining terminology we use, the procedures, principles and policies we currently have in place and summarises the evidence we have gathered from staff and volunteer surveys. The report is available from the volunteer support team on request.

AUGUST 2024

Staff, trustees and volunteers joined a working group. Produce first draft of the volunteer action plan document.

OCTOBER 2024

Document reviewed by working group before final production. Work began to embed commitments in staff teams and identify additional needs for delivery.

DECEMBER 2024

Public launch

JANUARY 2025 – JANUARY 2030

Delivery phase



How do volunteers support our goals?

At the time of writing, we are halfway through our 10-year Wilder 2030 Strategy. Below we have highlighted both how volunteers have supported our Strategy goals so far and how we hope to build on these over the next five years.

GOAL 4

Grow Somerset Wildlife Trust

Live our values and ensure our resources support delivery of our aims.

- Community fundraisers raised £36,430 in the 2023-24 financial year. This is set to grow with schemes such as Wilder Open Gardens.
- We aim to use digital technologies to bring people closer to nature through cameras, online reserves and other innovations.
- Somerset Wildlife Trust benefits hugely from a small number of volunteers who support with skilled administrative and strategic tasks. As our work evolves and diversifies it may be beneficial to explore other roles to support internal functions, and/or make more use of pro-bono support.
- We endeavour to represent the communities we serve and recognise the need to facilitate volunteering opportunities for a wider diversity of the community.

GOAL 3

Telling Somerset's story

Telling and monitoring the story of nature recovery in Somerset through the State of Nature report.

- Increase data and monitoring capacity by launching citizen science programmes, including growing the Great Somerset Wildlife Count to involve 5,000 people per annum, and with the support of volunteers embed it in communities, for example the West Somerset Wildways project.
- Specialist recording skills are needed now more than ever to both support learning in communities, and also to continue to provide specialist monitoring on reserves and contribute to the biennial Somerset State of Nature.
- Recording skills also needed to deliver specific condition reports and monitoring tasks beyond reserves such as the ancient woodland project, Private and Community Nature Reserves and Local Wildlife Sites.

GOAL 2

A movement for nature

Everyone has the opportunity to experience nature, with 1 in 4 people taking positive action.

- We aim to build a family offer, including Wildlife Watch groups across the county, that are either volunteer led or supported, engaging children aged 6-12 and their parents/guardians in a variety of wildlife focussed activities.
- We aim to recruit and train volunteers who can take the lead engaging, supporting, advocating and advising both communities and individuals across Somerset. For example, our Wildlife Garden Advisors who provide visits to individual and community gardens.
- We aim to engage with 100+ young people across the county. Some of these will be coming along to youth volunteer days as casual volunteers, and some will be Youth Forum members, who are registered volunteers.
- Our annual programme of events or activities aims to connect people with nature and encourage action. Many of these events are led by volunteers and we aim to increase our capacity through recruitment and upskilling.

GOAL 1

More space for nature

Nature is improving everywhere through Nature Recovery Networks with 30% of land and sea in positive management for nature.

- It costs over £2,000 a day to manage our nature reserves. In 2023 volunteers gave 12,533 hours to reserves, the equivalent of £144,995 of paid time.
- In 2023, volunteers contributed 3,838.5 hours undertaking skilled roles such as chain sawing, hedge laying and specialist recording.
- We aim to make strategic acquisitions of 300 hectares. This is likely to involve significant volunteer resource as it has done at Honeygar where the 18 strong team has delivered 1,163.5 hours since October 2022.
- Somerset Wildlife Trust have ambitions to support and deliver landscape-scale species recovery, including through reintroduction projects. To support with this area of work, new volunteer opportunities are being created in 2024 as part of the Beaver Management Strategy and the Two Moors: Pine Marten Bounce Back project.
- A key aim is to support nature recovery across the wider landscape by giving advice to landowners across 7,000 hectares of land. As well as commercial advice to reach the scale of advisory services needed, we will need to utilise skilled volunteers to achieve this aim.



How will Somerset Wildlife Trust deliver our plan and support our volunteers?

Delivering our Wilder 2030 strategy with the help of volunteers requires us to develop an inclusive culture of volunteering, embedded across the Trust. To do this every team will need to have specific responsibilities and commitments.

We will be working towards achieving these commitments over the next five years. The Volunteering & Community Support Officer (VCSO) will work with each team to support staff and review progress on an annual basis.

Trust-wide commitments

- All new and existing staff across Somerset Wildlife Trust and subsidiaries should be familiar with volunteering processes, opportunities and culture.
- Dedicate time to supporting volunteering embedded into each team and all volunteer manager roles.
- Develop biannual volunteer management training to upskill and support all volunteer managers.
- Explore the need for increased central volunteer management capacity.
- Staff representing all teams are encouraged to attend annual volunteer celebration events to support and celebrate our volunteers.
- We will measure the progress and impact of this plan, including exploring methods to creatively and accurately reflect the experiences of individuals and communities we work with.



Individual team commitments

PEOPLE, CULTURE & RESOURCES

- Facilitate basic induction meetings with the VCSO for every member of staff upon starting at Somerset Wildlife Trust, SWTC and SERC. More in-depth inductions and training required for those managing volunteers as identified within their job descriptions, or by their line managers.
- Working with the volunteer support team to recognise the unique position of volunteering, and our organisational duty of care, in our processes (including insurance, policy's, safeguarding, health and safety), recognising volunteering as core part of our strategy and operations.
- Support teams across Somerset Wildlife Trust to identify options for inclusive paid early career opportunities (such as apprenticeships, traineeships and entry level jobs), which will sit alongside and compliment fair and appropriate early career volunteering opportunities (such as student placements and work experience).
- To ensure volunteering is appropriately presented at the People and Culture Committee with relevant input from specialist staff and volunteers.

COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING

- Dedicate regular and timely social media channel space for both advertising volunteer opportunities and celebrating the diverse work of our volunteers.
- Work with the VCSO and volunteer managers to develop content that is reflective of the breadth of our work and celebrates personal stories.
- Work with the VCSO to reformat the volunteer pages of the website including new and engaging recruitment pages, video content and role profiles.
- Reflect the role of volunteers across all teams throughout our media.

FUNDRAISING

- Include expenses reflecting the full cost of involving volunteers in all appropriate grant applications so that volunteers are fully supported.
- Consider recognised barriers to volunteer involvement (the costs to overcome these) at application and when working with funders.
- Work closely with the VCSO and volunteer managers to understand volunteer needs and realistic projections for recruitment when developing projects.
- Work with the volunteer support team to develop a corporate volunteering offer as part of corporate packages.

DATA AND EVIDENCE (INCLUDING SERC)

- Record and report on volunteer input to recording and monitoring efforts on an annual basis as part of the Somerset State of Nature, to allow us to celebrate volunteer contribution.
- Act as the main point of contact for independent specialist recording groups, nurturing a relationship with them, developing the countywide network of recorders and actively listening to volunteers to plan for future and ongoing support and collaboration.
- Explore options for backfilling dedicated staff resource to support and grow volunteer surveying, monitoring and recording including citizen science.
- Lead on the development and delivery of surveying, monitoring and recording including citizen science.

NATURE RECOVERY

- Recognise, record and report volunteer input as part of developing impact measures for the Nature Recovery Network.
- Identify new opportunities for formal volunteering, including opportunities for highly skilled nature recovery roles.
- Provide high quality training to support specialist volunteers e.g. support answering planning applications.

RESERVES

- Explore options for recruiting and training more lead volunteer roles who can help widen the dates, times and locations that volunteer days are available.
- Work with the VSCO to develop a series of alternative volunteer days every year, that aim to widen the number of people who can participate in volunteering.
- Work with the VCSO to reformat task programmes with clear descriptions and details of ability required to participate.
- Work closely with other teams (particularly engagement, nature recovery and SERC) to benefit from and enable different kinds of volunteering on reserves, including independent groups, specialist groups, youth volunteering and corporate groups.

ENGAGEMENT

- Support colleagues across Somerset Wildlife Trust to consider and implement new ways of working that enable a more diverse range of people to engage with volunteering.



- Take a holistic approach to developing wider engagement plans and activities to both recognise the role of events and outreach as a potential first step towards volunteering, and to support the involvement of individuals when volunteering isn't an option.
- Lead on development and delivery of Youth volunteering opportunities – including the youth forum and work experience week – planning a holistic youth-led offer as part of the Youth Strategy.
- Plan for sustainable recruitment and support for our family offer across Somerset, including support and succession for Wildlife Watch clubs.

FINANCE

- Process expenses efficiently so volunteers are never out of pocket, and actively encouraging a culture of expenses claims.
- Work with colleagues across the trust to implement innovative ways to support volunteering and tackle financial barriers.

Commitments from Volunteer Support Team

The Volunteer Support Team currently encompasses the Administration Support Assistant, VCSO and Wilder Communities Manager, who sit within the Engagement Team.

- Oversee volunteer experience and implementation of this plan, including our central recruitment, celebration and thank you opportunities (see next section).
- Support consistent best practice in volunteer management through appropriate inductions, training and ongoing support for all managers.
- Proactively stay abreast of national and local volunteering developments. Provide specialist advice internally, as volunteer leads, including on matters of volunteer safeguarding, insurance and health and safety.
- Revise volunteer recruitment, role profiles, tasks, website and social plans to reflect feedback received during the development of this plan and increase our reach.
- Commit to reporting and sharing both successes and failures on an annual basis.
- Review progress with each team annually to ensure the implementation of this plan.



Developing our volunteer experience

Challenges, barriers and opportunities

Our research of both volunteering at Somerset Wildlife Trust and the national picture has identified several challenges to volunteering, including the time and physicality of volunteering tasks, commitment required and reliance on having a car. These challenges have built the context for conversations on how to improve our volunteering opportunities.

Over the next five years we are committed to making sure that collectively, our volunteering offer is accessible to as wide a range of people as possible, who are supported appropriately to fulfil their role. We will continue to review these challenges through annual satisfaction surveys and national data and ensure that through the commitments listed above, we are developing an inclusive culture of volunteering, embedded across the Trust.

Advertising volunteer roles

At present, we list all roles we are actively recruiting for on our website. Although effective for recruiting, this doesn't showcase the extensive range of volunteering that happens across the Trust. We will re-evaluate how we are advertising volunteer roles, both those that we are actively recruiting for and those we have filled, to demonstrate the work volunteers are doing across teams. This will tackle the assumption that the majority of our volunteering takes place on reserves and celebrate the variety of tasks our volunteers do.

We will update our volunteer web pages, focussing on making it easier to search through opportunities depending on interests, requirements and availability. We will also explore advertisement through a more diverse range of avenues e.g. through other partners, to extend our reach.

Role profiles

At present, our volunteer role profiles highlight the essential information needed by the volunteer about what the role entails. Our working group identified that the current template isn't very engaging and aren't usable as a 'living document', to edit specifically to the volunteer and their needs. There is a lack of consistency in use of volunteer role profiles across Somerset Wildlife Trust.

We will review role profiles to make them easier to read, and simpler to use throughout a volunteer's time with us, and accessible from first point of contact. We will make sure that as well as essential information about the role, they demonstrate who would be well suited to the role and adjustments that can be made for volunteers. We will explore the use of other media to explain our roles, such as video content explaining the day-to-day responsibilities of a volunteer in that role.

We will explore options for digital, remote and micro roles to make use of changing volunteer resource and support access to opportunities.

Staff inductions and training

All staff will receive an induction about volunteering at the Trust upon starting, regardless of whether they will be managing volunteers, to ensure everyone has a basic understanding of volunteers and their importance within the Trust's work. Those who will be managing volunteers will have specific training to make sure they understand policies and procedures, how to manage volunteers and the support available from the Volunteer Support Team. Refresher training will be available every two years, to make sure staff are up to date with any changes.

Rewards and recognition

We will continue to celebrate the wonderful work of our volunteers, including our pin badge scheme recognising long-term commitment (5, 10, 15 and 20 years), annual celebration events and Volunteer Awards, which are presented at the AGM.

We are committed to celebrating the work of volunteers, sharing what they've been up to through staff newsletters, social media and volunteer newsletters. We will ensure that adequate space and time is given to do this to highlight the importance of volunteers and the diversity of tasks they do across the Trust.

Volunteering community

We will focus on building our volunteer community, by providing opportunities for volunteers from across teams to meet each other and share what they've been up to outside of the annual celebration event. For example, other Trust's host regular volunteer walks, picnics etc, as well as a calendar of training events. We will assess which options would be of most interest and benefit to our volunteers, and work to build a programme of opportunities for volunteers to get together throughout the year.

These events can also be used to update volunteers on Trust work, as the consultation highlighted that volunteers are eager to learn more about Somerset Wildlife Trust and what we are working towards outside of their work area, as well as the impact their volunteering is having.



Action for nature and other people we work with

In order to deliver our Wilder 2030 strategy, we need many more people, from all sectors of society, taking action and speaking up for nature to help us restore a Nature Recovery Network.

Formal volunteering opportunities are just one way in which someone can take action for nature. Our formal (registered) volunteers are a significant part of Somerset Wildlife Trusts operations who work with direct support and instruction from staff to deliver work of behalf of Somerset Wildlife Trust.

Somerset Wildlife Trust are committed to supporting informal volunteering opportunities and “action for nature” in the broadest context, working with individual, communities and business to support nature’s recovery. This aim is encompassed in the commitments written in this document and within the Engagement Delivery Framework.

CORPORATE, CASUAL AND PRO-BONO VOLUNTEERS:

These are volunteers who turn up as part of an external group for an organised day led by Somerset Wildlife Trust, they are managed as “event participants”. This form of volunteering offers a key entry route into more formal opportunities or sustained action for nature, as well being accessible to more people. At the moment, we offer a low number of these kinds of volunteer roles largely due to the increased staff capacity needed to deliver them, but we are committed to implementing a regular, meaningful and realistic program of open opportunities which compliments our formal volunteer opportunities.

Corporate and pro-bono roles/days also offer the opportunity to tap into corporate funding and skill sets but pose a number of challenges and are resource intensive. This offer needs to be considered as part of a wider review of our corporate relationships.

SPECIALIST GROUPS AND RECORDING TEAMS:

The specialist groups are independent volunteer groups who have focused on specific biological or geological activities including species recording, most work county-wide. These groups are responsible for the vast majority of species and habitat data collection on reserves and across the county.

SERC will lead on fostering mutually beneficial relationships with the specialist groups to identify support needs, including staffing, funding, digitisation, administration and training. We will promote and celebrate the work of the specialist groups including reviewing our media to accurately reflect the voice and independence of the groups. We will recognise the expertise of the specialist groups and plan for their involvement fairly. We will work with the groups to plan realistically for succession and tackling taxonomic impediment, utilising community citizen science as a route in.



COMMUNITY GROUPS (WILDER COMMUNITIES):

Supporting independent community groups to deliver self-led action for nature, on their own terms, within their own community, is at the heart of our Wilder 2030 strategy (the “Team Wilder” way of working). We’ve made progress actively listening to communities, developing locally relevant resources, training and advice, and integrating into local and countywide networks.

We recognise there is still work to do embedding this way of working across all teams at Somerset Wildlife Trust, as well as influencing our partners, peers and funders. We will need to build upon what we have learnt, and tackle resourcing challenges to deliver nature recovery at scale from the ground up.

CITIZEN SCIENTISTS: Citizen Science is the voluntary participation of members of the public in scientific recording (at their own risk and not as part of a formal program of volunteering). Somerset Wildlife Trust and SERC have a growing programme of citizen science opportunities to encourage data collection for the Somerset State of Nature, including the Great Somerset Wildlife Count, which sits alongside popular national programs like the RSPB Big Bird Count.

We recognise the need to review engagement with our existing citizen science programs, and make changes to improve accessibility, engagement and value of evidence. It’s important to recognise when a program’s primary aim is to engage, or to collect data, and tailor content accordingly. We also recognise the importance of working closer with peers and partners to access data and build complementary offers, and offer citizen science programs as part of an ecosystem of volunteering and action-based engagement opportunities.

INDIVIDUAL ACTION FOR NATURE: Whether at home, in a garden or from behind a screen, everyone has the power to take action for nature in some way. We will continue to support, advise, encourage and cheerlead advocacy and action for nature, providing clear pathways and supporter journeys to more formal volunteering opportunities and sustained actions wherever appropriate.



Get involved

- See all current volunteer opportunities on our website:
somersetwildlife.org/get-involved/volunteering
- Get in touch with our Volunteering Team:
volunteering@somersetwildlife.org
- Find our current volunteering opportunities:
somersetwildlife.org/volunteering-opportunities
- Join our Team Wilder Facebook group to find other opportunities to take action for nature across the county:
www.facebook.com/groups/teamwildersomerset

