



Surrey
Wildlife Trust

Volunteer Strategy

2026-2031



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1. Introduction

For nearly 70 years, volunteers have been at the heart of Surrey Wildlife Trust, dedicating time, energy and expertise to protect and restore Surrey's wildlife. Last year alone, volunteers contributed 27,000 hours across a variety of roles. We are deeply grateful for this commitment and we strive to offer an outstanding, rewarding experience in return.

This dedication has made a real difference in the county; however, nature is still in crisis. To secure a wilder future for Surrey, we must try new approaches and involve far more people, reflecting the diversity of our communities, advocating for change and restoring habitats at scale.

Nationally, volunteering is evolving, from who volunteers, to how they engage, and what support they require. People are seeking flexible roles that fit their busy lives. Growing disconnection from nature makes it more important than ever to create opportunities that reconnect people, and keep volunteering relevant for years to come.

Our 2026–2031 Volunteer Strategy responds to these realities. Building on a strong foundation, it sets out an ambitious vision for change. We aim to grow an engaged and skilled volunteer community, expand ways people can get involved, and empower individuals of all ages to care for Surrey's natural environment.

This document sets out four priorities that will guide our activities and a framework for best practice in volunteer management. It sits alongside the Volunteer Strategy Action Plan, along with other organisational plans including the Trust's overarching strategy, Citizen Science Strategy, and Communities Strategy, ensuring a joined-up approach to nature recovery.

We offer our heartfelt thanks to everyone who has contributed to local conservation, whether through a one-off activity, years of regular commitment, or through partnerships with other organisations. This strategy is an invitation to join us in shaping a wilder Surrey for generations to come.



2. Our strategy in one page

Goal: Increase the total area of connected land supporting nature in Surrey

Trust-wide strategic focus		
Empowering People	Indirect Land Management	Direct Land Management
Encourage adults and children to connect with, value and take action for nature	Deliver nature's recovery and nature-based solutions through collaboration, advice and support	Our land is biodiverse, bio-abundant and a strong foundation for a Nature Recovery Network
KPI: Number of people taking positive action for nature	KPI: Area of land connected & managed for nature	KPI: Condition of SWT reserves

Volunteer Strategy 2026-31			
Enhance Volunteer Experience	Connected Community	Tomorrow's Volunteers	Volunteer-led Recovery
Goal: Deliver an outstanding volunteer journey, which celebrates impact, nurtures skills and inspires long-term engagement	Goal: Build a volunteer culture that reflects Surrey's communities and brings people together for nature's recovery	Goal: Inspire and equip people aged 11-30 to take meaningful action for nature, ensuring nature has a strong voice for the future	Goal: Enable volunteers to play a leading role in nature recovery and strengthen Surrey Wildlife Trust's impact

Our values				
Respect & Appreciation	Teamwork	Learning	Strength in Diversity	Impact
Respect for the natural world and for everyone who contributes to nature recovery	Working together for nature and towards common goals	Share and learn, embrace new ideas and grow together	Welcoming people from all backgrounds and creating opportunities that respond to their needs and aspirations	Creating meaningful change for nature by delivering results that make a lasting difference

3. Our vision for volunteering

We'll build a thriving, inclusive volunteer community which restores wildlife, connects people with nature and creates a resilient environment for future generations.

4. Our shared values

Our approach is underpinned by our values:

RESPECT & APPRECIATION

We respect the natural world and value everyone who contributes to nature recovery.

LEARNING

We share and learn, embrace new ideas and grow together.

IMPACT

We aim to create meaningful change for nature by delivering results that make a lasting difference. We aim to create meaningful change for nature by delivering results that make a lasting difference.

STRENGTH IN DIVERSITY

We welcome people from all backgrounds and create opportunities that respond to their needs and aspirations.

TEAMWORK

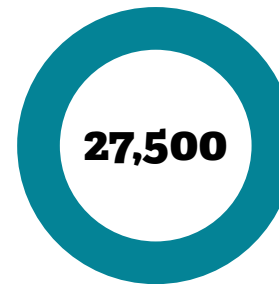
We work together towards a common goal.

5. Volunteer impact

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

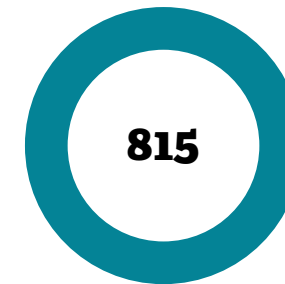
In 2024–2025, volunteers dedicated thousands of hours to restoring habitats, monitoring wildlife, engaging schoolchildren, checking livestock, and supporting other essential roles, helping us deliver our strategy and accelerate nature recovery.

BELOW IS A SNAPSHOT OF THEIR EFFORTS



HOURS

of volunteer effort contributed



ACTIVE VOLUNTEERS

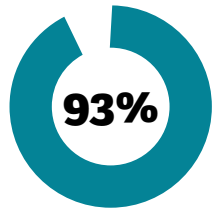
with time logged over the year



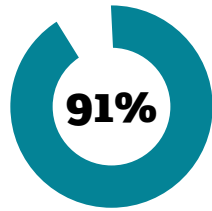
PEOPLE

registered as volunteers

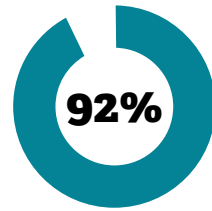
6. What do our volunteers value and want?



of our volunteers feel our volunteer days have a friendly atmosphere



of our volunteers would recommend volunteering with SWT



of our volunteers feel they receive regular communication and know what is going on

WHAT DOES BEING VALUED BY SURREY WILDLIFE TRUST LOOK LIKE TO YOU?



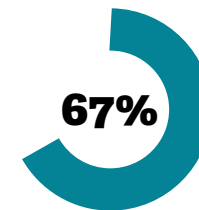
LAST YEAR IN NUMBERS

27,400+
volunteer hours

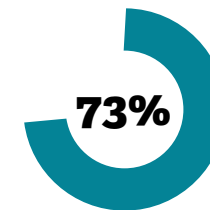
488+
volunteers gave their time

6,100+
volunteer task days

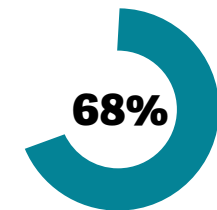
AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT



of our volunteers feel their skills and knowledge are utilised



of our volunteers feel there are regular opportunities for them to express opinions

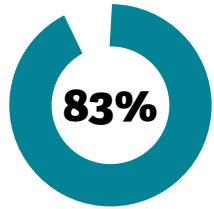


of our volunteers feel celebrated by the Trust

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- More impact sharing
- More context sharing to highlight the purpose and bigger picture of tasks
- More, better maintained tools
- More surveying and other skills-based volunteering opportunities
- Clearer communication
- More guided walks
- Review the functionality of Eventbrite
- Continuation of the approach to having small, local celebration events
- More opportunities for volunteers to provide feedback
- More weekend and evening volunteering opportunities

7. Focus group & online survey summary 2025



of our volunteers expressed an interest in taking on more responsibilities

KEY ROLES OF INTEREST

47% Support staff or volunteers to lead practical volunteer days

44% Act as buddy or mentor for new volunteers

41% Become an Assistant Voluntary Warden

32% pass on skills or knowledge to other volunteers

WHAT IS WORKING WELL

- ✓ Good variety of opportunities
- ✓ Supportive & knowledgeable staff
- ✓ Flexible volunteering
- ✓ Well organised
- ✓ Supportive & knowledgeable staff

KEY BARRIERS

- Transport and reaching sites
- Insufficient weekend and evening opportunities
- Unclear information about volunteer roles and what is involved
- More structured support and communication needed
- Insufficient and poor quality tools
- Lack of on-site facilities e.g toilets
- Not enough local opportunities throughout whole county
- Perception that most roles are manual or physically demanding
- Difficulty Booking practical conservation sessions in the West

TRAINING VOLUNTEERS WOULD LIKE

Skills-based sessions led by staff

Learning from other volunteers

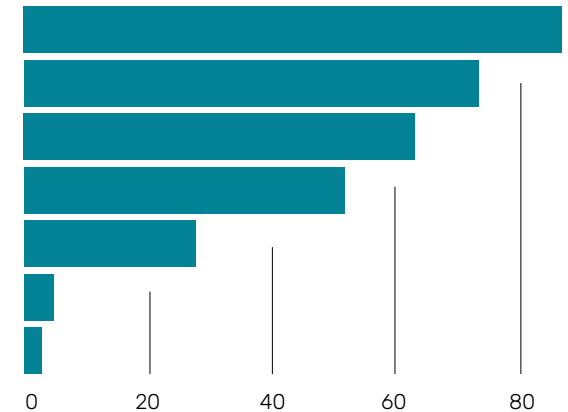
Leadership training

Adult learning courses

Sharing own knowledge with others

Environmental careers support

Training from external specialists



FUTURE VISIONING

- Increase flexibility: more weekend, evening and at-home and in-your-own time opportunities
- Taster sessions before registering as a volunteer
- Wider variety of volunteer roles and opportunities to take on greater responsibilities, tapping into volunteers' skill-sets. Key areas of interest are more surveying, monitoring, leadership and ambassador opportunities
- More engagement with

young people: more targeted opportunities provided directly by the Trust and support provided for volunteer groups to involve more young people themselves

- Greater partnership working: stronger links with communities, schools, universities, youth groups, businesses and other ENGOs
- Better promotion of volunteering opportunities and their impact

8. How we shaped this strategy

This document reflects the voices of SWT volunteers and staff, alongside the needs of the Trust. It draws on feedback from discussions, workshops, surveys, and best practice across the sector, including insights from other Wildlife Trusts.

FEBRUARY - APRIL 2025

- Annual volunteer satisfaction survey (185 responses)
- In-person feedback sessions (seven sessions, 63 attendees)
- Review of previous surveys and feedback
- Review of the volunteer scene in other UK environmental organisations

JUNE 2025

- Volunteer strategy staff workshop (25 staff representing all teams)

OCTOBER 2025

- Volunteer focus groups (two sessions, 28 attendees)
- Youth Action Committee focus group (10 attendees)
- Online volunteer strategy survey (123 responses)
- Online volunteer strategy survey: New volunteers (19 responses)
- Review of the current state of volunteering at SWT

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2025

- Discussions with SWT teams leading volunteers to identify priorities
- Drafting the strategy
- A summary of the consultation is provided in the Appendices



9. Our strategy for change 2026-2031

Over the next five years, we will focus on four strategic priorities. These are set out below.

PRIORITY 1: ENHANCED VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Why it's important:

Our volunteers have helped shape who we are as an organisation and what we have achieved, contributing to our mission from the very beginning. In return, we aim to provide an experience that benefits both the Trust and the incredible people who give their time and energy to our cause.

Each year, hundreds of new volunteers join the Trust alongside our long-standing supporters. While many contribute regularly, others may only be able to join occasionally. Our focus is therefore on creating a positive experience for all volunteers while offering additional opportunities and guidance for those who wish to become more active, recognising that involvement will vary and every contribution matters.

We understand that motivation is key to lasting involvement. Existing volunteers have highlighted the main factors that matter to them are, clear communication and understanding of impact, opportunities to learn and use skills, and making a meaningful difference. We also recognise that motivations vary, whether giving back to nature, seeking camaraderie, or developing a career, and that younger generations often value learning opportunities and career benefits.

To keep people engaged, we will recognise and value their contributions, plan effectively, foster a culture of respect, trust and inclusion, while creating opportunities that inspire lasting involvement.

Our goal:

Deliver an outstanding volunteer journey, which celebrates impact, nurtures skills, and inspires long-term engagement.

How we'll deliver this:

To implement our Volunteer Strategy (2026-2031) each team has set their own priorities.

The Communities team will:

- Work with wider SWT teams to support staff and volunteers to deliver this strategy, and review progress annually.
- Establish a clear volunteer lifecycle – recruitment, onboarding, participation, onward journey, ensuring each stage is engaging, purposeful, and celebrates achievements.
- Partner with community groups to enable SWT volunteers to contribute to wildlife projects in their local areas.
- Strengthen the Ambassador programme, enabling volunteers to confidently represent the Trust, share their passion for nature, and contribute meaningfully to outreach and engagement work.

- Develop opportunities for Ambassadors to support SWT's fundraising efforts, including suggested donations at talks, promoting appeals, clear calls to action, and optional volunteer fundraising training, while recognising that not all Ambassadors will choose to fundraise.

The Reserves Management team will:

- Enhance the volunteer experience and engagement by proactively communicating advance information on tasks, seasonal plans, and site management plan priorities, demonstrating progress and impact using ArcGIS mapping and imagery.
- Improve task accessibility, foster an inclusive community, and provide learning opportunities through wildlife surveying and monitoring.
- Optimise volunteer support to meet project priorities and enable volunteers to make the greatest impact for nature, while also utilising specialist skills and maintaining tools effectively.

The Education team will:

- Continue collaboration with existing volunteers and expanding involvement into Wilder Schools, especially through local volunteers, to sustain engagement and legacy.
- Re-establish and grow the Youth Action Committee (YAC) as a vibrant, inclusive community offering regular opportunities to connect, learn, and take action for nature.

The Membership team will:

- Sustain and recognise a dedicated group of administrative volunteers, whose contributions strengthen the team's effectiveness and deepen its connection with supporters.

The Nature-based Solutions (NbS) team will:

- Empower volunteers to actively contribute to supporting nature's recovery on third-party land, and co-deliver volunteer sessions with partner organisations to amplify the reach and effectiveness of nature recovery efforts.
- Create meaningful opportunities for volunteers to gain and share ecological knowledge and practical skills, and exploring new concepts and opportunities in nature-based solutions.

The Corporate Fundraising team will:

- Increase the number of Wild Work Days taking place on NbS landowner sites, to drive landscape-scale restoration beyond SWT-managed nature reserves, and engage more working-age volunteers.
- Encourage more corporate volunteers to fundraise individually for SWT, by providing more information about how to do this and by supporting yearly fundraising challenge events.

The Conservation Grazing team will:

- Expand the team through recruitment of weekend and emergency SOS checkers and explore introducing citizen science roles to monitor grazing impacts on wildlife.
- Strengthen partnerships with Merrist Wood College and Surrey of University to offer hands-on

experience for students (vet nurses, animal science) in farming within a conservation and nature-focused setting.

The Research & Monitoring, SBIC and teams across the Trust will:

- Increase and diversify participation in citizen science volunteering and biological recording.
- Boost, promote and support the community of biological recording groups in Surrey.
- Follow guidance as set out in the Citizen Science Strategy.

PRIORITY 2: CONNECTED COMMUNITIES**Why it's important:**

The conservation sector is among the least diverse in the UK, and our current volunteer base reflects this reality. Over the next five years, we aim to remove barriers, enabling more people to connect with nature, appreciate its value, and take meaningful action to protect it. We believe diversity strengthens our impact, and that volunteering should represent the richness of Surrey's communities. We are therefore committed to building an inclusive and resilient volunteer network. One that empowers individual action, strengthens local communities, and drives nature recovery.

Our goal:

Build a volunteer culture that reflects Surrey's communities and brings people together for nature's recovery.

How we'll deliver this:

- Research community needs and demographics within our Landscape Recovery Areas.
- Listen to under-represented voices and build meaningful connections across Surrey's communities.
- Embed equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in our culture, communication, and practices, supported by training for staff and volunteers.
- Expand our volunteering offer to reflect changing trends, introducing more flexible options such as citizen science, home-based roles, taster days, weekend or half-day sessions, and project-based short-term volunteering.
- Develop urban and community-based volunteering opportunities on and beyond our nature reserves.
- Promote volunteering opportunities through diverse local networks (parish councils, religious organisations, youth groups).
- Strengthen partnerships with other organisations to share resources and knowledge, expand reach, and deliver sessions in under-represented areas (particularly east and north-east Surrey).
- Increase engagement with working-age volunteers through corporate Wild Work Days and weekend conservation volunteer days to increase impact.
- Celebrate volunteers through nominations for external awards, storytelling and events.

PRIORITY 3: TOMORROW'S VOLUNTEERS

Why it's important:

Volunteering at Surrey Wildlife Trust has traditionally focused on practical, site-based roles and education volunteering, mostly during weekdays. While this suits those with flexible schedules, typically aged 45–79, it doesn't always fit the lives of younger people or those in work or education. Short-term funded projects such as Hedgerow Heritage and Space4Nature, along with the Youth Action Committee have helped bridge this gap, but a longer-term plan is needed.

To ensure volunteering remains relevant to a younger audience, we will expand and diversify opportunities so that more young people and early-career adults can connect with nature and play an active role in its recovery.

Citizen science offers one way to achieve this, providing field-based learning, boosting nature connectedness, and fostering pro-conservation behaviours. Participation in these projects can also support mental health and deepen awareness of environmental issues as highlighted in the SWT Citizen Science Literature Review.

By investing in skills development and creating safe, inclusive opportunities, we will inspire tomorrow's volunteers and build a diverse, resilient community committed to nature recovery.

Our goal:

Inspire and equip people aged 11–30 to take meaningful action for nature, ensuring nature has a strong voice for the future.

How we'll deliver this:

- Engage and connect with individuals where they are, through their interests, communities, and faith groups, while recognising that motivations for connecting with nature vary.
- Diversify volunteering opportunities to include flexible, weekend, tech-based roles, citizen science and short-term roles that fit modern lifestyles.
- Develop a tailored young people volunteering programme focused on learning, skill-building, social connection, and wellbeing, broken down into different age categories.
- Re-establish and grow the Youth Action Committee (YAC) as a vibrant, inclusive community offering regular opportunities to connect, learn, and take action for nature.
- Explore an 18–30 Ambassador pathway, offering leadership, advocacy, and progression opportunities.
- Strengthen links with schools, colleges, and universities through events such as career fairs.
- Empower young adults (18–30) to lead initiatives, including exploring the possibility of a nature reserve managed by this age group.
- Partner with local recording groups to nurture the next generation of species recorders.
- Factor volunteer-related costs into budget planning (e.g., staff resources, travel, refreshments, minibs pick-ups).
- Embed safeguarding and inclusion through clear policies, induction training, and use of the Wildlife Trust Wild Action Inclusion Framework and SWT EDI Framework & Policy.

PRIORITY 4: VOLUNTEER-LED NATURE RECOVERY

Why it's important:

Our supporters bring a wealth of skills, knowledge, and experience that are essential for restoring the natural environment. By creating opportunities for volunteers to lead, share expertise, and contribute ideas, we strengthen our collective efforts.

By gaining a clearer understanding of the support our volunteers are willing and able to provide, we will increase capacity at practical sessions, enable volunteer-led sessions and expand habitat and species monitoring. Volunteer feedback is clear: many people want to contribute more, learn more, and take on greater responsibility, but they need the right tools, improved communication, and structured support to succeed.

We recognise that every volunteer's journey is unique. This pathway is not a fixed route; volunteers can start at any stage and move between steps based on their experience and aspirations. It is a guide for development, not a requirement.

Volunteer progression pathway

- 1 JOIN**
Take on introductory roles
- 2 LEARN**
Receive training & develop skills
- 3 LEAD**
Lead sessions & take on specialist roles
- 4 MENTOR**
Support other new or existing volunteers

This flexible approach ensures volunteering remains rewarding and will build a resilient network of skilled individuals driving nature recovery.

Our goal:

Enable volunteers to play a leading role in nature recovery and strengthen Surrey Wildlife Trust's impact.

How we'll deliver this:

- Identify SWT sites where volunteer involvement can deliver the greatest benefits for nature recovery.
- Integrate community and volunteer engagement early in the process of acquiring new sites, ensuring local people can contribute to nature restoration wherever possible.
- Conduct a comprehensive skills audit to understand volunteer backgrounds, skills, and interests, informing future engagement, training plans, and development opportunities.
- Learn from our experiences with current volunteer-led groups to inform how further volunteer-led groups could best be established and run.
- Recruit, train, and equip leadership roles including Voluntary Group Assistants, Assistant Voluntary Wardens, Voluntary Wardens, Volunteer-Led Group Leaders, and Ambassadors.
- Provide flexible development pathways for volunteers and create a training programme to build ecological and practical knowledge, while recognising that not all volunteers want additional responsibility.

- Facilitate peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange, enabling volunteers to develop skills, share expertise, and pass on knowledge to others.
- Enable volunteers to make a bigger contribution to site management, habitat restoration, wildlife monitoring, and site condition monitoring.
- Utilise volunteer expertise effectively to support the smooth running of volunteering sessions and expand wildlife monitoring across our sites.
- Develop volunteer fundraising opportunities to help sustain the Trust's work.
- Encourage volunteers to act as ambassadors, sharing positive stories, highlighting local impact, and inspiring others to get involved.



10. Appendices

CONSULTATION OUTPUTS

- SWT Annual Volunteers Survey Report: [Volunteer Survey 2025 Results - Volunteer Version](#)
- SWT Shaping the Future of Volunteering - Volunteer Consultation Report 2025: *[Volunteering Strategy - Volunteer Consultation Report.pdf](#)



Surrey
Wildlife Trust

About us

**Surrey Wildlife Trust is a wildlife charity
and is one of 46 Wildlife Trusts working
across the UK**

With the invaluable support of volunteers and members, we care for over 60 nature reserves in Surrey. We also work with other organisations and landowners to protect and connect wildlife sites across the county and inspire local communities and young people to care for wildlife where they live.

surreywildlifetrust.org

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