



Wild East Devon Volunteer handbook



CONTACT THE COUNTRYSIDE TEAM

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The satisfaction of contributing to the active management of a nature reserve is hugely rewarding

—Clive, Tuesday Taskforce volunteer

Foreword

The Countryside team value and appreciate the commitment, dedication and hours that are put in by our volunteers to help us manage the outstanding East Devon countryside. Volunteers ensure that important conservation work is carried out, that enables us to enhance, conserve and protect the wildlife on our network of Local Nature Reserves. Volunteers bring a wealth of experience and skills which are essential in keeping our sites open all year round for the public to enjoy.

This Handbook is part of East Devon District Council's overall commitment to providing a diverse range of opportunities and training for all our volunteers in a safe working environment. I am therefore delighted to take this opportunity to thank all our volunteers for the fantastic work and good humour that you bring to the work we do and to thank you for your interest in getting involved.

—Charlie Plowden
Countryside and Leisure Service Lead



Section 1

Types of volunteering

There are a number of different voluntary opportunities within the Countryside team. If you would like to talk about any of them, please feel free to contact the team to find out more or to express your interest email countryside@eastdevon.gov.uk or call 01395 517557.



Events

Throughout the year the Countryside team run a variety of events on Local Nature Reserves throughout East Devon. Events range from wildlife themed mornings such as moth breakfasts, dawn chorus guided walks and wildlife safaris, to public fairs and festivals such as Natural Seaton and the annual Bluebell Day in Holyford Woods.

Each year we rely on volunteers to help make these events a huge success. Types of work volunteers may be involved with include:

- Running activities with families (craft, pond dipping etc)
- Serving refreshments
- Welcoming visitors
- Taking photos
- Handing out literature

On the day of an event we will run through what is involved and delegate specific jobs to volunteers, making sure you are happy with what your role entails. You will always have a member of the Countryside team to work with and answer any questions you may have.

We do not ask for any set time commitment for volunteers helping with events, you are welcome to help at every event, once a year or once in your lifetime – we always appreciate the help!

£3,000+

raised by Countryside
volunteers raise each year
to help maintain sites





What's that bird? Guide

Seaton Wetlands is an important site for many bird species. Boasting a selection of five bird hides, the reserves are a popular destination for birders across the UK. More information on Seaton Wetlands can be found on page 14.

What's that bird? sessions provide the chance for budding bird watchers to spend time in the company of experienced bird watchers, with binoculars which are available to borrow. Sessions run twice a month, throughout the year. Details of upcoming dates can be viewed in the latest events guide or online at wildeastdevon.co.uk.

If you are enthusiastic about birds, this is an ideal opportunity to share your knowledge with others and spend time in the bird hides at Seaton Wetlands. Volunteers who lead What's that bird? sessions are a friendly welcoming face, who can offer some local knowledge and guidance about birds on the reserve.

You can take part on a monthly basis, or choose to lead occasional sessions throughout the year to suit your availability.

Discovery Hut volunteers

With an increasing number of visitors to Seaton Wetlands, the role of volunteers becomes ever more important. The key objective of all wardens, whether staff or voluntary, is to help visitors to get the most out of their visit. The main elements of this work are:

- Welcome visitors to the Discovery Hut, which is opened Saturday to Monday, 10am to 4pm
- Meet and greet visitors, helping them to orientate themselves around the wetlands
- Give out leaflets, events guides and other information
- Serve basic refreshments
- Tell visitors about the birds and wildlife found at Seaton Wetlands
- Answer visitors questions about the wetlands, the local area and upcoming events
- Hire out the off-road mobility scooter (Tramper)
- Maintain the nature table and look after any animals in the Discovery Hut

Discovery Hut volunteers are encouraged to undertake training in First Aid and hiring out the Tramper. They are also provided with a name badge and polo shirt which they wear when on duty and when patrolling the Wetlands



so that visitors can ask questions. Discovery Hut volunteers are a welcoming and friendly face to visitors and help to pass on comments received (good or bad!) so that the visitors experience is always improved.

Discovery Hut volunteers commit to a three hour slot on the rota to suit their commitments/availability. The rota is regularly circulated via email and slots are filled on a first come first served basis, with lots of flexibility.

6,300

drinks served by
volunteers each year

Hide caretakers

There are five public bird hides at Seaton Wetlands. The role of Hide caretaker can make a huge difference to the quality of Seaton Wetlands for visitors. Tasks include:

- Sweeping up and removing any dirt or rubbish
- Cleaning the windows
- Filling up bird feeders
- Keeping information in the hides up to date
- Reporting any damage or maintenance needs as well as ideas for improvements

Hide caretakers 'adopt' a hide (or two!) to take care of. The role can be shared between different volunteers, during different weeks or months of the year so that your involvement suits you. If you would like to help, please contact the Countryside team with your preferred hide and how often you would like to check it.





Tuesday Task Force

The Tuesday Task Force meet most weeks to carry out a range of practical tasks at Seaton Wetlands.

Volunteers receive an email in advance of sessions confirming the arrangement for each week. Most sessions start at 9.30am with an 11am and 1pm break. Please bring along your own snacks, drinks and packed lunch.

At the start of a session the staff leading will give a brief talk about potential site risks and safe tool use. It is recommended that volunteers wear old clothing and bring waterproofs and stout boots/wellies.

The work carried out can be quite varied and at times challenging, so volunteers are reminded to work within their

“I enjoy all the tasks that we are set, come rain or shine. Strangely it is more often sunny than rainy on a Tuesday morning! The tasks are incredibly varied; using the different skills we have each acquired through our lives and usually teaching us new ones.”
—Angela Willes, Tuesday Task Force volunteer

own limits. There are on-going tasks such as coppicing and vegetation clearance, as well as building boardwalks and fencing projects. An annual highlight is getting the boat out to row to the Black Hole Marsh islands to manage the vegetation – which often results in getting wet, but is always fun!



East Devon Conservation Volunteers

The East Devon Conservation Volunteers meet most Thursdays to carry out a range of practical tasks at sites across East Devon including Trinity Hill, Knapp Copse and Holyford Woods. Volunteers receive an email in advance of sessions confirming the arrangement for each week. Most sessions start at 10am with an 11am and 1pm break. Please bring along your own snacks, drinks and packed lunch. Drinks are provided at 11am.

At the start of a session the staff leading will give a brief talk about potential site risks and safe tool use. It is recommended that volunteers wear old clothing and bring waterproofs and stout boots/ wellies.

4,500+

hours of service
contributed by our
volunteers each year

The work carried out can be quite varied and at times challenging, so volunteers are reminded to work within their own limits. Tasks range from invasive species clearance to building bug hotels or sowing wild flower meadows.

Stock checkers

Stock are used to graze a number of sites across East Devon during the summer months. Devon Ruby Red cattle graze Colyford Common at Seaton Wetlands and Exmoor ponies graze Trinity Hill Local Nature Reserve.

Stock checkers are put on a rota and are required to visit the site and check that all the stock is there and looking healthy.

Full training is provided so that volunteers know what to look out for, and know how to report any issues should they arise.



“My husband and I decided to be stock checkers to get some outdoor time together, and some pony time for me! I love getting to know the beautiful wild ponies, and the rangers too.”

—Ann Knight, stock check volunteer

Surveying and monitoring

There are a number of surveying and monitoring schemes across the East Devon Nature Reserves, these include reptile, butterfly, dragon fly and bird surveys as well as vegetation surveys.

Volunteers are asked to have experience and knowledge in the field they choose to work in so that accurate records can be made of the quality of our nature reserves.

This work is essential to report on the quality of East Devon Nature Reserves and inform future management plans.



Section 2

Our nature reserves

KNAPP COPSE

A hidden gem with a choice of walks, discover a variety of life and take in views of the Ronco Valley – wellies recommended! Owned by Devon County Council.



1

EXMOUTH AND THE MAER

Exmouth Local Nature Reserve is a short drive from town on the Exe Estuary and provides viewpoints to watch a variety of rare birds.

The Maer is a remnant sand dune behind the beach, it is perfect for dog walkers and families who want to explore the play trail and enjoy the sea air.

3

FIRE BEACON HILL

Stunning views over Sidmouth – ideal for a picnic. Look out for reptiles which can be spotted in the heathland. Owned by Sidmouth Town Council.



HOLYFORD WOODS

Explore circular walking routes at this unspoilt ancient woodland.

5





habitats
mbe

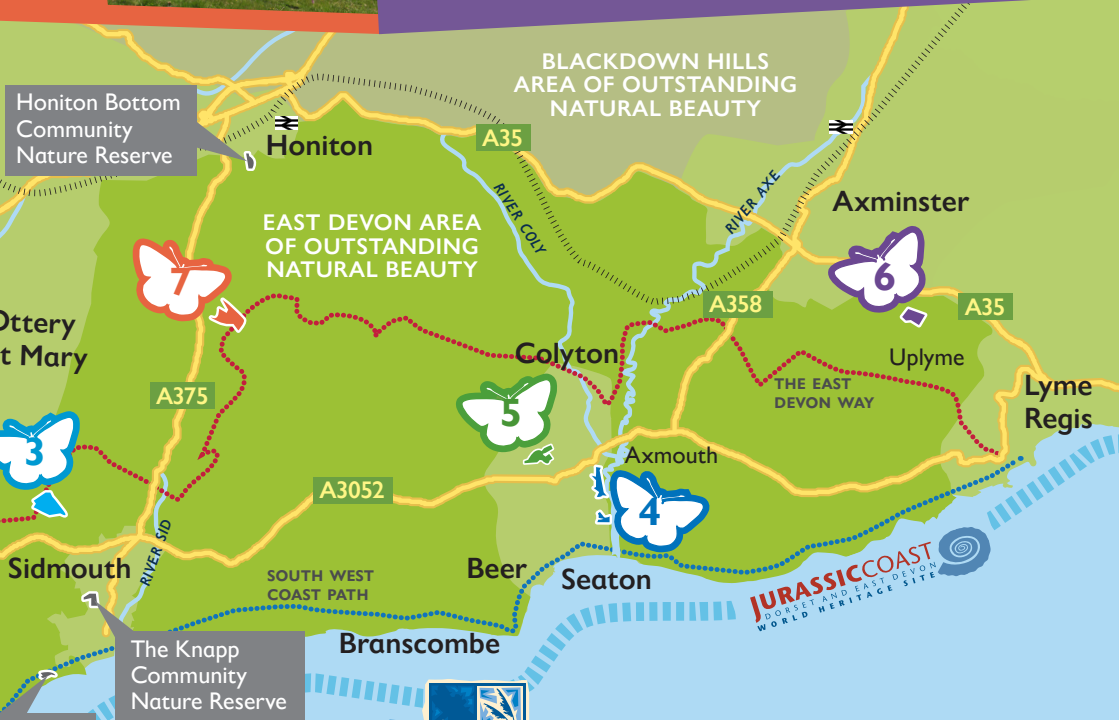


TRINITY HILL



15

Just outside Axminster, this site offers fantastic views over the valley. This is an International Dark Skies reserve and great for star gazing.



Ottery
t Mary



Sidmouth

Field
Community
Reserve



SEATON WETLANDS



Walk or cycle through, stopping at bird hides to discover more about the wildlife along the Axe Estuary. Stay for a picnic in the heart of the wetlands.

- Accessible by wheelchair/pushchair
- Trumper (off-road mobility scooter) available to hire by advanced booking
- Tea/coffee available at weekends



- No dogs (except assistance dogs)
- Free on-site parking
- Toilets and baby change facilities





Seaton Wetlands

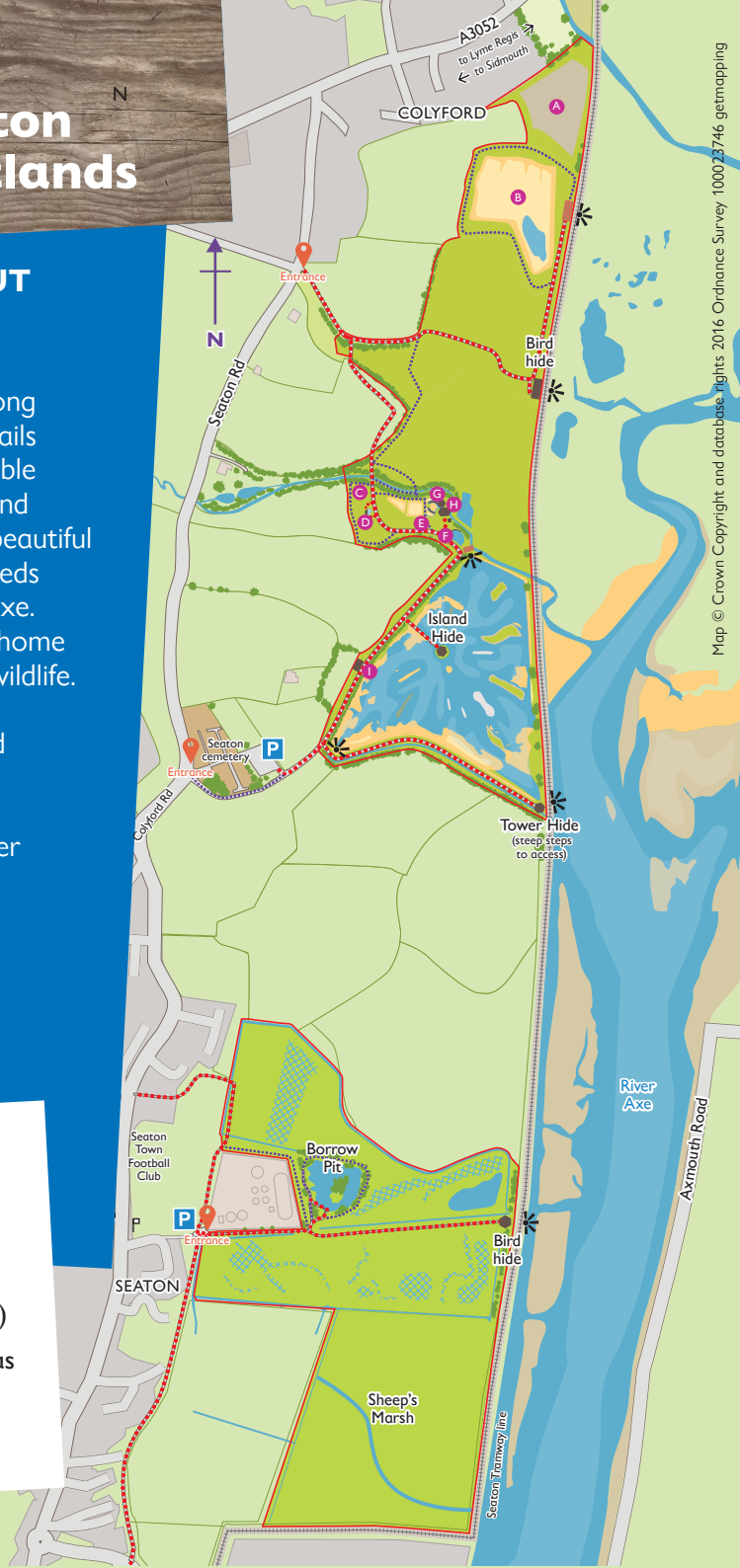
A WILD DAY OUT FOR ALL AGES

Explore the site from five bird hides and along nearly 4km of level trails and boardwalks suitable for wheelchair, bike and pushchairs, through beautiful marshland and reedbeds alongside the River Axe. A countryside haven home to an abundance of wildlife.

- A** Bird seed crop field
- B** Reedbeds
- C** Wildlife garden
- D** Pond dipping shelter
- E** Star-gazing circle
- F** Sand Martin cliff
- G** Reed Base
- H** Discovery Hut
- I** The Lookout

Key

- Reserve boundary
- Easy access path (cycling friendly)
- Grass paths (not suitable for cycling)
- Seasonally flooded areas
- View point
- Bus stop





“
After moving into a flat,
I had been missing a
garden to work in, but
now I feel I have the
whole estuary!

—Angela, Tuesday
taskforce volunteer



Section 3

General health information

Remember to bring plenty to eat and drink, a waterproof coat (and waterproof trousers if you have them) and wear clothes that you don't mind getting dirty. If you are doing practical work, steel toe capped boots or walking boots are ideal footwear. If you are not wearing steel toe capped boots, please inform the Ranger, as there are certain jobs that should not be carried out without the correct protective footwear.



■ **Illnesses, allergies and past or present injuries**

It is important to let the Ranger know if you are suffering from any illness, have any allergies or have any injuries or weaknesses. Please also bring with you any medication that you may need, and let them know where it is kept.

■ **Personal protective equipment (PPE)**

The Ranger will provide you with any PPE (gloves, goggles, visors or ear defenders etc) that you need to do the job, it is essential that you use it. If your PPE is defective in any way, please let the Ranger know immediately so that it can be replaced. Please ask the Ranger if there is any other PPE that you think you should have.

■ **Working within your means**

It is important to work steadily and not push yourself too hard while out on site, particularly if you are new to this kind of activity. Warming up your body by doing some gentle stretching before you start work will help to prevent strains and pulled muscles. Remember that everyone is different and has different levels of fitness. Your companions may be able to work faster or lift more than you but it is important to listen to your body and know your limits. Every contribution is valuable. Please feel free to take a break if you need to, and drink fluids regularly. If you need to leave sight of the group for any length of time, please let the Ranger know where you are going.

■ **New and expectant mothers**

If you are pregnant, think you may be pregnant or are breastfeeding, it is important to let the Ranger know.

Some of the hazards on site may be more of a risk to new mothers, pregnant women and their unborn child. For example, pregnant women should avoid contact with sheep and lambs and extra care should also be taken when lifting.

■ Young people

If you are under 18 years old, you are very welcome to join us out on site, but there are certain restrictions about what you are legally allowed to do. Children under the age of 16 years will be limited to when and for how long they can volunteer, in accordance with child employment regulations. This age group will also have to be accompanied by a parent/guardian or a member of staff when volunteering. Please contact the Countryside team to find out more.

■ Older people

There is no age limit on our public liability insurance, although reasonable precautions must be taken to ensure that volunteers only carry out tasks which they are reasonably competent to undertake.

■ General hygiene

To avoid infection, always wash your hands after work and before eating or drinking.

■ Injuries

If you hurt yourself or feel unwell when you are with us, it is important that you let someone know. All accidents have to be reported in our accident books which are kept in our offices. Rangers have portable first aid kits in their vehicles, which should be carried onto site if you are working

any distance away from the vehicle. There is also a first aid kit in the Discovery Hut and Reed Base at Seaton Wetlands.

■ Policies

The council has a list of policies, which you are welcome to have copies of if you wish. Policies which are most relevant to volunteers include;

- Volunteering Policy
- Volunteering for East Devon District Council
- Acceptable Behaviour Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Non-Smoking Policy
- Expenses Policy
- Confidentiality
- Compact Community
- Equality and Diversity
- Data Protection

■ Risk assessments

Full risk assessments will be carried out for each site and volunteer role.

For practical tasks, risks will be explained by the Ranger in the form of a safety talk at the start of each session. Discovery Hut and hide caretakers will be given guidance on safe working practice as part of their induction and will have the lone working policy explained to them.

We recommend that volunteers read safe working guidance documents regularly. Volunteer guidance for safe tool use can be found in the appendix.



I enjoy the sense of achievement of a job well done, the friendships and learning new skills

—East Devon practical volunteer

Section 4

Manual handling



The work you will be doing on Local Nature Reserve sites may require you to lift and carry materials and tools. Although manual handling cannot be avoided completely, there are some steps that you can take to minimise the chances of hurting yourself.



■ Safe lifting techniques

- Plan where you are going to put the object. This will save you or someone else from carrying an object for longer than needed. Where possible, minimise the amount of bending an individual needs to do.
- Assess the object to be lifted. Is it an awkward shape and if so, where is its centre of balance? Roughly how heavy is the object and will you need help to move it? Remember that, if wet, some objects and materials can become much heavier. Take this into account before lifting or moving. Never try to lift more than you are capable of.
- When lifting, make sure that you have a good grip on the object, bend your knees and use your leg muscles, not your back muscles.
- Keep the object close to your body.
- Avoid twisting your back. If you need to turn, move your lead foot first, then follow with the other foot and the rest of your body.
- Where possible ease the load you have to carry by using wheelbarrows etc. but don't overload them, and be especially careful if the terrain isn't flat or is slippery.



Section 5

The weather

When working outdoors the effects of the weather in the UK environment can potentially have a serious impact on your health if not properly managed. In extreme weather conditions volunteering will be cancelled.



■ The sun

The dangers of exposure to the sun are well known. Sun burn is very sore and there is a danger of long term damage to skin. While out on site in hot weather, wear a hat and loose, long-sleeved clothing. Work in the shade if possible. Please use high factor sun block and re-apply it whenever necessary – remember that you may sweat it off!

■ Dehydration

Even on cold days, and particularly on hot ones, it is possible to become dehydrated. It is important that you bring plenty to drink with you, and drink regularly. On cold days a flask of hot drink is a very good idea! Bring more liquids than you think you will need as you will lose a lot of water doing working outdoors! Signs of dehydration include a headache and feeling thirsty.

■ Heat exhaustion

Keeping your temperature regulated while you are working can be difficult and suffering from heat exhaustion is not limited to hot, sunny days. It is caused by the loss of salts and water through excessive sweating and can be caused by hard physical work and dehydration. Symptoms include: feeling dizzy and sick, confusion, headache, pale sweaty skin and cramps in the limbs or abdomen. If heat exhaustion is suspected, let the Ranger/Leader know, move to a cool place and replace lost fluids and salts.

■ Heat stroke

Heat stroke is where the body overheats rapidly and dangerously. It can follow on from heat exhaustion when sweating stops and the body cannot be cooled by evaporation. It can cause headaches, dizziness and discomfort and skin will be hot, flushed and dry. If heatstroke is suspected, move to a cool place and use water to cool your body down – dampen clothing and use a fan.

■ Hypothermia

Hypothermia develops when the body temperature falls below 35°C, and can be caused by prolonged exposure to the cold, particularly in wet conditions. Moving air has a much greater effect than still air, and a high 'wind-chill factor' can therefore greatly increase the risk of hypothermia setting in. It is always important to bring the correct clothing with you for your volunteer day, and it is wise never to underestimate the changeability of the British weather. Always plan for the worst, and hope for the best – a waterproof coat is essential! If you do get caught out (and most people have been), and start to feel shivery and cold, let the Ranger know immediately. Other symptoms include pale, dry skin, blueing around the lips and nails, and disorientation. There is normally somewhere that you can go to warm up/dry off, and a warm drink and high energy foods can quickly help you to feel better.

Section 6

Plants and animals

Whilst working on an East Devon site you may come into contact with a variety of plants and animals. Some plants and animals can be dangerous. The Ranger will inform you about specific risks at the site you are working on.



■ Adders

These beautiful reptiles are the UK's only venomous snake, although to a healthy adult, their bite is normally no more dangerous than a bee sting. Try to avoid these animals, especially early in the morning when they may be slower to move away from people. If you are bitten, tell the Ranger, try to remain calm and seek medical attention. Do not apply a tourniquet, slash the wound with a knife or suck out the venom.

■ Animals and livestock

It is best not to approach or touch animals (wild or domestic) unless it is absolutely necessary to do so. If you do have contact with animals during the course of your work, always make sure that you wash your hands afterwards. Be aware that injured animals or animals with young can be particularly aggressive.

■ Bees and wasps

While stings from these animals rarely present major problems, it is important to be aware of the risk of anaphylactic shock, which is a major allergic reaction and needs immediate medical attention. If you know that you are allergic to bee or wasp stings it is essential that you let the Ranger know so that you can discuss what action should be taken in the event of an allergic reaction. If you carry an EpiPen (to counter the effects of the sting) please make sure that you bring this with you when you join us for a day out on site, and let the Ranger know where it is.

■ Blue-Green Algae

Blue-Green Algae is found in water and can create toxic blooms in hot weather. Avoid contact with the scum and wash it off immediately if contact with the skin occurs.

■ Bracken

There is some evidence that bracken spores can be harmful when breathed in, as can the spores from fungi associated with bracken.

- Avoid prolonged working in bracken particularly during the summer/spring season from July to September.
- A disposable mask can be worn to avoid inhaling the spores.
- Protect your skin against contact with the sap.

Giant Hogweed and Water Dropwort

Contact with these plants, combined with the sun's ultra violet rays can cause rashes and in severe cases, blisters. Do not touch this plant without wearing gloves. If you inadvertently come into contact with it, wash your skin with cold water as soon as possible, and cover the affected area to prevent exposure to sunlight. If blisters appear or your eyes are affected, seek medical assistance.

Ragwort

Always wear gloves when handling ragwort, as the toxins in the plant can cause liver problems.

Ticks

These small invertebrates are found on vegetation between spring and autumn and attach themselves to passing animals and humans to feed on blood. The current advice is not to try to remove the tick, as the head may be left attached to the skin. Instead visit your GP. Ticks can pass on an infection called Lyme disease – see later section, so it is important to be aware of the symptoms so that medical attention can be sought without delay.

Fungi

We do not recommend picking or eating any fungi unless it has been identified by an expert.

A photograph of three brown wild ponies standing in a grassy field. The ponies are the central focus, with one in the foreground and two slightly behind it. The background features green trees and a dramatic, cloudy sky. A large, dark purple quote box is overlaid on the bottom left of the image.

**Thank you for allowing
me to be part of the
team. I love getting
to know the beautiful
wild ponies!**

**—Ann, stock check
volunteer**

Section 7

Diseases

The work you will be doing on Local Nature Reserves will increase your exposure to certain diseases. The Ranger will inform you about specific risks at the site you are working on.



■ Lyme Disease

This is a rare bacterial infection, generally occurring in summer or early autumn and is transmitted from animals to humans by the bite of a sheep or deer tick. It is characterised by a patch on the skin steadily increasing in size and gradually clearing in the centre to form a series of concentric rings – known as a target lesion. It is treatable at this stage by appropriate antibiotics. Later stages of the disease are much more difficult to treat and quite diverse in their nature, affecting various systems of the body. If you have been bitten by a tick or suspect that you may have contracted the disease, seek medical treatment immediately. Protective clothing should be worn, with insect repellent to exposed skin, when working where sheep graze.

■ Tetanus

This is a prolonged and extremely unpleasant illness. It can be contracted through contact with soil via cuts, abrasions or puncture wounds made by splinters or thorns. Most people have some level of immunisation whilst at school. Boosters are not usually required as tetanus injections are given automatically if a serious wound occurs. Chat to your GP for advice about this.

■ *Toxicara canis*

This is a micro-organism that is found in dog faeces, which can cause blindness in children, although the risk to adults is not considered great. If dog faeces come into contact with skin or clothes, wash off immediately with soap and water or antibacterial hand wash.

■ Leptospirosis (Weil's Disease)

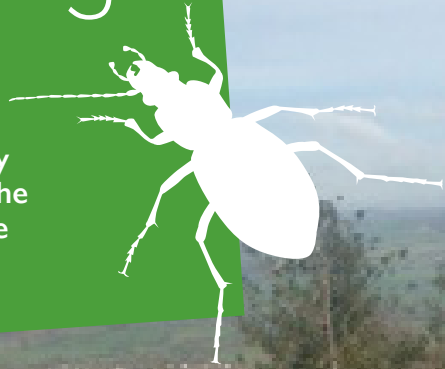
Leptospirosis is a rare bacterial infection carried in the urine of rats, foxes and domestic animals, which can contaminate water and wet banks. Infection usually occurs through cuts, abrasions and the lining of the nose, eyes and mouth. An incubation period of one to two weeks is followed by feverish flu-like symptoms, usually characterised by redness of the eyes. The illness will usually last four to nine days. In rare cases where people are jaundiced, a second phase can develop, known as Weil's disease, with sometimes severe results.

When working in or near potentially contaminated water, cuts should be covered with waterproof plasters, and contact with water should be avoided. Exposed skin should be covered and waterproof gloves worn whenever possible. Hands should be washed before eating, drinking or smoking. If symptoms appear seek prompt medical attention from your GP and tell them that you have been working near water.

Section 8

Safe working practices

The safety of volunteers is very important to us. Please read the following safe working practice guidelines



■ Working with members of the public

When carrying out practical tasks on the reserves please be aware of the safety of visiting members of the public. Please ensure tools do not create a tripping hazard and where appropriate, ensure your work area is cordoned off and/or display warning signs. You may need to stop working to allow members of the public to pass.

Please conduct yourself appropriately: a polite and helpful approach at all times.

It is important not to disclose any personal details concerning yourself or another member of East Devon District Council staff/volunteers.

If you are approached by an angry member of the public, please remain calm and try to avoid confrontation. If working in a group, seek the support of the Ranger. If working alone, please refer the individual to a member of East Devon District Council staff or give the Countryside email/phone number to help resolve the problem.

■ Bird hides

We recommend that young children have assistance when opening and closing the shuttered windows in the bird hides to avoid any chances of injury to fingers. When opening windows in the hide, please ensure the window is firmly secured with the latch before letting go. Similarly, when closing shuttered windows please take care to ensure that the latch you are opening is securing your window and not the window next to you.

■ Lone working

As a volunteer you may find there are times when you are working alone. Volunteers should familiarise themselves with the Volunteer Lone working guidelines – The Buddy System, details of which can be found in the appendix.

Volunteers are encouraged to be accompanied wherever possible and to take a mobile phone. A ‘buddy’ system should be used if it is necessary for a volunteer to be working alone. A relative or friend is informed of the whereabouts, timings, activities, route taken, who to call in case of an emergency and any other relevant information should the volunteer not return by the allotted time.

■ Child protection

When volunteering at public events, you are likely to come into frequent contact with children. East Devon District Council has a Safe Guarding Children Policy that aims to protect children against injury and abuse. For your own protection and that of younger visitors to the reserves it is important that you are aware of the following points:

- Avoid lone working with children whenever possible.
 - Maintain a safe and appropriate physical distance.
 - Do not give any personal details of yourself or staff to any child.
 - Talk to children in an appropriate manner and ensure your conduct is appropriate.
- Please do not film or photograph children or young people, or use the images, without expressed and recorded permission from their parent or guardian.

Children's activity volunteers will be required to work alongside a member of staff at all times and will not be left unsupervised.

A photograph showing three people engaged in a construction project outdoors. They are working on a wooden structure, possibly a raised garden bed or a small enclosure, against a larger wooden building with windows. One person is kneeling on the right, another is standing in the center, and a third is bent over on the left. Various tools like a drill, saw, and pliers are scattered on the wooden surface. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

The time felt right to do something which matched my interest – I would definitely recommend volunteering

—Clive, East Devon Conservation volunteer

Section 9

Additional information

For further information on volunteering for the Countryside team please read on. Please contact the team with any further questions or queries



■ Training

Volunteers will be given an outline of the specific responsibilities they will be undertaking as part of their voluntary role. To become a volunteer hide caretaker, in the Discovery hut or at ‘What’s that bird?’ sessions warden, you will be asked to attend an induction before undertaking any work.

All volunteers will be asked to complete a registration and medical information form as part of their induction.

You will be given verbal instruction on how to handle any tools and equipment that you will be using and how to perform the task safely by the Ranger. If you are unsure about any aspect of what you have been told please ask the Ranger to run through the information again. Please read the guidance documents contained in the appendix.

We run a number of training events throughout the year in first aid and hiring out the off-road mobility scooter (Tramper). There are also events including wildlife, hedgelaying, informative guided walks and training days which you may be interested in. If you are interested in gaining knowledge or skills in a specific area of work, please feel free to contact the Countryside team and we will try to accommodate your needs if we can.

■ Confidentiality

We do expect volunteers to use the same confidentiality rules as staff in that they must not, at any time during or after their time with East Devon District Council disclose any information about the practice, business dealings or affairs of EDDC or of any of EDDC’s employees, clients, volunteers or associated agencies. Communication with the press and media should first be run via the Countryside Information and Events Officer.

■ Data protection

All volunteer details are kept in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Only designated staff or volunteers within EDDC can access volunteer details and the information held will not be shared with other organisations. These details will be held with agreement of the volunteer and can be removed or viewed on request. Volunteers will be asked to complete a Registration and Medical Information Form which will be held in confidence.

Emergency contact information will be given out where necessary to ensure everyone's safety.

The purpose of holding volunteer details is to improve the management and co-ordination of volunteers working with EDDC and to ensure volunteers are kept up to date with EDDC activities and volunteering opportunities. The information is also very important in support of funding applications.

Volunteers can have access to EDDC's Data Protection Policy on request.

■ Uniform

You may be required to wear uniform or protective clothing which will be provided at no cost to you.

■ Insurance

All volunteers will be covered by East Devon District Council's Liability Insurance Policy whilst engaged in any voluntary work.

■ Equality and Diversity

East Devon District Council has an Equality and Diversity Policy which is applied to all paid employees. This will also apply to all volunteers. Volunteers can be provided with a copy of this Policy on request.

This Policy provides the framework for ensuring fair treatment to all and aims to avoid unfair discrimination in all the organisation's recruitment-related policies, practices and procedures.

■ Volunteer grievance procedure

The purpose of the grievance procedure is to enable resolution of individual problems quickly. It is hoped that most issues will be settled informally, however should you wish to raise a formal complaint, the procedure as detailed below should be followed. The council will aim to ensure that all grievances are taken seriously and are resolved as quickly as possible.

■ Informal approach

You should raise the issue with the Ranger in the first instance. If this discussion has not resolved the issue or the problem continues because it has not been addressed adequately, then the grievance should be made formally.

■ Formal approach

You should write to Charlie Plowden, Countryside Service Manager, stating clearly the grounds of the grievance.

A grievance hearing will be held to attempt to resolve your grievance. You will be offered the opportunity to bring a fellow volunteer or a colleague employed by the Council with you for moral support to any grievance meeting. You will be given the opportunity to appeal the decision made at the grievance hearing.

■ Complaints about a volunteer

If a complaint is made about you as a volunteer, then you will be informed to allow initial enquiries to be undertaken. The course of action that may be taken will depend on the level of seriousness of the complaint. The types of action that may be implemented are an informal discussion to resolve the issue, addressing any additional needs such as training or in very serious cases it may be necessary to ask you to leave.

■ Expenses

In the course of volunteering, travel expenses may be claimed. However EDDC's ability to pay expenses will be dependent upon the resources available. Volunteers may be eligible to claim for costs to and from the place of volunteering, to a maximum amount of £5 per journey. Fuel expenses will be reimbursed at a rate of 15 pence per mile. Volunteers are expected to use the cheapest form of transport.

■ Volunteer social events

Volunteers are key to the work that we do as a countryside team. To thank volunteers for their time and commitment, we organise a volunteer get-together twice each year.

Section 10

Tool use

If working out on site, the Ranger will run through the tools that you will be using and show you how to use, carry and store them safely.



Remember that when you are working in a group extra vigilance is needed. With all tools it is wise not to carry too many at once. If you do, you risk injuring yourself and others if you slip or trip. With most tools one in each hand is plenty.

All tools that are used on site should be in good condition, but it is a good idea to make sure that you know what to look for in order to identify substandard ones. Broken tools should be brought to the attention of the Ranger/Leader and then be clearly labelled and put aside. Under no circumstances carry on working with a broken tool.

When storing the tools out on site, never put them down randomly on the ground – they are surprisingly easily lost in grass or leaf litter. Make sure that all tools are returned at the end of each day.

Some tools must not be used without special personal protective equipment, for example steel toe-capped boots. Please make sure you are aware of the restrictions.

Volunteer guidelines for safe tool use can be found in the appendix. We recommend that you familiarise yourself with these guidelines regularly when working with tools.



Appendix

■ Tool guidelines

Bow saw 21"/30": Green/dead wood cutting blades.

- Carry horizontally, holding 'bow' at point of balance.
- Blade guard should be kept on when tool is not in use.
- Place tool in safe, level, conspicuous place, well away from brush or anything that is likely to conceal it.
- Do not hang it up in branches or undergrowth.
- Work well away from others.
- A glove should be worn on the free hand.
- Commence cutting by four or five backward strokes to establish the cut, do not use your thumb as a guide, continue with even backward and forward strokes keeping the blade straight, not applying pressure, allowing the blade to do the work.

Loppers are used for cutting through twigs and branches less in diameter than a human thumb. For anything thicker use a bow saw.

- Place tool in safe, level, conspicuous place, well away from brush or anything that is likely to conceal it.
- Do not hang it up in branches or undergrowth.
- Work a safe distance from others.
- Do not use a twisting action when attempting to cut as this puts undue pressure on the pivot which

may loosen and eventually break.

- Gloves can be worn.
- Carry to and from the work site at the point of balance, holding both handles and with the blades pointing towards the ground.

Pruning Saws are useful for small, awkward branches where loppers are not adequate or there is not enough room for a bow saw blade.

- Care should be taken when opening and closing the blade that fingers are not across the blade slot – this is especially applicable when closing the blade.
- A release button will allow the blade to be moved and will hold it in place whilst in use.
- Gloves can be worn on the free hand.
- Store and carry with the blade closed and ensure it is kept well away from brash or anything that is likely to conceal it.

Slasher is a swinging tool used for clearing brambles and light scrub at ground level. Your legs need to be well apart to maintain your balance through the swinging motion.

- Holding the handle firmly at the end with one hand, slide the other hand down the shaft as you progress through the swing.
- Adjust the height of the action by bending your knees and not your back.
- Do not wear gloves as the slasher might slip from your

grasp and cause injury.

- Work at least twice the length of the tool away from anyone else.
- Whilst working, ensure that the tip of the blade is slightly above horizontal so that it does not catch in the ground.
- Place tool in safe, level, conspicuous place, well away from brash or anything that is likely to conceal it.
- Carry at the point of balance down by your side with the blade curving downwards.

Billhook is a swinging tool for hedge laying and snedding (removing branches from main stem).

- Do not wear a glove on the hand you use to hold the billhook.
- Always cut away from your body.
- The use of a billhook for hedge laying is a considerable skill, chopping obliquely down through the stem with a minimum number of blows. This skill must be demonstrated before use by a volunteer or staff member.
- When snedding you should work on the opposite side of the stem to which you are standing to avoid injury (the branch should be between you and the blade).
- Place tool in safe, level, conspicuous place, well away from brash or anything that is likely to conceal it.

Mell is usually made of brittle cast-iron and should only be used for knocking wooden stakes into the ground. Contact with stone or metal objects is likely to cause the head to shatter.

- Do not wear gloves.
- Holding the handle firmly at the end with one hand, slide the other hand down the shaft, bringing the head down until it strikes the top of the post, keeping your back straight.
- Wear a hard hat when using a mell and work well away from anyone else.
- Carry at point of balance close to the tool head and down by your side.

Sledge hammer is used mainly for breaking up stone. The size and shape of the head makes it unsuitable for knocking in wooden posts.

- Do not wear gloves
- Holding the handle firmly at the end with one hand, slide the other hand down the shaft, bringing the head down until it strikes the stone, bending your knees and keeping your back straight.
- Wear a hard hat when using a sledgehammer and work well away from anyone else.
- Carry at point of balance close to the tool head and down by your side.

Crowbar is used as a lever to displace a heavy object.

- Keep your back straight and bend your knees when lifting or using.
- When levering an object with a crowbar, do not jump on the free end or use other tools to hammer on the crowbar.
- Remember that crowbars can bend.
- Carry down by your side at the point of balance.

Tamper is used for tamping or compacting material when back filling a post hole. One end of the tool is used as a tamper, the other pointed end, is used as a crowbar.

- Keep your back straight and bend your knees when lifting or using.
- Let the weight of the tool do the work.
- Carry down by your side at the point of balance.

Pitchfork is used for pitching hay or cuttings into a wheelbarrow or trailer, etc.

- Keep knees bent and back straight when lifting material.
- Do not wear gloves.
- Work well away from anyone else
- Do not leave pitchfork upright, lay on the ground with prongs facing downwards when not in use.
- Carry at point of balance down by your side with prongs pointing down.

Hay rake is used for dragging or raking hay or brash.

- Keep knees bent and back straight when raking.
- Do not wear gloves.
- When not in use, lay down horizontally with forks pointing downwards.
- Carry at point of balance down by your side.

Garden fork/spade is used for digging and turning over soil etc.

- When digging use the ball of your foot to apply downward pressure, rather than the arch or heel of your foot.
- Keep your back straight and bend your knees.
- Lay the fork/spade flat on the ground when not in use, with blade or prongs pointing downwards.
- Carry at the point of balance down by your side with blade or prongs facing down.

Shovel is used to move soil and other materials from one place to another or into a wheelbarrow.

- Bend your knees and keep your back straight when shovelling.
- Do not shovel a load heavier than you are comfortable with.
- Lay the shovel flat on the ground when not in use, with blade facing downwards.
- Carry at the point of balance down by your side with blade facing down.

Mattock/pickaxe are used for digging and chopping.

- Hafts and heads should be carried separately at the point of balance down by your side.
- Haft should fit snugly and firmly into the head socket, ensuring that the head cannot slide down the haft and trap your hands. The haft should stand proud of the tool head.
- If there is more than one tool it is useful to number the hafts and heads so that they can easily be matched, although this should not be a guarantee that matching hafts and heads are safe to use.
- When adding or removing the head the appropriate end of the haft should be tapped on a hard surface to lock or unlock the head.
- Bend your knees and keep your back straight.
- Make sure that you are working well away from anyone else.

Wheelbarrow is used to safely carry heavy loads from one area to another.

- Bend knees and not backs when picking up the handles and walking with the barrow.
- Find the balance point and try the weight before committing to moving the load.
- Only barrow what you can safely and easily handle – it is better to make more trips than damage your back or spill the load.

■ Lone working guidelines – the Buddy System

A 'buddy' system is a simple way of tracking your location and your expected return time when you are lone working. It is normally operated in pairs, you and your 'buddy'. A buddy may be a colleague or a partner, neighbour or friend at home. When working alone, you must observe the following rules:

- Ensure that your buddy knows where you are going and when you are expected to return.
- Make sure your buddy knows what to do if you do not return on time or if you do not call to say why you are delayed.
- Inform your buddy of the non-return procedures shown below and give them a printed copy of this procedure.
- Write down and give to your buddy your mobile phone number, and at least two emergency telephone numbers to contact if you do not return or contact them. Volunteers should refer to the emergency contacts list.
- Give your buddy your car make, colour and registration number and details of what you are wearing.

■ Non-return procedures

If you do not return or contact your buddy by the expected time they should take the following action:

- Telephone you on your mobile.
- Continue to try to make contact at regular intervals for 30 minutes.
- After 30 minutes, contact the first emergency phone number they have been given.
- If the first emergency number is not available the buddy should try the second emergency number and so on until they obtain a response.
- Emergency contact should organise a search of the last known destination of the missing person and, as far as is practicable, check the site.

The kind of information that will be asked for to assist with searching for a missing individual would be:

- What do they look like?
- What were they wearing?
- What is the make, colour and registration number of the car they were in?

If this does not result in contact with the missing person within two hours of the expected return time, the circumstances must be reported to the relevant police force who will implement their emergency procedures.

■ Emergency Contacts list

- Countryside team: 01395 517557
- Main East Devon District Council office, during office hours (8.30am to 5.30pm): 01395 516551
- Main East Devon District Council office, outside office hours: 01395 516854
- Emergency services 999 (urgent) or 112 (non-urgent)





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