LINCOLN CONSERVATION GROUP

KEY ACTIVITIES –
WHAT’S INVOLVED IN RUNNING LCG

GUIDANCE FOR VOLUNTEERS

Nature Conservation Volunteers

Making a Difference to our Environment

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WHAT'S INVOLVED IN RUNNING LCG

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ABOUT LCG

For general information about LCG – our volunteers and what we do - see the document titled Volunteering with Lincoln Conservation Group (on our website; follow the 'LCG Handbook' link).

To see who's who on our committee at the moment, take a look under 'About us' on the website.

VOLUNTEERING TO HELP RUN THE GROUP

Apart from the essential activity of volunteering on our workdays (which we also call tasks), if you feel ready to do more, there are a number of ways you can get involved in the running of the Group. Remember that if you take on one of these key activities you won't be expected to do it 'cold'; there will always be someone to help you, whether it's the volunteer who was doing it before or members of the committee. You can also offer just to help with a role.

The Group is organised by a committee elected each year from our members, consisting of Chair, Secretary, Task Organiser, Treasurer, publicity roles and Tools Officer. Tasks are run by a group of leaders, also drawn from our volunteers. There is some crossover between the two groups!

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LEADING WORKDAYS (TASKS)

If you've joined us on some of our tasks, you'll know that one of our volunteers is the leader for the day, sometimes working with a site manager and sometimes not. They also arrange things in the run up to the task.

Several members of the Group are actively involved in leading tasks and we are keen to encourage others to take on this role. It's not a big commitment - you can lead just one task a year, or, of course, you can lead more if you like. If you think you would be interested in leading a task but are not sure, why not offer to help one of the leaders – co-leading – so you can see what is involved?

A new task programme is issued every four months, starting in March, July and November. Shortly before it's issued, the Task Organiser will email round asking for leaders for each task. You'd be free to volunteer for a date or dates that suit you and a work type you feel confident with. The Task Organiser will then confirm with you which task you'll be leading and provide contact details for the site manager.

We have lots of information to support you as leader. There are guidance notes about the main tools that we use, including how to use them and safety tips, to help you with the tools talk that leaders give at the start of a task. We have risk assessment templates to help you complete this important element.

Part of the risk assessment template includes guidance on which tools are needed for the different types of work that we do, so this will help you to identify what tools to take on any task that you lead. Also on the risk assessment is a grid list of the tools, with spaces for you to enter how many of each you are taking on the task. It is important to complete this when you collect the tools, so that you can check at the end of the task that all the tools have been returned. The grid list also includes the items that have to be taken on every task, such as first aid kits, gloves, etc.

If you decide that you would like to co-lead or lead a task, these documents are available on our website. Look under 'How to join in' and then follow the 'Leaders' link.

The following list of 'things to do if you lead' may look daunting – but please don't be put off. It's there to help you!

Leading a task – what to do in preparation

- A week or two before the task, contact the organisation we are working for, to check that they are expecting us and to confirm the work (which sometimes changes from the initial contact about the task because of weather conditions) and the tools we will need.
- You might have to visit the site, to see in person what we are to do and where, particularly if we are going to be working without a member of the 'employing' organisation present on the day or if it is a site we haven't been to before.

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- A few days before the task (typically Tuesday or Wednesday) send an email to everyone in the Group (via the Group email list), setting out the details of the task and asking who is going to attend and if they need a lift or can give one.
- Help volunteers to coordinate lifts if you can (though they often do this themselves), as we try to take as few cars as possible, particularly to tasks which are further afield.
- Check who has the defibrillator and the plastic wallet with the emergency contacts list and membership book, if you don't already have them, and ensure they are taken to the task.
- It's helpful to let the site manager know how many volunteers are expected – some will ask for this.
- Check who has the biscuit box and ensure it is taken on the task and that there are enough biscuits for the workday; top it up if necessary, or ask someone to volunteer to bring some biscuits.
- Prepare the Risk Assessment (required for our insurance); we have a standard form for this so you can prepare it in advance and just check it on the day, updating it on site if necessary. If you are not sure what information is needed, ask one of the other leaders for advice or for a sample from a previous task. On our website there are templates for the main sites where we volunteer, with all the main location details already prepared for you.
- Collect the tools from our tool store in Lincoln, or arrange for someone else to do so, including the first aid and welfare kits. You'll need to borrow a key from one of the regular leaders. Use the tools grid list on the Risk Assessment to record how many of each tool you are taking out.

What to do at the task

- If the site manager/warden is present, ask if they'd like to give a short talk about the site and the task for the day.
- If not, do this yourself, making sure everyone is clear about what is being done and how it is to be done.
- Talk through the risk assessment, updating it if anything has changed since you prepared it.
- Lead the 'tools talk' about safe use of tools, or ask someone else to do it.
- Ask whether any volunteers are qualified first aiders.
- Introduce any new volunteers (ask if you're not sure) and pair them up with an experienced volunteer if this will be helpful.
- Consider doing a name check of all volunteers.
- Decide the tea and lunch break times (members of the Group are very good at letting you know when they want a break!).
- At a convenient point in the day, make sure any new volunteers fill in the form in our membership book with their email address and emergency contact details.
- Copy any new volunteers' names and emergency contact information onto the emergency contacts list that is in the plastic wallet with the membership book.
- During the day monitor the task to make sure everything is going to plan and that people are working safely and are happy. Offer tips or assistance where you think this will be helpful.

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What to do at the end of the day

- Make sure all the tools are collected back in, checking against your list in the Risk Assessment, and that the site is left clean and tidy.
- Help volunteers give the tools a quick clean if needed.
- Thank the volunteers – and site manager if they've worked with the Group.
- Hand the plastic wallet with the emergency contacts list and membership book to the leader of the next task or to someone who is going to the next task if you are not; they must not be left in the tool sheds as they contain some personal details.
- Ask if someone would like to write a brief report of the task for the website, or write one yourself; reports are emailed to the person who is responsible for the website.
- Return the tools to the tool shed (note the defibrillator, membership book/emergency contacts list and biscuits are never left in the tool sheds).
- When you are back home, send a copy of the risk assessment to our Treasurer; either send an electronic copy or, if you amended the RA onsite during the day, a scan or photo of it.

For many tasks, someone from the organisation we are working for is with us and will do things like check the site at the end.

COMMITTEE ROLES

GROUP MEETINGS: CHAIR AND SECRETARY

We hold a business meeting once a month, usually on the last Thursday of each month (except for August and December), run by the Group's Chair and Secretary. We discuss matters like future tasks, funds, tools and other equipment, and social events. The venue varies but it is normally held at someone's house in Lincoln. It starts at 7.30 p.m. and finishes about 9.30 p.m. All volunteers are welcome to attend if interested and to contribute ideas.

If you feel like offering your services to take on either the Chair or Secretary roles, both of them are straightforward.

CHAIR

- The week before the meeting, prepare and circulate the Agenda by email. It is usually pretty standard but occasionally a specific item is added for discussion.
- Go through the last Minutes just before the meeting so you know what will come up under 'matters arising' and whether you need to raise anything else.
- Chair the meeting, allowing discussion but keeping people on track so the time is managed effectively (so we can get home or to the pub!).

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- Make sure everyone is clear what the decisions are or who is responsible for Action Points.
- Make sure the venue for the next meeting is agreed – usually the home of one of the committee members.
- Close the meeting.

The Chair also acts as a point of contact for the Group, monitoring the Group's email address and dealing with any correspondence that we receive, as appropriate.

SECRETARY

The Secretary's main job is producing the Minutes of our meetings. We have a standard format for the Minutes which you can copy.

All you have to do is take notes during the meeting, type up the Minutes and circulate them by email to all members on our email list.

Ideally the Minutes should be circulated within a few days of the meeting, so that everyone finds out about plans and any social events, and those responsible for Action Points are reminded of them and have time to do them.

The Secretary may also deal with other occasional correspondence, such as that relating to the annual general meeting.

TASK ORGANISER

Our Task Organiser puts together our programme of tasks – contacting organisations to discuss potential tasks and agreeing tasks dates and the work we will be doing. We have a good list of wildlife and conservation organisations for which we work but we are always happy to develop new contacts. Members of the Group often come across sites that they think may be of interest to us and pass on ideas for tasks at the meetings or to the Task Organiser or committee members when we are out on task. We try to get a balance of conservation content, organisations and locations in each programme.

Occasionally we arrange tasks with private individuals or organisations, if they have an interesting and worthwhile conservation project that will benefit from our help. We use these tasks to contribute to our finances, charging a small sum per volunteer per day.

A new task programme is issued every four months, starting in in March, July and November. This means that the Task Organiser needs to have the draft programme ready in plenty of time (e.g., in January for the programme starting March), so that it can be reviewed at one of our business meetings, the leaders confirmed and details publicised in good time.

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Our task programme is organised by one of our volunteers. You may be interested in working with them, perhaps with a view to taking over in the future.

If you are organising the task programme, here is what you have to do.

- See if we have had any requests from organisations/individuals – whether new ones or regulars – and check what they are asking us to do and if they have asked for specific dates.
- Look at what we did at the same time last year and what we have done over the past few weeks, as we try to aim for a balance of tasks over the year – in content and travel distance.
- Create a draft programme of tasks.
- Using your draft, contact the organisations or individuals to see if they can offer us a task, what work they want us to do and if the date/s we suggest are acceptable (perhaps getting some bookings for the next programme too).
- Give the organisations/individuals a clear deadline by which to confirm to you whether they can accommodate our group, on what date and if possible the work we'll be doing, to avoid delay in completing the programme. Be aware that sometimes they may not know exactly what the work will be, as it can be difficult for them to identify that up to several months before the task – in which case a general idea is enough for our programme.
- If appropriate, discuss and agree payment with them. The charge for private organisations and individuals is £5 per volunteer per day.
- Review all the proposed tasks and responses and check that all the dates fit.
- Take the proposed programme to the committee for a final review, either at a business meeting if the timing allows it (e.g., the January meeting for the programme starting March) or at one of the tasks.
- Confirm arrangements by email with the organisations.
- Circulate the proposed programme to the Group to ask for volunteers to lead each task.
- At the same time send the final draft (including grid ref, w3w address and meeting place) to the publicity person who has responsibility for checking and proofreading the text to ensure that everything is clear and correct.
- When you have leaders for all the tasks, confirm the names with the programme checker, who will add the names and send the final programme to the group, to the people who keep our website and Instagram up to date, and to organisations who promote our volunteering opportunities (TCV and Hartsholme Country Park).
- Start thinking about the next programme!

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TOOLS OFFICER

We have a lot of tools and equipment (gloves etc) which need to be maintained and occasionally replaced; this is overseen by our Tools Officer. We usually have a task in the summer which includes tool cleaning, organised by the Tools Officer. You could volunteer to help to look after our tools, or perhaps to become Tools Officer in the future.

If you look after the tools, you need to:

- make sure the tools are properly stored in the tool sheds;
- advise the Group committee if we need more tools;
- let the Group committee know if there is a problem with storage or the tool sheds;
- make sure tools are cleaned and checked regularly and repairs are organised when necessary.

PUBLICITY

We publicise the Group on our website, Facebook, Instagram and via a paper programme leaflet, and a number of people are involved in doing this. We also always welcome new ideas for promoting the Group to potential volunteers.

There are several ways you could help with publicity. Remember that if you take on some responsibility you do not have to do everything yourself: just make sure it gets done. And there is always someone to ask if you are not sure what to do.

Website
Our website is hosted by Weebly. Training and familiarisation would be given to anyone taking over, or becoming ‘backup’ for, this role. If you are responsible for our website, you will need to:

- post task reports and photos provided by leaders;
- add the new task programme when it is ready, and update tasks if there are any changes;
- ensure website content is up to date generally.

Leaflet
The current system is that the committee member who produces the leaflet version of our programme works with the Task Organiser to check and proofread the final programme text before putting it on the website and sending out to our volunteers and to other organisations.

If you take on this role, the Task Organiser will send you a Word document with all the programme details (usually with the leader information to be added later).

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This is what you have to do.

- Update the dates on ‘front cover’ Word document and the month when the next programme will be available; check the other general information in this ‘cover’ page to ensure it is accurate and up to date.
- Check all the task programme information in the Word document sent by the Task Organiser and ensure it is clear and that punctuation, spellings, spacing etc. are right (edit the text or spacing if necessary to make it fit on one A4 page).
- Send your final programme draft, with suggested amendments showing, to the Task Organiser and the person who oversees the website, for a final check.
- When the leaders have been added and the final programme version is confirmed, send the Word document to the website coordinator to add to the website, to the Group members and to the person who keeps our Instagram account up to date.
- Email Word and PDF versions of the final programme document and the ‘front cover’ document to the local TCV officer (Darren Nortcliffe) and to the rangers at Hartsholme Park (Ruth Symons).

Facebook

The volunteer who has responsibility for posting task details on Facebook does this within a day or two of them being emailed out to the Group, taking the text from the email.

Any volunteers who are signed up to the Group’s page can post photos or conservation-related information and comments.

LCG’s Chair and Secretary have administrator responsibility, to approve initial requests to participate in the Facebook group and to monitor posts to ensure that they are appropriate for LCG’s role and ethos.

Instagram

The volunteer who runs the Group’s Instagram site posts photos from tasks (either photos they have taken themselves or that are sent to them by the task leaders or other volunteers) and other useful information relevant to LCG and nature conservation. One or two members of the committee also have authorisation to post material on the site.

Posters and display boards

We have some promotional posters – A3 or A4. These can be put up at work or other venues where potential new members can see them. Could you put up a poster somewhere?

We have a set of display boards that can be put up on a table or can stand on the floor. You might have ideas about where we can put these up, or would be happy to help us when we are invited to put on a display at local volunteer or conservation events.

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FUND RAISING

We need funds for a variety of purposes: paying our insurance; paying the allotment fee; buying new tools or paying for repairs; paying for the website domain or other publicity activities.

We raise funds through occasional paid tasks and also apply for grants and funds that are available to charities and volunteer groups like ours, for example Lincolnshire County Council's Community Wildlife Grant and Lincolnshire Co-op's Community Champions scheme.

If you have ideas for raising funds, talk to the Committee about them at a task or let us know about them at one of the meetings.

SOCIAL EVENTS

We all enjoy the social side of being a volunteer with the Group, both on workdays and through other social activities that are arranged from time to time. If you have any suggestions about events you know of that you think might appeal, tell someone on the committee or bring the information to one of our meetings.

If you would like to organise something – a walk, picnic, barbecue, party, or a visit to the cinema, theatre or music event – you can circulate details via the Group's email list and see who is interested. If you're not sure how to do this or whether your idea will be of interest to the Group, ask the leader when on a task or anyone on our committee.

You are welcome to organise a one-off social activity, but if you would enjoy organising something on a more regular basis – being the Group's social secretary – then talk to the committee about what you would like to do.

EVERYONE CAN GET INVOLVED

THERE'S ALWAYS SOMETHING TO DO WITH LINCOLN CONSERVATION GROUP