



LINCOLN CONSERVATION GROUP

VOLUNTEERS' HANDBOOK

Nature Conservation Volunteers

Making a Difference to our Environment

LINCOLN CONSERVATION GROUP VOLUNTEERS' HANDBOOK



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😊 WHO ARE WE?

The Lincoln Conservation Group started life in October 1994. We are all volunteers. Members of the Group come from all sorts of backgrounds and are all ages (though you must be 16 years or over to volunteer with us). We are affiliated to TCV (The Conservation Volunteers) and have our own insurance.

Joining the Lincoln Conservation Group is a great way to get out into the local countryside and to meet people.

😊 WHAT DO WE DO?

Tasks: We carry out practical nature conservation work. We aim to conserve the natural history and biodiversity (variety of plant and animal life) of the area, and have lots of fun while doing it!

The majority of our workdays (which we call tasks) involve working on the wildlife havens in and around the city of Lincoln, although we also work on nature reserves further afield in Lincolnshire.

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Tasks are held twice a month, on Sundays, usually the first and third Sunday of each month. Once or twice a year we have an away weekend task a little further afield, for example Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire or Norfolk. We stay in accommodation provided by the organisation we are working for.

Our nature conservation work includes coppicing and hedge laying, tree and hedge planting, woodland and grassland management, dry stone walling, construction and maintenance work (paths, steps, etc), and pond restoration.

VOLE: Tasks are on our website and also appear in our programme leaflet, **VOLE** (Voluntary Opportunities for Lincoln's Environment), which comes out every four months (January, May, September). Once you are a volunteer with the group, the task programme is emailed to you (or sent by post if you are not on email). We are happy to have comments on VOLE and ideas for ways in which it can be improved.

Meetings: We hold a 'business' meeting once a month, on the last Tuesday of each month (except for August and December). The venue varies but it is usually held at someone's house. It starts at 7.30 p.m. and finishes about 9.30 p.m. Agendas and Minutes are emailed out to all volunteers so you know what the Group is doing, or will be posted to those who are not on email.

Social things: The Group also has an active social life, including visits to the cinema, theatre and live music gigs, bike rides and walks, and occasional weekends away or holidays in this country and abroad.



HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

Volunteering on a task is only one of many ways in which you can be actively involved with the Group. If you enjoy coming out on task, you might also want to join in with some of the organisational/behind the scenes activities.

And remember – if you offer to take on responsibility for something, it doesn't mean you have to do it every time, just that you need to work with others in the Group to make sure it is done. There are plenty of other volunteers in the Group who will help you as you learn about any role you take on.

❖ TASKS

You can volunteer with the Group on its tasks. We meet at the site for 10 a.m. and work until 3.30-4 p.m. (depending on the time of year) with tea/coffee and lunch breaks. Most people stay all day but you can come along just for part of the day.

Most of our volunteers have other commitments. You DON'T have to go to every task; just join in when you can!

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We supply tea, coffee and biscuits but please bring your own packed lunch, soft drinks, etc. You need to wear old clothes and sturdy footwear. You should also have had a tetanus vaccination (ask at your doctor's surgery).

We will train you how to use tools safely and we have a tools safety talk before each task.

Transport: If you don't have transport, we can arrange for someone else to give you a lift, so don't be afraid to ask. As petrol is expensive now, we share the cost between the passengers and driver of each carload. It is suggested that a contribution based on 15p per mile per carload (rate at January 2013) is offered to the driver to cover their costs; for example, if the total journey there and back is 30 miles and there is one driver and two passengers in the car, the cost per person will be $30 \times 15p$ divided by 3 = £1.50, so the two passengers each give £1.50 to the driver.

(see also 'Leading tasks' and 'Organising the task programme' – below.)

❖ SOCIAL EVENTS

We all like the social part of being a volunteer with the Group so let us know about events you think might appeal, or bring information to a meeting. If you want to organise something – a walk, barbecue, party, or a visit to the cinema, theatre or music event – just circulate details via the Group's email list and see who is interested.

❖ PUBLICITY

There are several ways you could help with publicity. We always welcome new ideas for promoting the Group so that we recruit new members. Remember that if you take on some responsibility for publicity 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.

• Posters

Displaying posters: we have promotional posters – A3 or A4. Group members put these up at work or other venues where potential new members can see them. Could you put up a poster somewhere?

Producing posters: you could be our 'poster person', reviewing the current poster and recommending changes when necessary; helping to develop new versions for display boards, etc.

• VOLE

Distributing VOLE: We produce about 300 copies of VOLE each time, and they are distributed by Group members to local libraries, nature reserve visitor centres, workplaces, and other relevant places (e.g. Wildlife Trust shop, , etc). You could help with this distribution.

Producing VOLE: We produce three issues a year. There is a standard template (in Word) which is easy to use. The programme is usually confirmed early in the month before the next issue, so that it is ready for distribution before the first task. The task details and a summary of forthcoming tasks are provided by whoever is organising the task programme. We use a print shop in Lincoln (West Parade) to copy and fold VOLE.

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If you are involved in producing VOLE, this is what you do:

- update the general information – issue/volume number and dates on the front cover; activities in the next programme; etc.;
- copy the task information into the template (and edit it if necessary to make it fit the space);
- choose the paper colour and book in the copy job with the print shop and ensure the hard copy pages are delivered on time, and sort out payment, or arrange for someone to do it;
- arrange for the finished copies to be collected and prepared for distribution, including a copy to each of the organisations we are doing tasks for – either doing this yourself or arranging for someone else to do it with you or for you;
- get copies to the next Group meeting so everyone can take some for distribution;
- email the final version of the task list to the Lincolnshire Echo (What's On/News Desk) and to whoever is managing our website.

- **Displays**

Promotional displays: sometimes we have a poster in Lincoln central library to promote our work, usually timed to coincide with a new issue of VOLE in January. There is a poster display board in the community area (near the children's library) that can be booked, free of charge, usually for up to a month. We have a poster that can be produced to the size of the board and is just pinned in place. You could offer to book the cabinet and put up/remove the poster.

Display materials: 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 use them at local volunteer or conservation events.

❖ TOOLS

We have a lot of tools which need to be maintained. We usually have a task in the summer which includes tool cleaning. You could help to look after our tools.

Whoever looks after the tools needs to:

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

You can also offer to collect the tools for a task if the task leader is not able to do so or it is easier for you to do so. And where do we keep the tools? The Group has an allotment on Long Leys Road. We have a storage shed on the allotment which is where we keep the tools. Several members of the group look after the allotment, and grow vegetables as well as wildlife friendly plants.

❖ REFRESHMENTS

We provide tea, coffee and biscuits at every task. We have a 'brew kit' which includes several flasks, mugs, supplies of tea and coffee, etc. Someone has to prepare the brew kit for each task.

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You could offer to do this occasionally, or take overall responsibility for the brew kit and for making sure someone does it for each task. Task leaders have other things to do and ideally do not want to have to do the brew kit too. Remember – if you volunteer to be responsible for the brew kit you do not have to do it every time, just make sure it is done. Or you might just choose to donate a packet of biscuits occasionally.

If you are going to prepare the brew kit for a task, you need to:

- contact whoever has it and get it from them before the day of the task
- check the stocks of tea bags, coffee, sugar, and biscuits. Group members get very disappointed if anything is missing, especially the biscuits (!). If you need to buy anything, keep the receipt and the Group will refund the cost (unless you feel you would like to donate it).
- buy milk or ensure someone else is bringing it.

On the day of the task you fill the flasks with boiling water, making sure there is enough for at least two drinks each; the task leader will let you know how many people are going, but it is always best to allow for an extra person or two.

❖ LEADING TASKS

Several members of the Group are actively involved in leading tasks and we are keen to encourage others to take on this role. You could just lead one task a year, or more. If you think you would be interested in leading a task but are not sure, why not offer to help one of the leaders so you can see what is involved?

If you lead a task, this is what you do:

- about a week before the task, contact the organisation for which we are working, to check that they are expecting us and to confirm the work (it sometimes changes because of weather conditions) and the tools we will need;
- you might have to visit to site, to see 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;
- email a reminder round to everyone in the Group, asking who is going to attend and if they need a lift or can give one (or ask someone to send an email on your behalf);
- coordinate transport, as we try to take as few cars as possible, particularly to tasks which are further afield;
- collect the tools, or arrange for someone else to do so;
- check that someone is doing the brew kit;
- prepare the Risk Assessment (required for our insurance) for which we have a standard form; you can prepare most of it in advance and complete it on the day.

At the task, you:

- make sure everyone is clear about what is being done and how it is to be done;
- go through the risk assessment;
- lead the 'tools talk' about safe use of tools, or ask someone else to do it;
- introduce any new volunteers and pair them up with an experienced volunteer if this will be helpful

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- decide the tea and lunch break times (members of the Group are very good at letting you know when they want a break!);
- during the day monitor the task to make sure everything is going to plan and that people are working safely ;
- at the end of the day make sure all the tools are collected back in and that the site is left clean and tidy;
- 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

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.

❖ ORGANISING THE TASK PROGRAMME

We have a good list of organisations for which we work but we are always happy to develop other contacts. The task programme is organised in 4-month 'chunks' and we try to get a balance of conservation content and organisations in each programme.

We currently have someone organising the programme. However, you may be interested in working with them, perhaps with a view to taking over in the future.

If you organise a programme, here is an idea of what you have to do:

- see if we have had any requests from organisations and whether or not they have asked for specific dates;
- put together a draft programme, looking at what we did at the same time last year and what we have done over the past few weeks, to maintain a balance of tasks;
- contact organisations to see if we can work for them, what they would want us to do and if the date/s we suggest are acceptable (perhaps getting some bookings for the next programme too); review all the proposed tasks and check that all the dates fit;
- confirm arrangements with the organisations;
- circulate details to members of the Group to get a leader for each task;
- send the final details (including grid ref and meeting place) to the person who is putting VOLE together, in time for the agreed print deadline.

You will also have to give an update at the business meetings, or arrange for someone else to do so, so that everyone knows how plans are going for the next programme. Members of the Group often contribute task ideas at the meetings.

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GROUP MEETINGS: CHAIRING OR TAKING MINUTES

If you feel like offering your services to take on one of these roles, both of them are straightforward!

Chairing: the week before the meeting you 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!). Make sure everyone is clear what the decisions are or who is responsible for Action Points. Make sure the venue and Chair for the next meeting are agreed. Close the meeting.

Minute taking: we have a fairly standard format for the Minutes which you can copy. Ideally the Minutes should be done within a few days of the meeting, so that everyone finds out about social events, and those responsible for Action Points are reminded of them and have time to do them. All you have to do is: take notes during the meeting; type up the Minutes; circulate them to all members (arranging for them to be posted to those not on email).

❖ 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 tea, coffee, etc; paying for VOLE or other publicity.

We raise funds through some paid tasks – 3-4 a year – and other activities such as car boot sales, Group T-shirts, etc. If you feel like organising a Group stall at a car boot sale, there is always something to sell and someone will help you. If you have other ideas for raising funds, talk about them at a task or let us know about them at one of the meetings.

WHO'S WHO IN THE GROUP – AT JANUARY 2013:

Co-Chairs: Julian and Jude

Treasurer: John T

Minute taker: Nicola

Programme organiser: Richard D; Niamh and Delphine taking over for May-December 2013

Tools: John C

Publicity: Laura D

VOLE: Shirley

EVERYONE CAN GET INVOLVED

THERE'S ALWAYS SOMETHING TO DO WITH LINCOLN CONSERVATION GROUP



SOME EXPLANATIONS

Coppicing

Coppicing is a traditional method of woodland management. Many trees such as hazel and birch make new growth from the stump or roots if cut down. In a coppiced wood, young tree stems are cut down to near ground level. In subsequent years, many new shoots emerge, and, after a number of years, the coppiced tree, or stool, is ready to be harvested, and the cycle begins again. If the coppice cycle is managed correctly it can increase biodiversity in the woodland because of the beneficial effects of varying light levels reaching the woodland floor, and the range of different aged trees and stools in the woodland.

Hedgelaying

Laying hedges is just one of the techniques in managing hedgerows. Other techniques include trimming and coppicing. Left unmanaged a hedgerow will continue to grow upwards and outwards and will eventually become a line of trees. Where farmers keep cattle or sheep a good hedge is essential, for although barbed wire or wooden fences can easily be erected they do not provide shelter like a hedge. Hedges are also important for our wildlife and for their scenic value. A good hedge affords shelter for livestock, and a precious haven for up to 600 plant species, 1,500 insects, 65 birds and 20 smaller mammals (including half of Britain's rarest).

A well-managed hedgerow is thick and bushy. Cattle will lean against a hedge and make gaps whilst sheep push through the base. Hedgelaying prevents this. The cut stems, which are bent over at an angle, prevent the sheep pushing through the hedge and the binding along the top makes the fence strong to resist the weight of cattle. Laying the hedge also tidies it up and encourages the shrubs to regenerate keeping the hedge bushy and healthy.

Properly laid using techniques that date back to Roman times, a good hedge will – with regularly winter trimming to maintain its strength and structure – be good for 50 years. To start you need to cut away the front and side shoots from the length of the branch to be laid, a process known as snedding.

Then, using a hedgelayer's billhook if they're thin enough, or a chainsaw if they're not, you cut part way into each stem at, or near, ground level, and lay the remainder – now known as a pleacher – towards the horizontal, along the course of the hedge.

Depending on the style (there are 30 regional variations), the smaller shoots branching off the pleachers – known as brush or brash – are pushed to the far side, or woven into it.

It's vital that the pleacher remains connected firmly to its roots by a section of bark and sapwood, so it will continue to grow. Nor must the pleachers be laid completely flat, or the sap won't rise.

Hazelwood stakes are sharpened and driven into the ground at 45cm intervals along the length of the hedge, and 'runners' or 'binders' – thinner shoots of freshly-coppiced hazel – are woven between the stakes to give the finished hedge its final strength. Finally, the tops of the stakes are cut off 10cm above the beaten-down runners, at a finished height of 1.4 metres.

Different styles evolved according to climate, farming practices and the type of trees and shrubs found to each region. Prime beef-rearing areas such as Oxfordshire, Leicestershire and Northamptonshire developed a dense, tough, bullock-proof hedge using multiple binders; mainly mixed and sheep-rearing areas such as Derbyshire needed no binders at all.

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Dry stone walling

Dry stone walling in Britain stretches back at least three and a half millennia, to the village of Skara Brae in the Orkneys, and the Iron Age brochs of northern and western Scotland. Dry stone walls are found in Britain, and elsewhere, where large quantities of rock and stone are found above the soil, and especially where trees and hedges do not grow easily because of the climate, elevation, strong winds or thin soils. This is why dry stone walls are most prominent in northern and western Britain, and often at the higher altitudes.

Dry stone walls are an important feature of the British landscape which should not be taken for granted.

As interest in environmental issues increases, dry stone walling sits comfortably within these parameters, being a sustainable product made from natural materials. Although initially appearing more expensive than fencing, with regular maintenance a dry stone wall could stand for 100 years and at the same time offer shelter and habitat for a wide variety of animals, birds and plants.