



# **VOLUNTEERING WITH LINCOLN CONSERVATION GROUP**

## **General Information**

# Nature Conservation Volunteers

## Making a Difference to our Environment

### LINCOLN CONSERVATION GROUP

### VOLUNTEERING WITH LCG

### General Information



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### WHO ARE WE?

The Lincoln Conservation Group (LCG) started life in October 1994. We are all volunteers. Members of the Group come from all sorts of backgrounds and are all ages (but please note that you must be 16 years or over to volunteer with us).

The Group is organised by a committee elected each year from our volunteers, consisting of Chair, Secretary, Task Organiser, Treasurer, publicity roles and Tools Officer. To see who's who at the moment, take a look at our website (under 'About us'). Workdays (which we also call tasks) are run by a group of leaders, also drawn from our volunteers.

We are affiliated to TCV (The Conservation Volunteers) and have our own insurance.

Joining LCG is a great way to get out into the local countryside, learn new skills, get some exercise and meet new people.

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## **WHAT DO WE DO?**

We carry out practical nature conservation work on two Sundays a month. 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!

Our volunteer workdays (which we call tasks) are held twice a month, on Sundays, usually the first and third Sunday of each month. They involve working on the wildlife havens in and around the city of Lincoln, although we also work on nature reserves further afield in Lincolnshire.

Once or twice a year we aim to have an away weekend task a little further afield, for example Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire or Norfolk. We stay in accommodation locally, sometimes provided by the organisation we are working for. There is a small cost for these away weekends – for our food and shared transport, and sometimes a contribution to the accommodation.

### **CONSERVATION WORK**

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. (See 'Explanations of what we do on task' – below.)

To get more of an idea of what we do and where, on our website there are reports about past tasks going back several years and descriptions of sites where we have worked. Look under Workday Reports and Places.

A new task programme is issued every four months, starting in March, July and November. The new programme is automatically emailed to everyone who is on our mailing list. The tasks are listed on our website (look under Workday Programme) and are also published in a programme leaflet. The Group is also active on Facebook and Instagram.

If you're interested but not ready to book onto a task yet, it's a good idea to get added to our email group anyway. You can request this via our email address:  
lincolnconservationgroup@gmail.com

### **SOCIAL ACTIVITIES**

The Group also organises social activities outside of the workdays, such as walks around nature reserves, cinema trips, picnics and occasional weekends away or holidays in various parts of the country.

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## HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

Volunteering on a task or tasks is the way to find out if LCG is for you. If you enjoy coming out on tasks, you might also want to join in with some of the organisational/behind the scenes activities.

### VOLUNTEERING ON TASKS

The task leader emails everyone on the group's email list during the week before the task, giving final details about where it is and what we will be doing. To join the task, reply to the leader and let them know that you are planning to go along. If you have any questions, just email back and the leader will be happy to help.

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

We meet at the site for 10 a.m. and work until 3.30-4.00 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.

We supply biscuits but please bring your own packed lunch, hot and cold drinks, etc. You need to wear old clothes suitable for outdoor work and sturdy footwear. You should also have an up-to-date tetanus vaccination (ask at your doctor's surgery).

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

Transport: If you don't have transport, we will do our best to arrange for someone else to give you a lift, so don't be afraid to ask. As petrol is expensive, we share the cost between the passengers and driver of each carload. It is suggested that a contribution based on 20p per mile per carload (rate at October 2023) 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  $30 \times 20p$  divided by 3 = £2, so the two passengers each give £2 to the driver.

### VOLUNTEERING FOR ORGANISATIONAL ROLES

If you've enjoyed volunteering with LCG, and are interested in doing more by leading or helping with one of the organisational roles, have a chat with one of the leaders.

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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.

If you would like to know more about how the Group functions, including the key activities involved in keeping it running, for example, how to lead tasks, see our Key Activities – What's Involved in Running LCG : Guidance for Volunteers (on our website; follow the 'LCG Handbook' link).

EVERYONE CAN GET INVOLVED

THERE'S ALWAYS SOMETHING TO DO WITH LINCOLN CONSERVATION GROUP

## EXPLANATIONS OF WHAT WE DO ON TASK

### **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 hedgelayers' 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.

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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.

### **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.