

Volunteer handbook



Everything you need to know to make
the most of your time with Trees for Life

treesforlife.org.uk



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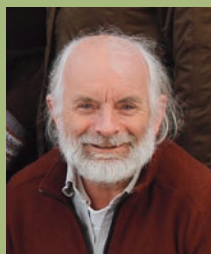
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Welcome to Trees for Life

A personal note from Alan



With the depletion and degradation of forests and other natural ecosystems continuing unabated and the planet's capacity to support life, both human

and non-human alike, diminishing with each passing day, the need for ecological restoration becomes ever more pressing.

At Trees for Life, we see our work as not only helping to restore the Caledonian Forest in the Highlands of Scotland, but also as part of a much-needed movement towards developing a positive and proactive relationship with nature, in which humanity once again lives in harmony with all other life. Our work forms part

of the healing and rewilding of the world, and it provides an opportunity for volunteers to engage in 'hands on' practical work of direct benefit to the ecological health of the Highlands. It also offers the opportunity for volunteers to receive a meaningful and empowering experience, in which they make a real and lasting difference for the future of all life on the planet.

Because most of our practical ecological restoration work is carried out by volunteers, you will be playing a vital role in the return of the Caledonian Forest when you participate in our award-winning programme of conservation volunteering. Thank you for contributing to our project, and I hope that your time as a volunteer will be a meaningful, inspiring and empowering experience.

ALAN WATSON FEATHERSTONE

Founder of Trees for Life

Welcome to the Trees for Life team. Your work towards the restoration of the Caledonian Forest is greatly valued, and we want to ensure you have all the information you need about Trees for Life and the conservation work you will help

to carry out. Our aim is to share knowledge and introduce our volunteers to new skills. We're so grateful for the work that you are doing to establish a wilder, reforested environment in the Highlands of Scotland.

We believe that volunteering can be an incredibly rich and rewarding undertaking. We are proud to offer volunteering experiences that centre around four key areas:

Contact with nature

Spending time working amidst the forests, rivers and mountains of the Scottish Highlands provides an opportunity to reflect on our environment and learn from the land itself; something that often touches people in a profound way.

Education

Conservation volunteers are exposed to many aspects of ecological restoration through practical work, discussions with group leaders and brief meetings with local rangers or land managers. There are also many opportunities to learn about local flora and fauna.

Helping the planet

Our opportunities provide volunteers with the chance to do something proactive to help the planet; empowering them to take positive action at a time when so much environmental news is negative.

Community

During our residential volunteering we live as a community, working together in the forest and sharing domestic tasks such as cooking the evening meal. Many of our volunteers form friendships for life as our groups work and live together, inspire each other, and encourage one another.



The Trees for Life story

The Caledonian Forest once covered a large part of the Highlands. It was Scotland's equivalent of the rainforest, but has now been reduced to just a tiny fraction of its former range. Most of the surviving forests consist of old trees reaching the end of their lifespan, with no new trees replacing them because of overgrazing by deer and sheep. Trees for Life is taking urgent action to conserve and extend these forests before it is too late.

Our work is about people as much as places. The majority of our forest restoration work is carried out by volunteers, with hundreds of people joining us from all over the world every year to carry out rewarding and enjoyable conservation work to restore native habitats.

Our volunteers have planted over one million native trees and are now working to plant a million more.



OUR CORE VOLUNTEERING

Volunteers are
CRITICAL
to all that we do, and contribute
to all aspects of our
WORK

Our volunteers are our most
VALUABLE RESOURCE

We would never achieve our
VISION
of a wilder environment
without their commitment and
SUPPORT

All of our volunteers are
recruited and treated on an
EQUAL
opportunities basis

Our staff and our volunteers gain
POSITIVE
EXPERIENCES
from working with each other
towards a common
GOAL



PRINCIPLES

At every opportunity,
VOLUNTEERS
are encouraged to
LEARN
and develop skills
during their time with us

We will work in
PARTNERSHIP
with our volunteers. We will
consult them on matters that
affect their experience

We promote long term
COMMITMENT
and/or recurring volunteering,
to develop personal skills and
**OFFER A
MEANINGFUL
EXPERIENCE**

Volunteer with Trees for Life...

...for a day

Conservation Days are well suited for those that live close to our Core Area. They involve practical tasks such as planting and monitoring trees in Glen Affric, potting seedlings at Dundreggan Nursery or rhododendron bashing at Garve. Project sites and activities vary for a range of interests and physical abilities.

...for a week

Trees for Life's Conservation Weeks have been voted the number one conservation volunteering opportunity in the UK. Working with up to nine other volunteers, you will undertake vital conservation work at sites throughout the Highlands, from the Isle of Skye to Dundreggan Conservation Estate. Volunteers share cooking and other tasks, and often form a close bond as they live and work together.

...in the office

There are many other skill sets which can add value to our work in our office. Writing blogs or articles to lending knowledge and experience to help with day to day tasks.



Overview of our work

Our Core Area covers 1,000 square miles to the west of Inverness and Loch Ness. Sites where we have carried out significant forest restoration work include Glen Affric, West Affric, Corrimony, Achnashellach, Glen Garry, the Isle of Skye and our own Conservation Estate at Dundreggan. We are now beginning to expand our work outside this area.

Our main office is in Findhorn, Morayshire, with our second office located at Dundreggan.



Dundreggan Conservation Estate

A lost world of biodiversity



Near Loch Ness in beautiful Glen Moriston, Dundreggan is Trees for Life's flagship forest restoration project. We purchased the 10,000 acre estate in 2008, in one of the largest land purchases in the UK specifically for forest restoration.

Dundreggan contains substantial areas of ancient woodlands, including remnants of the original Caledonian Forest, superb birch-

juniper woodlands and the largest expanse of dwarf birch in Scotland.

By planting trees at Dundreggan and encouraging natural regeneration, we aim to create an unbroken native woodland link between Glen Moriston and Glen Affric. Our vision is to turn Dundreggan into one of Scotland's finest native woodlands, abundant in wildlife and protected for generations to come.

The Tree Nursery

Our Tree Nursery is acclaimed as a national model of best practice. Based at Dundreggan, it is idyllically located next to tranquil birch woodlands. We are growing a range of native trees for planting at our project sites, including rare species such as dwarf birch and woolly willow, and are trialling innovative ways to propagate aspen.



Other key work sites



Glen Affric contains one of the best and largest fragments of Caledonian Forest. Its importance has been acknowledged through its designation as a National Nature Reserve.



The **Glen Garry** pinewoods are part of the Caledonian Forest Reserves area designated for special protection. The local herd of Highland cattle is very popular with our volunteers!



Glen Moriston, located south of Glen Affric, is important for black grouse, a rare and declining species, and improving habitat in this beautiful glen is a focus for our work.



Achnashellach is on the northern boundary of Trees for Life's Core Area. Much of this site is Caledonian pine forest, under-planted with non-native plantations.



We are working with Forestry Commission Scotland on a 18,000-acre site on the eastern side of the **Isle of Skye** to restore native woodland, heath and bog.



At **Corrimony**, we are helping the **RSPB** restore an area of moorland and former conifer plantation. The reserve offers the chance to see many rare birds.



Glen Strathfarrar is a hidden gem, protected at UK and European level. We are working on developing a rolling programme of forest restoration exclosures.



Ben Damph is a stunning location along the shore of Loch Torridon where we are helping with a large-scale rhododendron control programme.



Scatwell Estate sits on the River Conon. Our work here has focused on aspen conservation, in particular enhancing the largest area of aspen in our Core Area.



Conservation tasks

No previous experience of conservation work is necessary to participate in our conservation volunteering, but you do need to have a reasonable level of fitness. Each task begins with an explanation and safety demonstration. We provide all the tools and safety equipment you will need.

Planting trees

We plant trees in areas where the forest is unlikely to regenerate itself because of the remoteness of the nearest seed sources, or where we are aiming to increase the diversity of species. Planting usually takes place in exclosures – within fences that prevent overgrazing by sheep and deer.

Tree Nursery work

Volunteers help to sow seeds, pot seedlings, propagate rare trees and much more.

Wetland restoration

Encouraging bog to re-establish returns habitats to a more natural state and restores the lost biodiversity.

Felling non-native trees

Many sites that are now designated for Caledonian Forest restoration were formerly plantations of spruce and lodgepole pine. These out-compete native species so we tackle regeneration using bow saws and loppers. Nearly all weeks involve some non-native tree removal. At some sites we also work to remove rhododendron.

Fencing and tree guards

Some sites we work to have resident deer populations. Here we put up stock fences and tree guards.

Surveying & monitoring

This important work can include wildlife and vegetation surveys as well as following up on previous years' planting projects.

Partnership working

Trees for life works in partnership with a number of landowners, who are all in some way working to increase native woodland at various locations across the Scottish Highlands.

Forestry Commission Scotland

We have been working in conjunction with Forestry Commission Scotland for over 20 years and are involved with projects at Glen Affric, Achnashellach, the Isle of Skye, Glen Moriston, Glen Garry and Grudie Oakwood.

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

The RSPB own and manage Corrimony estate near Cannich, where the emphasis is on creating habitat for species such as the black grouse, Scottish crossbill and crested tit. We have been working on various projects across Corrimony reserve for over 15 years.

The National Trust for Scotland

West Affric is owned and managed by the National Trust for Scotland. This remote stretch of rugged land includes one of the Highlands' most popular east-west paths. The Trust is committed to protecting the wild quality of this important landscape, and has an ambitious woodland restoration project which we have been involved in for over ten years.

Other key partnerships

We also work in partnership with educational bodies, voluntary sector organisations and public sector services to include a diverse range of volunteers and to provide opportunities to those who will potentially benefit the most from what conservation volunteering can offer. Many of these partnerships develop through our existing volunteer network.



Your volunteer experience

At Trees for Life we aim to provide our volunteers with life-changing experiences. Our feedback shows that our volunteers value the opportunity to spend time in the wilderness, connecting with nature whilst developing new skills.





Learning & development

It does not matter how much you already know about forest conservation as there will be opportunities to learn, and we have roles to suit every level of expertise. We are committed to providing quality volunteer training and development opportunities.

We also aim to provide opportunities for those interested in a career in conservation to learn and enhance their skill set for the future.

Your volunteer experience will begin with an induction, which will include a walk around the work site. We will give you specific training relating to the conservation tasks you will be undertaking. Where further opportunities for training and skills development arise, we will take every step to train you in these areas.

We are committed to the development of volunteer knowledge and understanding about the Caledonian Forest, so this will form a large element of your experience with us.

On completion of your volunteering experience, we strive to offer you every opportunity for development within our organisation.



Supervision & support



Volunteers always have a named person as their main point of contact who will provide regular informal contact; giving feedback on progress, discussing future tasks, and ensuring we deliver on our volunteer experience pledge. Conservation Days and Weeks have a group leader who is the main point of support to volunteers.

We're here to listen

Volunteer feedback is vital to the development of what we do and through supervision and support we aim to give regular opportunities for volunteers to share their feedback, and be listened to and respected. We ask all our volunteers to complete a feedback form to inform our work.

Celebrating our volunteers!

We recognise volunteers and their achievements by sharing volunteering stories in our publications, on our website and social media, and by recruiting leaders from our existing volunteers.

We also have an annual Volunteer Awards initiative, inviting our volunteers and supporters to nominate their peers for special recognition.



The practicalities of conservation volunteering

The practical work we carry out is often in remote locations, sometimes requiring long walks over rough terrain. We go out in all weathers and tend to carry out tasks that require a good level of fitness. Although we do have work targets we encourage volunteers to work at their own pace and check regularly on the well-being of the group.

It is important that volunteers come prepared. Check out the basic kit list below:



A sleeping bag, towel and toiletries (including midge spray)



Wellies & boots



A small daysack, lunchbox & a flask for water



Warm & waterproof clothing & a warm change of clothes



A torch



A camera (because you won't want to miss a moment!)

If you have any medical conditions, or are taking medication, we need to know. Details are held in the strictest confidence. Please fill out the relevant section on the booking form.

Travel, food & accommodation

We provide transport from meeting points to our project sites. When overnight stays and week-long residentials are involved as part of the volunteering role, we source comfortable accommodation and provide your food.

Health & Safety

We take the safety of our volunteers very seriously. We constantly endeavour to provide a safe working environment with up to date, clear and safe working procedures for staff and volunteers. We regularly review and revise our Health and Safety Policy.

To ensure you are able to enjoy your experience in a safe environment, you will be issued with Health and Safety guidelines. We will ask you to sign this before you begin your work with us. We will make you aware of our policy during this time, which will include specific information on accommodation, vehicles and equipment.

In addition to your induction, you will be briefed at each work site by a leader or staff member. This will outline the risks on site and will include training on the work techniques that we will be using. We will provide Personal Protective Equipment and all necessary tools, which are maintained and replaced on a regular basis.

Our leaders and appointed members of staff are trained in First Aid, reporting accidents and all other Health and Safety aspects of our work. First Aid kits are carried at all times.

Other information

Insurance

All volunteers are covered by our Liability Insurance and limited accident cover. This does not cover personal belongings or free time activities, and you are advised to take out separate cover for this.

Expenses

We do not provide out-of-pocket expenses to volunteers.

Use of images

You may be included in photography which is stored and used by us. Please inform us if you do not wish to be photographed.

Confidentiality

Disclosures of personal information will only be shared with staff/leaders on a need-to-know basis. They will not be shared with third parties.

Resolving problems

Please let a member of staff know if you have a complaint, so that we can resolve the matter together. Complaints can also be sent by post or email. In the unlikely instance of serious misconduct, we may ask you to leave our work site.

Equality

Trees for Life is an inclusive organisation, and is an equal opportunities recruiter.



Further information

Our volunteering programme is developing and expanding all the time. To stay up-to-date with the latest news from Trees for Life, join our mailing lists by contacting volunteer@treesforlife.org.uk and follow us on Facebook and Twitter. You can also check our website (treesforlife.org.uk), which is regularly updated with information about new opportunities and Conservation Weeks.

Become a group leader

Leading our Conservation Weeks and Days is a hugely rewarding experience. This is a remunerated position, and we like to encourage all our experienced volunteers to apply to join this team. For more information, contact the Findhorn office.

Get in touch

Tel. 01309 691292

Email. volunteer@treesforlife.org.uk

Post. Trees for Life, The Park, Findhorn Bay, Moray, IV36 3TZ.

Restoring the C



Caledonian Forest



Thank you for volunteering with Trees for Life

Other ways you can support our work

Become a member

A great way to stay connected with the forest! Join Trees for Life and receive our magazine three times a year to keep in touch with all our work. You'll also receive 10% off volunteer Conservation Weeks and merchandise.



Dedicate a tree

You've been out to our work-sites, and you've seen first hand the difference that your work has made. You can continue to contribute to a wild forest by giving the gift of trees - a unique and lasting way to celebrate a special occasion.



Sponsor an acre

Sponsoring an acre is a great way to ensure that Dundreggan Conservation Estate remains a unique centre of biodiversity. You can choose your acre on our webpage and will receive a certificate and a beautiful photographic print of Dundreggan.



Get the look

Our online shop has a wide selection of gifts. Get the latest forest fashion by sporting our t-shirt, keep track of your schedule with our beautiful calendar and get your hands on our popular eco friendly shopping bags!



Visit treesforlife.org.uk/shop

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