



Wildlife Warden Training Leading Walks, Work Groups and Running Community Events



This course involves:

- Reading this document and confirming that you have done so
- Attending a Zoom meeting
- Completing and submitting a risk assessment task for approval

Please note: Just coming to the zoom meeting does not cover you with ACT insurance when leading a group or running an event!

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A. Background

Some Wildlife Wardens are keen to lead volunteer groups, organise guided walks or similar activities, run stalls at events or set up talks for their communities; this document and the Zoom training provides all the basic information you need to be able to do this.

After the zoom meeting you must create and send to the Wildlife Warden Coordinator a completed risk assessment for the sort of event you would like to lead as soon as possible after the training. When your Risk Assessment has been approved, you have then completed the training and you can lead events using ACT insurance.

Conservation work can be much easier, and more enjoyable, if it is done with the help of a small group, working together as a team.

Volunteer Groups, Guided Walks and similar events need a leader who is in charge of instruction, team-working and safety.

However, the team leader can use this document to delegate some tasks, such as:

- taking advance bookings
- being a first aider
- organising tools, and equipment
- bringing refreshments



B. Skills that a Leader Needs

However experienced a person is in carrying out a particular task, they need extra abilities if they are to lead a team, such as:

- Organising and delegating skills
- Training and experience in carrying out Risk Assessments before and during a work task
- Training and experience in making sure that everyone is aware of the risks and how to avoid accidents
- Being aware of what tasks, walks or events they can safely lead and asking for help when needed
- Good people skills - watching people and listening to them, and by doing so, getting to know them, and their abilities quickly
- Patience - some people learn practical work quickly; others need more help but can end up just as skilled
- Tact - if people aren't working as safely as they should, then the leader needs to quietly explain why and how to do it better. Most of us are sensitive to criticism and not everyone listens!
- Sympathy - people can come to walks and workdays for reasons other than a simple wish to help; this often includes loneliness, broken relationships, bereavement, depression, anxiety and a lack of confidence.

C. Planning a Task or Event Step by Step

Note: Power tools MUST NOT be used during volunteer tasks. ACT does NOT have insurance for power tools to be used during tasks, nor do we feel that it is safe to do so.

1. Decide where the task will be and what needs doing.
 2. Note the Grid Ref/GPS/What3Words for safety, in case an ambulance is needed.
 3. Look at the site, imagine the task being carried out and prepare a Risk Assessment - including any measures needed to reduce risks (see D).
 4. Decide how skilled the task is (see E. Task Types) and use that decision to fix maximum numbers and decide whether it is suitable for children.
 5. Fill in the details at the top of the Booking Form (F).
 6. Prepare a simple register form, for booking in on the day of the task (G).
 7. Make notes that you will need for the “Safety and Tools Talk” for your volunteers before you start the task (H).
 8. Read the Appendix to familiarize yourself with diseases and dangerous plants that you might be exposed to while working outside.
 9. Ensure you have a First Aid box and alcohol sanitizer to take with you. If you don't have a suitable one, contact Vicky to borrow one, allowing at least a week to arrange this.
- Note: If the task needs considerable skill, you may need to have a qualified first aider with you - contact Vicky if you are unsure.
10. Keep an eye on the weather in the run up to outdoor events and postpone or cancel if necessary.



If you are planning an event/talk/stall:

- Check the venue/site in advance for risks
- Check if it has insurance (e.g. a village or parish hall probably will)
- Check the capacity
- Make a note of the Wi-Fi code; grid ref/What3Words; unlocking and locking routine etc.
- If you have a stand at a fete or similar, make sure that any tables, gazebos and displays are safe in windy conditions.

If you are planning a walk:

- You need to walk it in advance and note down any risks.
- You will need at least one sensible helper for approx. 6 people, and two sensible helpers for 6-15 people.
- Walks usually take at least **twice** as long if you have a group of approx. 6, and nearly **three** times as long with a group of 6-15.
- More than 15 isn't recommended unless the leader and helpers are experienced.

D. Understanding Risk and Likelihood

The organiser/s should check the site before the task and make a risk assessment. This is essential for insurance purposes.

Wherever we go, whatever we do, we subconsciously or consciously assess the risks and decide:

- a) whether we should do the task, or
- b) whether we should do it differently to be safer.

We want our Wildlife Wardens and their helpers to keep safe while they are helping wildlife, so this is a **really important part** of the training. We want our Wildlife Wardens to think about the best and safest way to carry out a task, before they start.



Decide:

- What are the hazards?
- Who is likely to be harmed and how? (*include how many people*)
- What controls are already in place?
- Are existing controls working?
- What is the risk? (*the likelihood of things going wrong and the severity of the consequences*)
- Do you need to do more to further reduce the risk?

Ways to control risk:

- Eliminate the risk or find a different way of doing the task
- Reduce the risk e.g. allow more time, more/fewer people
- Control the risk e.g. by training people properly and by using agreed procedures
- Minimise impacts e.g. by using the right clothing or tools

Common safety issues:

- People working too close to each other; sharp tools and falling vegetation can be dangerous when you are too close.
- Chatting while using sharp tools or cutting down vegetation - resulting in loss of concentration and/or working too closely to hear each other.
- Using tools wrongly, so that they are dangerous to the user and/or others.
- Using the wrong tools for the job or for that particular person.
- Tiredness through over exertion or lack of fitness increases the risk e.g. the chance of stumbling.
- Inexperience and people's embarrassment about needing to ask for help.
- Bad weather and bad clothing - organisers need to know when to call a task off.
- The organiser may need to check that there are enough of the right sort of tools - and that the tools are in good condition.
- Trip hazards with leads and cables when setting up projectors etc. Bring tape with you to an event and ensure leads and wires are safe.



Tasks you shouldn't undertake with volunteers, or where you need to take special care:

Cutting vegetation that could include Hogweed and other related plants (Umbels).

- Please see Appendix 1 (pg.18)
- Survey sites before arranging a task and accurately identify umbels. These are dangerous in warm, overcast or sunny conditions and should not be tackled as volunteer task!

Ladders and step ladders (i.e. ladder with built in support)

- No work should be done using ladders longer than 2.5 metres
- The person on the ladder should not have their feet more than 1.25 metres above the ground
- There should be someone with you when you are using a ladder
- Always write, or discuss, a risk assessment with your companion
- The first task is to tie the ladder approximately 2m from the ground to something strong enough to take the weight of the person using it
- The person on the ladder should always have 3 of their 4 limbs on the ladder
- The person with you should not hold the ladder (it should be secured as described above). Otherwise, the person holding the ladder can be injured either by the person on the ladder falling or by the person on the ladder dropping a tool
- The companion can pass tools to the person on the ladder from the side

Power tools

- Power tools should never be used at ACT volunteer work tasks; they are usually dangerous, require skilled use and are noisy enough to prevent good and safe communication.
- If using power tools on a public site, you will **need permission and insurance** from the site-owner (e.g. Parish Council or similar). You will also need warning signs, hi-viz waistcoat/jacket and another person in a hi-viz jacket to keep walkers, children and dogs away.

Scything

- Scything shouldn't be a volunteer task unless your scythers have been properly trained
- Scything requires concentration, so those cutting may not notice walkers, children or dogs
- If you are working on a public site, **everyone** should wear a hi-viz waistcoat/jacket
- You will need warning signs and a person with a hi-viz waistcoat/jacket alerting other site users to keep away.

E. Preparing a Risk Assessment

If all the Likelihood scores x the Consequences scores = **6 or less**, then the task should be safe enough to do.

If any are **8-12**, then more measures are needed for that hazard. Rethink what could make it safer and recalculate the score.

If any scores are **15-20**, then the task and the way in which it is to be carried out need to be carefully rethought or rejected.
IT ISN'T SAFE.

Table 1c

Risk Score

| LIKELIHOOD | CONSEQUENCE | | | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|------------|---------------|------------|-------------------|
| | 1 Insignificant | 2 Minor | 3 Moderate | 4 Major | 5 Catastrophic |
| 1 - Rare | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2 - Unlikely | 2 | 4 | 6 | 8 | 10 |
| 3 - Possible | 3 | 6 | 9 | 12 | 15 |
| 4 - Likely | 4 | 8 | 12 | 16 | 20 |
| 5 - Almost Certain | 5 | 10 | 15 | 20 | 25 |

Example Risk Assessment (with a few examples of hazards)

Information about the task:

- Planting trees on sloping ground with volunteers
- The site is a public open space owned by the Parish Council
- The GPS/Grid ref/What3Words
- The task will be from e.g. 11am – 1pm
- Up to 10 members of the community will be booked in in advance and given full details of tools, clothing and snacks that they will need

| Hazard | Measures being taken to prevent the problem | Likelihood 1-5 | Consequences (seriousness) 1-5 | If L X C = 6 or less is acceptable |
|--|--|-------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Back injury from working for too fast, too hard or for too long. | Include this in the tool talk before the task starts. | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| Slip on muddy sloping ground causing a fall or strain | When taking bookings/advertising the task, ask people to wear suitable footwear, and warn them of steep, slippery ground | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| Bruises or cuts caused by working too close to others | Include this in the tool talk before the task starts. | 2 | 3 | 6 |

You will be sent a blank Risk Assessment form for you to keep and use.

For your Training Task, please fill in the blank RA form for the sort of task that you might do in the future and email it to Vicky asap. We will then assess and approve it.

F. Types of Tasks

Some tasks need a lot more expertise than others; only lead tasks you feel confident about and if necessary, co-lead with someone else.

These tasks don't need special expertise:

- Litter picking
- Work with secateurs/shears, such as cutting out brambles from a meadow or from the sides of a hedge or footpath
- Planting small plants, bushes and trees
- Manning a stall at an event
- Holding a talk in a village hall

These tasks need considerable expertise and experience:

- Making hedge banks
- Laying hedges
- Making or mending dry stone walls
- Working in water – for example ponds, ditches or other wet habitats. This includes events in water such as dipping for invertebrates.
- Scything

The task leader should decide on maximum numbers. Here are some guidelines:

- Six is the maximum number for a simple task led by a relatively inexperienced group leader.
- Nine is the maximum number for a simple task led by a more experienced leader.
- Skilled tasks must always be led by experienced people.
- Three is the maximum number for a skilled task, led by an experienced worker with little experience in leading a group
- Six is the maximum number for a skilled task, led by an experienced worker with **more experience** in leading a group.

G. Pre-booking People onto a Volunteer Task or Event

- Booking is best done in advance by phone or email so that the leader knows how many to expect and can, if necessary, limit the numbers.
- To abide by the Data Protection Act, it is essential that you only ask for necessary personal details and explain what you will do with this information. We ask that all Wildlife Wardens keep these details in a secure place for three weeks after the event before destroying them. Keeping these details for three weeks is important in case you need to contact people afterwards.
- Take contact details (phone number and email) of everyone who has signed up so that you can send them information about the event.
- When asking for contact details, you can copy this statement: *'This event is being organised by volunteer Action on Climate in Teignbridge Wildlife Wardens. If you would like to sign up for this event, please provide us with your email address and phone number so that we can send you more information. We will keep your personal details securely for up to three weeks after the event before destroying them.'*
- Some terrain or tasks may be too challenging for some people and advanced booking will give you the opportunity to give people this information.
- People may need advice about clothing and footwear (for the weather, ground conditions, ticks), and what they need to bring.
- They should be told where the meeting place is and whether there are toilets anywhere nearby.



- People should be asked whether they have any serious underlying health issues; if they have, then the leader will need to know some details - in particular, whether the person needs a friend to come along in case they are unwell. This could apply, for example, to someone with diabetes.
- For many tasks people should be over 16 years old. For some easier ones, for example, tree planting or litter picking, over 6-year-olds could be booked in, but **MUST** always be the responsibility of a parent or guardian; they must be clothed suitably with, for example, suitable gloves and clothes. The group leader must decide in advance whether they feel able to have children helping with a task and whether numbers should be limited!
- On the day of the event, **it is important** to ask for an 'In Case of Emergency' (ICE) phone number. Not everyone will have one so this should be asked for sensitively.
- We are often asked whether people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities can come. This is often a complex decision and the leader must feel satisfied, before taking a booking, that the person has sufficient help from a parent or carer, who **MUST** be responsible for the person.
- Under most circumstances, 3-4 hours is long enough for a 'workday'. It is long enough to achieve a really useful and satisfying result. If the tasks are too long then some older, or less fit people may feel unable to come.

An example of a booking form (the information at the top of it would be emailed to people who have booked in):

| Date and time: Sat 13 th Feb 10.00 - 13.00 | | | | |
|--|---------|-------|----------------------|---------------|
| Meeting place: Plashops Farmyard, TQ99 9YZ. We will put a sign at the top of the track. | | | | |
| Grid ref or GPS or What3Words: YZ 645 333 | | | | |
| Task: Hedge planting - using garden spades and lump hammers to knock in tree stakes. | | | | |
| Information for volunteers: Wear strong, comfortable clothes, gloves and footwear. Bring a drink and a snack. Please bring a garden spade if you can. | | | | |
| Toilet: In the farmyard by the barn. | | | | |
| Maximum numbers: 10 adults and a max of 6 children Any under 16s must be booked in and are the absolute responsibility of their parent or guardian (no more than 2 children per adult). | | | | |
| Name | Address | Email | Phone and ICE number | Health issues |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

H. Booking People in on the Day

Make sure you have a fully charged mobile phone with you.

Take the pre-booking form along to the task with brief health notes and ICE (In Case of Emergency numbers).

Keep it safe to comply with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and ask people to print and sign their name on it.

Fold it so that health issues are not visible to others.

I. Safety and Tool Talks

- Whether people are bringing their own tools or borrowing group tools, the leader should give them a brief inspection, checking for obvious defects (such as loose handles), appropriateness and, where necessary, sharpness.
- The leader should give an initial 'tool talk' at the meeting place, so that volunteers can carry their tools safely to the work site, especially if they need to follow narrow paths where people are walking in single file.
- Before starting work, the leader needs to give a clear outline of the reason for carrying out work and what needs to be done.
- A safety talk is essential - describing clearly the risks, and how the likelihood of an accident can be reduced.
- Another tool talk will be needed at the work site, including demonstrations of safe working methods. It may be useful to explain that we appreciate different levels of experience, but it is a requirement of the task that everyone listens to the tools talk. If someone arrives late, it needs to be repeated, or given to them to read.
- The leader should demonstrate, at least once, how to carry out key jobs.
- It is important to find out levels of experience, as some people will need 1:1 tuition.
- Recommending the best tool for a person to use can help prevent accidents and increase productivity e.g. small tools for small people.



- An up to date and fully stocked first aid kit should be available for people to use and placed in an obvious and accessible place - it should be big enough for the group size (kits are labelled with the number of people they will serve). Note: stick to listed contents - things must not be added in case of allergy.
- A First Aider can be named if there is someone present who has had appropriate, recent first aid training and is willing. For tasks where volunteers are learning to use sharp tools, a First Aider should be organised before advertising the task.
- If you are running a talk in a village hall for example, make sure you tell everyone about fire exits, toilets, hall rules at the start of the event.



J. Monitoring Your Team During the Task or Event

- Your responsibility is to your volunteers, rather than getting lots of work done yourself!
- Watch your volunteers carefully for dangerous working practices, signs of tiredness and, above all, working too close to each other! Always be tactful, but authoritative.
- Stop for a break after about an hour, so people can have a snack and a chat.
- Stop work, tidy up tools and the site, and finish promptly.
- Stop early if the weather deteriorates, or unexpected factors make your work hazardous.



Appendix 1: Infections and Plant Sensitivities that You and Your Helpers Should Be Aware About

(including special measures needed to prevent/reduce the risk of infection during outdoor and practical work)

i) Ticks and Lyme disease:

Some ticks (a small percentage) carry diseases which affect humans and animals; the main disease that humans can catch is Lyme disease.

Where do ticks live? Ticks have become a much bigger problem over the last 30 years and can now be picked up in short grass, as well as bracken and tussocky grass.

When are ticks active? In most months of the year, though the **peaks** in Devon are from March to June and August to November.

How can you reduce the risk of being bitten?

- clothe as much of yourself as you can, including tucking trousers into your socks.
- wear light-coloured clothes so that any ticks show up - they are very tiny before they have latched on and have sucked blood.
- use insect repellent if you can

What do you do if you have a tick?

Your main aims are to remove the tick promptly, to remove all parts of the tick's body and to prevent it releasing additional saliva or regurgitating its stomach contents into the bite wound (<https://lymediseaseuk.com/tick-removal/>)

- Remove it carefully with a special tick-removal tool or pointed tweezers (not blunt eyebrow tweezers).
- If using pointed tweezers grasp close to your skin and pull upwards without squeezing or crushing or twisting the tick.
- Only a small percentage of ticks carry Lyme disease.
- Watch the site for a circular skin rash around the site, which can appear up to 3 months after the bite.
- Be aware that a high temperature, headaches and muscle/joint pain are also symptoms of Lyme's disease.
- In either case, see a doctor **at once** as rapid antibiotic treatment is needed to prevent long-term illness.

ii) Staphylococcus aureus

This is a serious bacterial infection which many people carry but are unaffected by. However, in the context of practical conservation work, it can be introduced through scratches, particularly from blackthorn. It is important to take an alcohol-based hand disinfection on practical work tasks, for use when someone has a scratch and whenever soap and water would usually be used.

Symptoms: Any reaction, such as redness and swelling, should be carefully watched and anyone experiencing this after the workday should **always contact a doctor**. While many Staph aureus infections are mild and localized to the skin, the bacteria can also cause serious, life-threatening conditions such as sepsis if it enters the bloodstream. Symptoms of sepsis include fever, chills, sweating, rapid heart rate and breathing, confusion or disorientation, mottled or blotchy skin, a rash that does not go when you roll a glass over it and reduced urine output. **Any such symptoms should be treated as an emergency by calling 999.**

(<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/easy-read-signs-of-sepsis-and-what-to-do.pdf>)

Prevention: Wear long, strong, preferably leather gloves when cutting back scrub such as blackthorn. Ensure safe working distances.

iii) Leptospirosis/Weill's Disease

This is a **rare** bacterial disease which is spread in the pee from infected animals, most commonly rats, mice, cows, pigs and dogs. You can get leptospirosis if contaminated soil or fresh water gets into your mouth, eyes or cuts and can especially be a concern when working **in** ponds and waterways.

Symptoms are a high temperature; feeling hot and shivery; a headache; feeling sick or being sick or having diarrhoea; aching muscles and joints; red eyes; loss of appetite. It is important to tell your Doctor that you have been working with fresh water/soil. Antibiotics usually clear this up quickly.

Prevention: It can be prevented by good hygiene, using an alcohol-based hand disinfection whenever soap and water would usually be used. Any scratches should be well-covered before working in water - or simply don't work in water if you have scratches/cuts.

iv) Covid

Covid 19 is a very easily transmitted virus when working close to others.

No one who has recently been in contact with a person who is showing symptoms or has tested positive should come on a task.

Avoid touching, sharing tools and sharing drinks.

Government regulations and guidance should be adhered to.



v) Hogweed and others plant species with dangerous sap

Note: Work should never be done in hot, sunny weather! Even when it is cloudy and hot, burns can occur.

Which species have dangerous sap and where do they grow? Nearly all are plants in the 'Cow Parsley' family; the family includes some of our most useful plants (carrots) and some of our most poisonous (Hemlock). All of these can grow alongside paths and trails that are used by people. They are tall plants, that can fall over the paths after wind or rain. If they are bent or broken, they can leak sap onto passers-by – children can be especially vulnerable, and some dogs are too.

When planning a task, a survey should be carried out to see if any of these species are present. **If they are, then the task should NOT go ahead.**

Cutting this sort of vegetation is DEFINITELY NOT A SUITABLE VOLUNTEER TASK.

Risk Assessment shows that even with all possible precautions taken, some of the L x S scores are still too high, so the task should not be done.

If you are asked to carry out a task of this sort by any Council or landowner, then you should say that it isn't safe and explain to them the risks and consequences.

Hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*) is very common in many habitats, including gardens, meadows, and footpaths. Its sap can cause phytophotodermatitis after contact with the skin and exposure to UV light, leading to redness, blistering, and scarring. Healing can take a long time, and prolonged photosensitization or recurrence can be a significant problem.



Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*) is less common but can be locally very abundant beside hedges and in ungrazed/uncut fields. All parts of the plant contain coniine which, when ingested even in small amounts, can be fatal to humans. It is possible for the sap to also cause poisoning through skin contact, as well as photosensitivity, and may be inhaled in airborne particles too. Useful ID video: [How to Identify Poison Hemlock](#)



Hemlock Water Dropwort (*Oenanthe crocata*) is very common in wet, marshy habitats. It has poisonous, burning sap as well as very poisonous roots. A useful ID video: [How to Identify Hemlock Water Dropwort](#)



Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) is very rare in the Teignbridge area, but can cause **very serious burns**, so should always be looked out for. Giant Hogweed grows much taller than Hogweed - but even Hogweed can grow to over 2 metres (6' 6"). Here is a [video link](#) - but stop it to look at the photos - which otherwise are covered by words, hiding the plant! Here is a woodland trust factsheet with useful ID pointers: [Giant Hogweed: The Facts - Woodland Trust](#)



Cow Parsley and its look-alike cousins: some or all of these can cause photosensitivity; if in doubt, use protective clothing.

Spurges: Some people are sensitive to sap from Spurges.

Appendix 2. Ready to fill in Risk Assessment

(You should also have been sent a Word document that you can fill in and return).

Table 1c

Risk Score

| LIKELIHOOD | CONSEQUENCE | | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|------------|---------------|------------|-------------------|
| | 1 Insignificant | 2 Minor | 3 Moderate | 4 Major | 5 Catastrophic |
| 1 - Rare | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2 - Unlikely | 2 | 4 | 6 | 8 | 10 |
| 3 - Possible | 3 | 6 | 9 | 12 | 15 |
| 4 - Likely | 4 | 8 | 12 | 16 | 20 |
| 5 - Almost Certain | 5 | 10 | 15 | 20 | 25 |

Risk Assessment for Leading an Event

Note: ACT insurance covers Wildlife Wardens carrying out work specifically for wildlife where the owner of the site has given permission.

It covers Wildlife Wardens leading groups of people, who aren't Wildlife Wardens (including work groups, training sessions and guided walks), **as long as they have taken** the ACT Leading Volunteers Course. If you feel you have previous experience and use similar risk assessment methods, please talk to us beforehand.

Description of event/training:

Leader:

Permission from Landowner *(must be yes to be covered by ACT insurance):*

Task:

Group description:

Date and time:

Location *(Grid ref/postcode/What3Words):*

Insurance: Using ACT policy

Names of participants: *These should be listed on a separate form from the training document (under 18 accompanied by parent/guardian)*

Name of first aider *(Only essential if the task involves using dangerous tools such as billhooks, scythes):*

Note: The Likelihood x Seriousness score should be 6 or under. If it is over 6 and no more than 12, then look for measures that will reduce the risk. If it is over 12 then the task is too dangerous and needs to be completely re-thought.

| Hazard (what might happen that hurts somebody?) | Measures taken to prevent the problem | Likelihood 1-5 | Seriousness 1-5 | L X S 6 or under acceptable. |
|---|---------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|
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