



Volunteer Role Description: Naturally Native

Role: Biodiversity surveying (water vole and mink)

Purpose of role: To map water vole distribution; to reconnect isolated populations through habitat improvement; and to monitor mink populations using mink rafts.

Location: Various locations across the Tees Valley including our nature reserves. Local survey patches can be allocated using our 'Adopt a Patch' approach.

Volunteering Hours:

Water voles surveys: two surveys per year (between April and October). Surveys take 1 – 3 hours.

Practical habitat enhancements: work parties will be announced throughout the year.

Mink raft monitoring: once per week (all year round). Raft-checks take roughly 15 minutes.

Duration: ongoing

Availability: There are opportunities to engage with all three elements of the project.

Reporting to: Project Officer

Special Requirements: Water vole surveys, habitat management and raft monitoring all involve being outdoors (sometimes in shallow streams) so appropriate clothing and footwear is required. Maps of survey sites, recording sheets, tools and any other equipment will be supplied by the Trust.

Skills / Qualifications/Health criteria: Involvement in the project does not require any prior knowledge or experience as all training will be provided. However, due to the nature role, survey volunteers should possess good observational and recording skills. To be involved in practical habitat management tasks, volunteers should have a reasonable level of fitness. Surveying will take place either as part of a group or in pairs, so good communication skills would be beneficial.

Personal Qualities: Although this role does not principally involve working with the general public volunteers can come in contact with the public using our nature reserves and therefore we expect them to be polite and helpful wherever necessary, acting as representatives of the Wildlife Trust. As already stated, this work will involve working in

pairs or in a group, so communication skills will be helpful. Naturally we also want all volunteers to have an interest and enthusiasm for conservation!

Main Duties:

Water vole surveys:

- Walk a pre-agreed stretch of a water course, recording locations, images and characteristics of any water vole field signs encountered
- Submit records to Naturally Native project officer

Practical habitat improvement:

- Details of organised work parties will be circulated throughout the year. These may include scrub clearance and planting water vole food-plants.

Mink raft monitoring:

- Weekly checks of raft to ensure it is in good working order
- Use field guides to identify and record accumulated field sign (e.g. footprint, droppings)
- Submit records to Naturally Native project officer

Potential Risks: We expect all volunteers to use specialist equipment only when trained fully to do so (and in line with risk assessments), to be aware of others and their environments and also to contribute to general good housekeeping (keeping all working environments free of hazards). We have fully trained first aiders, first aid boxes, accident recording procedures and a health and safety policy which is available for all volunteers to read in the administration office or can be sent electronically.

Other Notes: Water voles have declined by 94% in recent decades, and will continue to do so without any intervention. Data collected through water vole surveys will enable us map remaining water vole populations, therefore allowing us to reconnect fragmented populations through strategic habitat enhancement. The non-native American mink is major driver of the water vole's decline. Deploying and monitoring mink rafts will enable us to identify locations with prevalent mink activity, which will allow us to focus our efforts to control mink populations. Naturally Native is therefore crucial in successfully reversing the decline of the water vole. This role is an also an excellent way to meet people and to learn important field survey skills, which would be particularly beneficial for anyone looking to gain employment in the conservation sector.