**Opportunity:** Practical conservation volunteer group member, working across Northern Devon. The group contribute to valuable habitat management and creation projects as part of the Northern Devon Natural Solutions project.

The Northern Devon Natural Solutions (NDNS) project aims to support northern Devon’s land managers to implement nature-based solutions in order to help tackle the climate and ecological emergency. Over a six-year period, the project will work with farmers, land owners, land managers, communities and volunteers to take action benefiting Devon’s environment. We will deliver a series of small-scale practical interventions to improve water quality, reduce flood risk, improve biodiversity and help to lock up carbon.

We are focusing on 36 waterbodies across the Taw and Torridge river catchments that have been carefully selected to deliver the greatest benefit. The project will encourage the use of natural solutions - habitat restoration and creation, enhancement of permanent pasture, natural flood management schemes and rewilding. By working with natural processes, we will be encouraging greater biodiversity, capturing carbon, and taking important steps towards making these catchments more resilient to climate change and extreme weather events.

For more details about the project, please visit our webpage: <https://www.devonwildlifetrust.org/northern-devon-natural-solutions>

Over the winter months, volunteer work will include tree and hedgerow planting, scrub management on priority grassland habitat sites and installation of leaky dams and brash bundles in small watercourses and ditches. In late spring and summer there may be the chance to undertake survey work and during the summer and early autumn we will be asking for assistance with harvesting wildflower seeds from species-rich grassland sites and removal of invasive Himalayan Balsam. The works will help to improve water quality throughout the catchments. As so much of our biodiversity relies on good quality, clean water, this is expected to lead to benefits for wildlife throughout the region. We will create and restore wildlife-rich habitats, in doing so we will be protecting and enhancing some of the most beautiful sites in Northern Devon.

Volunteer days may be on nature reserves, commons or privately owned land. Much of our work is with farmers and landowners who are enthusiastic about doing what they can for wildlife but don’t have the time and person power to available to achieve all they (and we) would like to. The extra help that a volunteer day contributes can make all the difference to getting a new hedgerow planted, wildflower seeds harvested or Culm grassland brought back into good management.

We are looking to build our volunteer network across the region in part so that we can improve local volunteering opportunities. Ideally we would not want volunteers to travel long distances to events and because of the large area covered by this project we know that travel to some sites will be prohibitive for some people. By signing up to this role you will be sent updates about activities and events and you can then pick and choose to attend those that suit your diary and location.

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| **Purpose:** |
| This volunteer role will help deliver practical conservation works across privately owned holdings, nature reserves and common land as part of the Northern Devon Natural Solutions Project. The volunteer group will help to manage and create various habitat types across the region. The work will contribute to improvements in water quality and reduction of downstream flood risk. There may be other tasks depending on needs and projects within the team. |
| **What the task involves:** |
| Planting native trees across the Taw and Torridge catchments in targeted areas to improve habitat connectivity, provide buffers along watercourses and to reduce flood risk.   * Planting bare root trees and firming in the ground * Securing stakes and shelters   Scrub Management:   * Use of hand tools (e.g. bowsaws, loppers) to cut down and process scrub. * Fires on site to burn up the arisings from the clearance work. * Working safely around staff members using chainsaws.   Swaling Culm grassland habitats:   * Controlled burning under supervision of experienced personnel. * Lighting the controlled burn using a butane gas torch. * Extinguishing small fires using a fire beater.   Surveying:   * Surveying for adult marsh fritillary butterflies in May / June * Surveying for larval webs of marsh fritillaries in late summer and autumn * Surveying grassland habitats which are undergoing restoration.   Seed harvesting:   * Assisting with mechanical and hand-harvesting of grassland species for use in habitat restoration projects.   Leaky dams and brash bundles   * Constructing and installing brash bundles and leaky dams * Working safely around staff members using chainsaws   Management of invasive non-native Himalayan Balsam   * Identifying and hand-pulling Himalayan balsam plants * Surveying sites where Himalayan Balsam control has previously be carried out. |
| **Skills and abilities** |
| All levels of ability welcome. For some tasks volunteers need to be able to work outdoors in poor weather conditions. No prior experience is required although a moderate level of fitness is recommended. All training in techniques and hand tool use will be provided by experienced project staff and regularly refreshed through tool talks. |
| **Where:** |
| Volunteering opportunities will be across Northern Devon in the Taw and Torridge river catchments. Exact locations to be determined closed to the event. |
| **When and how often:** |
| Approximately one or two days per month, weekdays only except in exceptional circumstances. Exactly which days will vary depending on staff and landowner availability. We will try to give a minimum of two weeks’ notice of upcoming days. |
| **Who is the supervisor:** |
| Supervised by at least one Northern Devon Natural Solutions Project Officer. |
| **Expenses/equipment available:** |
| Travel expenses will be covered in line with DWT volunteering policy.  Gloves are required for most tasks, in particular tree and hedge planting and brash bundle work as some plants will have thorns. Volunteers should bring their own gloves if possible. Hand tools such as loppers, bowsaws, hammers, mallets and spades will be provided.  It is advised to wear sturdy and waterproof footwear as we will often be working in wet / damp conditions throughout the day. Volunteers should also bring along plenty of layers, waterproofs and food provisions for the day. |
| **Health and Safety/ Risk Assessment** |
| Risk assessments will have been conducted prior to any volunteer days and will be provided before the event by the supervising staff.  Social distancing will be recommended.    During scrub clearance volunteers will be working around staff using chainsaws and felling trees and so need to be aware of safe working distances at all times. |
| **What’s in it for the volunteer?** |
| Biscuits! A chance to contribute towards valuable habitat management and creation work whilst gaining practical conservation skills. You will learn more about the habitats and species of Northern Devon and get the opportunity to visit privately owned sites in some of the most beautiful areas of the county. The days will be spent with like-minded individuals in a relaxing, rewarding and fun environment. It’s also a great way to improve fitness! |
| **How to apply** |
| Contact the Volunteering Team on [volunteering@devonwildlifetrust.org](mailto:volunteering@devonwildlifetrust.org) or 01392 279244. |

**Task review date: 15th November 2023**

**Task end date: 31st December 2025**