



Volunteer Handbook

A guide for volunteers of New Caledonian Woodlands Ltd

November 2011

New Caledonian Woodland's Volunteer Mission Statement

New Caledonian Woodlands exists to enhance the natural environment, inspire positive environmental behaviour change and improve mental and physical well-being. We do this via a range of environmental projects with a focus on hands-on conservation activity.

All of our activities are carried out with volunteers, who are fundamental to our aims and objectives. Volunteering opportunities at New Caledonian Woodlands should be a satisfying, rewarding and engaging experience.

Environmental Policy

New Caledonian Woodlands is an environmental NGO as well as being a social enterprise. We are here to play our part in preserving the planet at a time when the threats are daunting. We live in the age of peak oil, peak energy and possibly peak utilisation of many of the resources we take for granted. In the future we will have to make do with less and our successors will be amazed at how profligate and irresponsible we were with their heritage.

At New Caledonian Woodlands we try to be part of the solution, not part of the problem, although we are often tied into wasteful systems like everyone else, such as transporting our volunteers to site. We constantly strive to minimise our impact.

Our work always has a positive impact on the environment. We thin woodlands to encourage higher quality trees which can be used for durable products, which lock up carbon for a long time. We prune trees for the same reason. We stack the thinnings in our trade mark tipis to dry in the wood and make good wood fuel. The logs substitute for fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas, and are almost carbon neutral. We heap the smaller material in habitat piles to provide shelter for insects, birds and small mammals. We coppice trees for wood fuel and to increase biodiversity. We cut back invading vegetation like *Rhododendron ponticum* to let light in to the woodland floor and increase biodiversity. We build paths, bridges, sensory gardens, raised beds and bottle greenhouses to help people enjoy the outdoors, become more healthy and support other green projects.

Instead of all coming to a worksite in separate cars, we encourage car share and use a minibus for our weekend activities. The minibus is hired from a sister environmental organisation, the Green Team, and helps to support their activities. We always leave a site neat and tidy when we are ready to go home. We supply refreshments during the day and meals at weekends. We use organic food whenever possible, reducing the use of pesticides and fertilisers. We also buy locally sourced and Fair Trade food as much as we can, although trying to get all three in the same product can be quite a challenge. We support local businesses when we buy materials and repair & restore our tools when they wear out.

We encourage our volunteers to sign up to our Planet Pledge Project where they measure their individual carbon footprint and then take pledges to reduce it over the coming year with input and support from other pledges and our staff.

New Caledonian Woodlands isn't perfect but we think about everything we do, and with the help of our volunteers, we try and come up with solutions which ease the pressure on the planet.

General Information for New Volunteers

We run a variety of different volunteering events which we hope will cater for almost everyone. These include:

- Corporate Team Challenge Days
- Planet Pledge Project
- Woodland Re-skilling and Tree Planting Days
- Biodiversity Weekends

New Caledonian Woodlands weekends and day events are suitable for almost everyone. There are always a variety of different tasks that need doing and can be adapted to suit any age, gender, level of experience and fitness. Under 16s must be accompanied by an adult but are very welcome. Our events attract a range of volunteers from very experienced to complete beginners so they are open to everyone. We recognise that every volunteer who works with us brings a unique set of skills and experience that we value greatly. We want the project to be a positive experience for our volunteers, staff and the communities we are working with. We do all we can to make people feel at ease and expect all our volunteers to do the same.

Volunteer Roles

Conservation Volunteer

We are looking for enthusiastic volunteers to join us and take part in practical conservation work of all types using hand tools. We also expect our volunteers to assist in general housekeeping tasks on our residential projects such as cooking, washing up and cleaning.

Common tasks undertaken on New Caledonian Woodlands projects include:

- Tree planting
- Invasive species clearance and re-growth management
- Formative pruning and thinning of young woodlands
- Coppicing and pollarding
- Path maintenance and creation
- Community and forest horticulture

Planet Pledge Ambassador

We are looking for someone to join our Planet Pledge team to:

- Support the Planet Pledge project officer in researching the climate change and carbon effects of individual actions and lifestyle choices with particular focus on consumer behaviour.
- Market Planet Pledge and recruit participants from New Caledonian Woodlands existing projects and from wider contacts.
- Support project participants, giving personalised advice and making them aware of complementary organisations and services in their local area.
- Support New Caledonian Woodlands conservation project activities that incorporate environmental education elements.
- Support in the development and design of educational materials to underpin the Planet Pledge project.

- Carry out home visits to advise people how they can reduce their environmental impact under 5 key strands . travel, consumer behaviour, home energy, biodiversity and recycling.

Board Member

New Caledonian Woodlands is looking for enthusiastic new board members with financial and fund-raising experience and ideas on how we can utilise our natural environment to increase our environmental sustainability and thus tackle climate change.

The board usually meets bi-monthly, with meetings taking place by the wood burner in our cosy wee office in Crieff.

Application Process

We do not have a formal application procedure for our events; however we will ensure that all booking requests are confirmed by email and the booking procedure is made clear upon initial contact. This is:

- Upon receipt of a booking e-mail from a volunteer, a member of staff will confirm booking, usually by e-mail, and send out the next of kin and diversity monitoring form to be returned as soon as possible. We will also send out a feedback form at this time and we are grateful to volunteers taking the time to fill it in, as it helps us to address any issues and made sure we provide an even better service in the future
- Volunteers name will be added to the booking list and details of dietary requirements/medical conditions noted.
- A Project Details e-mail will be sent out at least a week in advance of the project start date
- Volunteers will be made aware of any changes to the project as soon as possible.

New Caledonian Woodlands do not take personal references as we feel they are not appropriate to the type of work we carry out.

The Volunteer can make payment by either cash or cheque to the project leader at the beginning of the project. Volunteers should, if entitled to a discount for any reason, make the project leader aware of this when they reply to the project confirmation e-mail to avoid any confusion on the day.

Tasks and accommodation do vary from project to project so please check the website or e-mail us for specific details of each event.

Adequate tools and equipment appropriate to the task will be provided but please come dressed appropriately for the weather. The majority, if not all of the working day, is spent outdoors in all weather conditions.

We provide transport for the majority of our events, usually a community mini bus driven by a New Caledonian Woodlands staff member who is a qualified driver. We encourage everyone to use the group transport provided but if this is not appropriate please get in touch with us to discuss alternatives. We often try to arrange several pickups along the way.

Unfortunately some of our projects are not suitable for people with mobility issues but please get in touch to discuss your situation and we will always try to suggest alternative opportunities (either with ourselves or other organisations).

Volunteers should feel free to work at their own pace; there is no obligation to get through a set amount of work. There are regular breaks and refreshments. Lunch will be provided and peoples dietary requirements will be catered for as long as we have prior notice.

New Caledonian Woodlands carries full public liability insurance and all relevant first aid and disclosure certification as well as minibus licences which we are happy to share with you on request.

Opportunities for Volunteer Development within New Caledonian Woodlands Projects

If you feel you have a specific skill or talent which we could all benefit from then please let us know. Also if you are looking to gain more experience within a certain area and would like to take advantage of the opportunity to do so while volunteering with us then get in touch as we would be glad to help.

There are lots of different areas where New Caledonian Woodlands can take advantage of the skills and experience of our volunteers. Some of these include:

- Communication skills
- Health and safety
- Species ID and ecology
- Local and task specific knowledge
- Catering . Contributing with catering is an integral part of our weekends. If any volunteers want to get more involved in the planning of food and menus or the actual meal preparation please get in touch with us.
- Activities and entertainment . If anyone has any good games or outings or local knowledge they would like to contribute please bring your ideas along, they are very welcome.
- Tools maintenance and talks . if anyone wants to help again just let us know.

These suggested roles and opportunities are entirely optional and volunteers are not expected to take on a specific role. Everyone just mucks in and helps out but if there is anything you would like to be particularly involved in or have any suggestions for other roles that you think might be helpful, please do speak to someone at New Caledonian Woodlands.

Opportunities for Volunteers Beyond New Caledonian Woodlands

New Caledonian Woodlands is happy to provide character and work based references for our volunteers. Please just contact a member of staff and they will organise it.

We will be looking into potential training opportunities e.g. John Muir awards etc for both staff and volunteers and will add this information to our newsletters. If any volunteers need a written record of volunteer involvement, we will be happy to help.

We currently hold a record of all volunteering hours which we can easily formalise and send out if required. It was decided by both volunteers and staff there was no benefit to volunteers

of a reward scheme or similar at this time although if this changes we would be glad to discuss again in future.

Privacy & Data Protection Statement

New Caledonian Woodlands takes the privacy of those registered with us very seriously and we do our utmost to keep it safe.

Personal information that you provide New Caledonian Woodlands with through registration or sign up forms such as your name, address and email address is used for the following purposes:

- Health and safety
- To keep you up to date with developments and changes within New Caledonian Woodlands and our programme of events.
- To conduct in-house research in order to improve our understanding of the needs of our volunteers. The results of all research and analysis will be presented as anonymous or aggregated information and will not reveal any personal facts about individuals.

All personal files are both password protected on the computer and, in the case of hard copies, kept under lock and key. If you ask not to be contacted by New Caledonian Woodlands again we will destroy all personal information that we hold relating to you.

Health and Safety

Health and safety is a top priority for New Caledonian Woodlands.

We will complete risk assessments in advance of all our projects and the leader will always have the risk assessment for the project with them on site. You are welcome to look at this risk assessment. Any questions or suggestions for improvement to our guidance for safe working are always welcome.

Please let us know of any medical conditions we might need to know about in advance of the project starting.

We always ensure there is a first aid kit on site and a qualified first aider leading or co-leading the project.

Volunteer and staff safety is paramount. Given this, we don't expect anyone to carry out a task if they feel at all uncomfortable with it. It is expected that volunteers should not put themselves or others at risk at any time during a project.

Support is offered through safety talks and informal training between staff and volunteers. If you have any questions or suggestions at any time throughout the project please let us know.

What New Caledonian Woodlands expects from our volunteers

We do not allow the consumption of alcohol or non prescription drugs at the work site on our projects.

Any prescription drugs that may impair your ability to operate safely please discuss with a member of staff before the project begins.

Child Protection Policy

New Caledonian Woodlands welcomes children and adults of all ages on our projects. However, we ask that any child under the age of 16 is accompanied by a responsible adult at all times. We will consider allowing responsible under 16 year olds without a parent or guardian to join us on projects and weekends where the task and accommodation is deemed appropriate but this will be considered on a case by case basis.

All precautions will be taken by staff and other volunteers to ensure the safety of everyone on the project and in particular younger volunteers but it is ultimately the responsibility of the parent or guardian to make sure their children are safe at all times.

There is a reduced rate for Children under the age of 16 to cover the cost of food and transport. All tuition, tools and equipment use will be provided free of charge.

All staff members have up to date disclosure checks and are fully first aid trained.

Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy

New Caledonian Woodlands welcomes children and adults of all ages on our projects. However, we ask that we be informed if any adult has a learning disability or behavioural issues that may cause problems for them, or any other volunteer or staff member at a project.

All precautions will be taken by staff and other volunteers to ensure the safety of everyone on the project, particularly in the case of more vulnerable volunteers. However, it is ultimately the responsibility of the individual to ensure they feel safe and confident with their allocated task and situation at all times.

All staff members have up to date disclosure checks and are fully first aid trained.

Equal Opportunities

New Caledonian Woodland events are suitable for almost everyone. There are always a variety of different tasks that need doing and can be adapted to suit different ages, gender, levels of experience and fitness.

Under 16s must be accompanied by an adult but are very welcome. (We have a separate policy that covers this in more detail.)

Our events attract a range of volunteers from very experienced to complete beginners so everyone is encouraged to come along.

We recognise that every volunteer who works with us brings a unique set of skills and experience that we value greatly. We want the project to be a positive experience for everyone. We do all we can to make people feel at ease and expect all our volunteers to do the same.

Diversity monitoring

We send out an equal opportunities monitoring form alongside our next of kin form to all volunteers with their project confirmation e-mail. If you do not feel comfortable completing this form please be aware it is optional and will not affect your application or experience with New Caledonian Woodlands.

Volunteer Expenses

If volunteers accrue unexpected expenses relating to the running of the project, we are happy to reimburse them.

To claim expenses, volunteers would be expected to fill out an expenses claim form and return this to us. We will make payment within 4 weeks.

If you think you are likely to accrue expenses and are not sure if you will be able to claim them, please get in touch first.

Please be aware this does not include travel to and from the pick up/drop off point or any meals out with those stated in the project details e-mail.

Cancellation Policy

Unfortunately we have recently been having problems on our weekend projects and re-skilling days with last minute cancellations and people not turning up. This makes it very difficult for us to break even on our weekends and will eventually mean that we have to put prices up to cover empty seats in the mini bus. For this reason we are asking that you give us at least one week's notice if you need to cancel so we have time to try and fill the space.

If you cancel with less than one week before the project start day we will be asking you to pay 50% of the full cost. We hope you understand that this isn't something that we want to do but our main priority is to keep the weekends as reasonably priced as possible to allow everyone and anyone to take part.

Resolving Difficulties

The staff member on duty will be there to respond to any incidents to the best of their ability. If a situation arises where a volunteer does something considered to be inappropriate by either a member of staff or a fellow volunteer then the project leader will have a quiet word at the time of the incident. If this doesn't resolve the issue, we will follow up with a phone call to discuss the issue upon completion of the project. We will make every effort to resolve any problems in a mutually amicable way, but the final decision regarding any action to be taken rests with the New Caledonian Woodlands staff team.

Equally, if a volunteer has a concern with a member of New Caledonian Woodland staff please contact another New Caledonian Woodlands member of staff to discuss the issue and we will make sure the complaint is investigated fully.



Staff Contact Details

New Caledonian Woodlands

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www.newcaledonianwoodlands.org

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Projects Manager - Works 4 days, in the office most Mondays and Fridays.
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Donald McPhillimy (donald.mcphillimy@newcaledonianwoodlands.org)

Environmental Projects Officer . Works 2 days from home and on site.
07810 324 407

Dawn Hickie (dawn.hickie@newcaledonianwoodlands.org)

Office Manager . Works 2 days, Monday and Friday.
07709 426 146

Liz Corke (liz.corke@newcaledonianwoodlands.org)

Planet Pledge Project Officer . Works 3 days, in the office most Mondays and Fridays.
07749 300 851

Lucy Zawadzki (lucy.zawadzki@newcaledonianwoodlands.org)

Good Wood Project Officer . Works 1 day on site.
07854 903 327

If you have a personal question or grievance the same procedure applies however if you would rather contact the individual directly please feel free to do so.