

Volunteer Handbook

(Last updated on 30/04/2026)



This handbook outlines our event structure, the key roles within the team, and how we work together to create fantastic events at your local rock pooling site.

Please read the handbook carefully, and when you are ready to sign up, you may find the link to the onboarding form on the last page of the handbook.



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A Warm Welcome

Thank you for choosing to volunteer with The Rock Pool Project. We are pleased to have you on board.

Our volunteers are at the heart of everything we do. By giving your time, knowledge, and compassion, you are helping to create meaningful experiences and positive impact for the communities we engage with and the coastal habitats.

This handbook has been designed to support you in your role, outline what you can expect from us, and explain how we work together to uphold our values.

Whether you're volunteering for the first time or bringing years of experience, your contribution matters, and your presence makes a difference. We are grateful you are here and excited to work alongside you.

Welcome to The Rock Pool Project!

Dr Ben Holt
The Rock Pool Project CEO



The Rock Pool Project

The Rock Pool Project is a not-for-profit community interest company founded in Cornwall in 2018, passionate about connecting people of all ages and backgrounds to the incredible wildlife found around our coastline.

By engaging with local communities and promoting scientific exploration, we aim to create a sustainable network of healthy, well-connected marine conservationists across and beyond the South West.

Big Rock Pool Challenge

Since October 2024, we have been focusing on our pioneer project, the Big Rock Pool Challenge.

The Big Rock Pool Challenge hosts free monthly BioBlitz Battles to engage people of all ages through a fun and friendly competitive way to explore rock pools and document marine life. The data collected will aid wildlife management and conservation efforts locally and globally.

As of April 2026, we have 10 hubs across the UK.



Our Mission



Inspire

Encouraging curiosity and action by engaging communities in hands-on citizen science and deepening their connection to local coastal environments.



Learn

Building knowledge and understanding of marine life and coastal ecosystems through hands-on exploration and community events.



Connect

Bringing people closer to nature and each other through events that foster wellbeing, learning, and a sense of community.

Our Funders

The National Lottery Heritage Fund

The Rock Pool Project has received funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund to launch the Big Rock Pool Challenge in 2024. The project engages local communities in rock pooling events to collect biodiversity data and protect marine habitats along the coastline in the south of England.

The ScottishPower Foundation

The Rock Pool Project has been awarded funding from the ScottishPower Foundation to expand the Big Rock Pool Challenge across the UK. Using the Bioblitz Battle approach, the initiative engages communities in local conservation.

Our Partner

Marine Biological Association

The Big Rock Pool Challenge is run in partnership with the Marine Biological Association, who lead on biodiversity data management, conservation data-sharing, and membership engagement.

Supported by:



In partnership with:



Hub Structure

Each hub is led by a leadership team of six volunteers: a Hub Leader, a Deputy Hub Leader, and four other Lead Volunteers. This team shares responsibility for planning and delivering events. The Hub Leader helps coordinate the group and acts as the main point of contact between events.

All other hub volunteers are Supporting Volunteers and help run the monthly events. During events, Supporting Volunteers may take on specific roles and be paired with one of the Lead Volunteers to assist them in their role for that event.

Before each monthly BioBlitz Battle, five key roles are allocated among the leadership team. For more details on all event roles, please see the next page.



Roles

Event Director

The main point of contact on the day.

- To deliver the pre- and post-event briefings to volunteers and participants.
- To ensure the event follows the planned schedule.

Lead/Supporting Social Media Coordinator

Capturing the event and sharing the excitement!

- Take photos and videos of interesting species and participants in action.
- Create content for social media

Lead/Supporting Safety Officer

Keeping the event safe for everyone.

- Conduct a dynamic risk assessment before the start of the event.
- Take note of potential hazards that require participants' additional attention.
- Logs any incidents or concerns to report back to The Rock Pool Project.

Lead/Supporting Data Officer

Ensuring accurate and exciting biodiversity records!

- Leads on verifying species records submitted through iNaturalist.
- Highlights top finds and rare species.

Lead/Supporting ID Station Officer

Helping participants discover marine species!

- Runs the ID station, where people can bring their finds to be identified.
- Assists with species verification and recording discoveries.

Supporting Volunteer

- Provide overall support at the event and assist and engage participants throughout.

How does our monthly BioBlitz Battle work?

Our monthly Bioblitz Battle is a fun, gamified citizen science event. Participants have 90 minutes to explore the coastline and record wildlife observations on iNaturalist, with each observation earning a rarity point.



At the end of the session, we see who has achieved the highest score!



How do volunteers run the BioBlitz Battle?

Pre-Event

- Sign up on Spond
- The Hub Leader ensures all roles are covered before each event, assigning lead roles and allowing supporting volunteers to choose theirs on Spond.
- Volunteer timings are listed on Spond. Volunteers should arrive at the beach at least 45 minutes before the event starts to assist with unloading equipment and setting up.

During the Event

Each person focuses on their role while also supporting the group. The Event Director is the go-to person for questions or unexpected issues.

- Volunteer briefing, equipment set-up, and dynamic risk assessment
- Participants arrive (all volunteers should familiarise themselves with the registration process and be confident to assist participants)
- BioBlitz Battle briefing
- BioBlitz Battle (90min) with ID station running throughout the event
- Participants debriefing
- Volunteer debriefing, pack down

Post-Event

- The team gathers for a short debrief to reflect on what went well, share any concerns, and plan improvements.
- Volunteers are expected to help with packing down.
- Help with verifying observations on iNaturalist to research grade before 3 pm the following Wednesday.

Our Stories

"I think TRPP is doing a great job of educating and involving the local community about nature and the environment. And is really supportive of the volunteers, despite feeling intimidated at first by my lack of knowledge, I've consistently felt appreciated and supported. Even when I've made mistakes, I've been gently educated and encouraged. It's a great community and a fantastic way of bringing diverse people together to share enthusiasm and knowledge."

Lisa (Castle Beach Hub)



"Volunteering with The Rock Pool Project has opened up my world to many opportunities and helped me grow socially as a person. It is an amazing way to learn about the intertidal environment and gain new skills whilst being involved in nature."



Ruben (Menai Bridge Hub)

Getting you onboard

- ★ Complete the volunteer onboarding form
- ★ Download and set up an account on Spond (a third-party app we use for volunteer communication)
- ★ A member of our staff will then get in touch and share a link to join the corresponding Spond group
- ★ New volunteers will attend a BioBlitz Battle
- ★ After you've attended your first event, the Hub Leader will add you to the hub WhatsApp group.

From there, you're officially part of the team! Welcome!



Communication

We use Spond (third-party app) to advertise volunteering opportunities, manage event sign-ups, assign specific tasks, and communicate with volunteers before and after events.



All volunteers are required to download the app and set up an account.

When you sign up for an event, we expect you to attend or notify us at least 3 hours in advance if you need to cancel. No-shows without notice impact event planning and make it difficult for the team.

Each hub also has its own WhatsApp (third-party app) group chat, along with a wider Rock Pool Project WhatsApp community, which is used as a secondary communication channel. You are very welcome to join these groups, but it is completely optional.

Please note that only The Rock Pool Project staff and Hub Leaders are authorised to add individuals to these WhatsApp groups. When using WhatsApp, all individuals are expected to follow the Code of Conduct outlined in our Social Media Policy* and communicate with others respectfully and appropriately.

*All policies are available to view and download at the bottom of our website.

Become a Lead Volunteer

Step into the role of a Lead Volunteer and help bring our events to life! You will play a vital part in making every experience fun, safe, and unforgettable. Simply chat with one of our staff members or your Hub Leader to find out what roles are currently available.

Lead Volunteers commit to attending at least 8 events throughout the year and take the lead in delivering our Big Rock Pool Challenge events (monthly BioBlitz Battle).

“I’ve loved being a Lead Volunteer. Being a volunteer was so much fun...but the addition of the leadership position has allowed me to enhance my skills in many areas, from leadership itself to species ID, data processing, and communication with the public.”

Sophie (Castle Beach Hub)



FAQs

Is there a minimum commitment requirement for Supporting Volunteers?

No, you can sign up to volunteer at our monthly BioBlitz Battle according to your availability.

What should I bring and wear?

We recommend comfortable outdoor clothing and sturdy, non-slip shoes or wellies. Bring a reusable water bottle and snacks if needed.

Do I need to be a marine expert to volunteer?

You do not have to be a marine expert to volunteer. Whether you're a seasoned marine enthusiast or just curious about our amazing rock pools, everyone is welcome!

Can I get involved if I am under 18?

All our volunteers must be 18 or above. If you are under 18, you are more than welcome to join us as a participant accompanied by an adult, as our BioBlitz Battles are open to all ages.



Ready to dive in?

Please take 15-20 minutes to fill out the onboarding form

