“Worries fade away”: volunteering on a wildlife



Sea Life volunteers

Volunteers on the People’s Porpoise Project in Pembrokeshire, Wales, tell us how they are benefiting from conserving marine life.

Page last updated: 5 July 2022

Since 2018, the Sea Trust has received £59,400 National Lottery funding for projects that are protecting porpoises off the Welsh coast.

For the Outreach with a Porpoise and People’s Porpoise projects, part of the work includes surveying the marine mammals from the coastline. Photography is used to track their behaviours and movements. This valuable research, which takes in habitat use and diet, is used in conservation efforts that aim to keep the porpoises thriving in the area.

Volunteers are vital to the survey work, and some have found the work to be hugely beneficial to their mental health.

Boosting wellbeing

Fran began volunteering to help her remain active when she retired in 2018. She said: “I have noticed several psychosocial benefits in terms of wellbeing.

“If I am having a bad day for various reasons, once I get to the project, collect equipment and start focusing my attention on the sea and what we are doing, other worries fade away.”

> Other worries fade away.
>
> *Fran, Sea Trust volunteer*

People in nature looking out to see with cameras

Volunteers focusing on the sea

Another volunteer, Eva, has also found the work rewarding. She said: “It has given additional structure to my week, providing beneficial and stimulating opportunities for meeting outside with a new group of friendly people.

“It has been great to learn a new set of skills from the very positive and patient team leaders, and fulfilling to know that we are contributing to really useful research.”

A sense of purpose

The work was paused for four months during 2020 during a national lockdown, but has started again. Telva, who also volunteers on the project, was grateful it returned.

She said: “As someone who struggles to the extreme with my state of mind and emotions and chronic pain, lockdown has been a very difficult time.

“But knowing that I can join in on surveys, if I can force myself out, has definitely been a lifeline and a point in the week to keep me going.

“On those occasions that I do make it out to survey it helps me remember I am not entirely useless to the world.”

The difference volunteers make

Porpoise in the sea

Helping porpoises ? and people ? to thrive

Project Officer Holly Dunn said: “This project would not be what it is without them.

“We would never be able to collect the amount of data or get the results we have. Having extra eyes on the water every day means we see more porpoises and we learn so much more about the species.

“And it’s not just the volunteers who reap the benefits here. With each volunteer, Sea Trust’s network and presence in the community grows and we can share our conservation message with more people.”

Wellbeing and volunteering in our projects

In 2021-22, we’re prioritising six outcomes in our funding in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. One of these is **people will have greater wellbeing**.

Read our wellbeing guidance to find out how your project can meet this outcome. We also have guidance to help you work with volunteers.





of Pembrokeshire's porpoises

Green Light Trust - Inclusive Conservation project



A Transport for Wales train

Boosting biodiversity at Welsh railway stations