



Residential volunteer placement information

Visitor Experience, Forsinard Flows Flows to the Future Project

Overall purpose of the role

This is an exciting opportunity to help us engage with a wide range of people and raise awareness of the global importance of the peatlands of Caithness and Sutherland, an area known as The Flow Country. The Flow Country is the best blanket bog of its type in the world and a key resource in the fight against climate change. The Flows to the Future Project is far reaching, ambitious and aims to significantly increase the level of conservation management and promotional activities currently being undertaken. More information about the project can be found at www.theflowcountry.org.uk.

You will work primarily with our Learning Development and Communities Officers to build upon our existing work and increase our reach across this large area. This includes developing learning sessions for primary and secondary schools, preparing and delivering events for local youth groups, organising and supporting a programme of community events across the Flow Country, contributing to our marketing and communications work and exploring the opportunities to promote the Flow Country to a wider audience.

This role is based at Forsinard but will work across the remote and beautiful landscapes of Caithness and Sutherland.

Length and duration of this placement

This role is available as a full seasonal internship, as well as a shorter residential volunteer placement. The full internship is for the duration of at least 6 months. We also offer this position for shorter periods of time, to accommodate for other commitments such as further education. The duration of the placement will be decided in consultation with the applicant. You are recommended to enquire about the options before submitting your application.

In this role you will gain:

As part of the Flows to the Future Team you will work closely with our project partners: Scottish Natural Heritage, the Highland Council and Environmental Research Institute (North Highland College UHI) enabling you to gain an understanding of each organisations work and experience partnership working. You will also work closely with schools and communities from across the Flow Country.

We will provide you with training in a wide range of engagement activities and environmental education skills through courses and shadowing. Mentoring will be led by Sjoerd Tel, Learning Development Officer and supported by Jonathan Ford, Communities Officer; Caroline Eccles, Project Manager; Gearoid Murphy, Advisory Officer and Judith Crow, Administrator. Input will also come from Forsinard reserve staff.

You will develop a wide range of knowledge and skills which will be of particular benefit to anyone pursuing a career in environmental education, community work or marketing and communications within the environment and conservation sectors. It would also be advantageous to other conservation careers as collaboration with the wider team will familiarise you with day-to-day reserve duties.

Main duties

Community work –

- Support the development and delivery of a programme of events across The Flow Country.
- Build connections with local community groups and individuals to develop projects.
- Support work to raise awareness to wider audiences e.g. promotion of our film, 3D landscape model and computer game.

Environmental education -

- Support development of resources for use with and by primary and secondary schools.
- Support learning visits at Forsinard, across the Flow Country and in local schools.
- Develop a summer programme to engage local youth groups with The Flow Country.

Marketing and Communications -

- Contribute to the project website and social media pages.
- Support public relations and marketing work.

You will be required to work evenings and weekends occasionally for which time off in lieu will be given.

Skills required

Essential:

- 18 years old or over
- You must be prepared to do a considerable amount of walking in remote areas over rough terrain, tasks and weather can be tough

- Full clean driving licence
- Effective communicator with the ability to motivate, inspire and enthuse others, as well as to form productive internal and external relationships
- Good organisational skills, with a familiarity with standard office software and a good standard of reading and writing
- The ability to lone and team work
- A flexible, friendly, sociable and professional disposition
- A willingness to develop public speaking skills and experience
- Experience of working with people of different ages and from different backgrounds.
- Able to represent the project well and act as an ambassador for its work.
- Some knowledge and a keen interest in the environment and conservation.
- An understanding of the importance of following Health and Safety practices and protocols



Desirable:

- Experience of group leadership.
- Confidence and experience of public speaking.
- Experience of living in shared accommodation.
- Experience of living in a remote rural setting.

PVG Registration

This role involves working with children as a main activity of the job and requires the job holder to be registered in the PVG scheme. The activities carried out are: School visits and outreach visits involving regular contact with children in a teaching role.

Development

This scheme is designed to give you the training and experience needed for a career in conservation. We will assist your personal development and progression towards a conservation career, but it is also important that you take advantage of the opportunities that will arise during the placement to learn new skills, gain new experiences and increase your conservation knowledge.

Accommodation at Forsinard

Free accommodation is provided in the Flows Field Centre, newly built in 2016. As well as a comfortable residential volunteer flat, the field centre houses our offices, an education room, a field lab and bunk room style accommodation for visiting groups. The volunteer flat has a shared social space for the five occupants, containing a kitchen, dining area and lounge space with a TV. There are five individual single bedrooms in the flat, three toilets, a shower and a bath with shower. There is access to washing and drying facilities. A vehicle will be available to travel from accommodation to the work sites, and for a weekly visit to the shops. The applicant will need to be comfortable living in a remote location, and have the ability to live harmoniously in shared accommodation. There is a train station at Forsinard.

How to apply

Please request an application form by e-mailing sjoerd.tel@rspb.org.uk. Please return your completed application form by post to “Sjoerd Tel, Flows Field Centre, Forsinard, KW13 6YT, or by email to sjoerd.tel@rspb.org.uk.

Applications are considered on an individual basis when they are received. As such, there is no closing date. When a position is filled, this will be announced on the Flow Country website and social media. Applicants will be notified about their application within one week. Interviews could be in person at our regional office in Inverness, via video link, or telephone.

About RSPB Forsinard Flows National Nature Reserve

Forsinard is the RSPB's largest reserve in the UK. It is part of the biggest expanse of blanket bog in Europe, the internationally important Flow Country. It is located in Caithness and Sutherland in the far north of Scotland. Peat has been forming here for thousands of years and reaches, in some places up to five metres in depth. As well as storing over 400 million tonnes of carbon, this area is a stronghold for a wide variety of wildlife, such as otters, water voles, red deer, mountain hares and hen harriers.

After remaining untouched for millennia, the Flow Country has undergone a massive change in land use over the last sixty years. In the 1980s, vast areas of the unique Flow Country habitat were destroyed through drainage and commercial conifer plantations, despite being treeless for over 4,000 years. The unfortunate result was huge damage to the habitat and the disappearance of much of the special wildlife.

In 1988, following a major campaign led by the RSPB in Scotland and the Nature Conservancy Council, a network of SSSI's was established to protect the Flow Country. This was followed in 1992 with the launch of a Peatland Management Scheme, which involved making direct payments to land owners and occupiers to support maintenance activities in this network of areas. In 2001, a partnership of RSPB Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Forestry Commission and Plantlife began a £2.8 million project, funded by the European LIFE programme, to bring conservationists and foresters together to restore damaged bog on a landscape scale.

Forsinard Flows reserve was established in 1995 and lies in the heart of the flow country. Practical restoration work in the area has included blocking drains across 15,600 hectares of blanket bog, using over 13,000 dams and removing trees from 2,200 hectares of former blanket bog. Re-wetting the drained peatland is allowing bog mosses and other vegetation to recover, helping to raise water levels and invertebrates return to their peatland niches. In turn, restoring the bog habitat on a landscape scale has attracted back wading birds like golden plover, dunlin and greenshank.

As well as being a centre for practical bog restoration and a hub for peatland research, Forsinard also attracts over 4,000 visitors each year. The RSPB visitor centre at Forsinard is housed in the former station buildings and is open annually between April and October. The reserve has two marked trails which allow visitors to explore the peatland habitat, discover the complex pool systems and gives them the opportunity to see some of the amazing wildlife on the reserve. Each year we host school groups from across the region. Through connecting our visitors and young people with the natural world we hope to inspire them to take an active interest in helping to protect the peatland environment and the complex range of plants and animals that live here.

The RSPB is a lead partner in the Flows to the Future project, a five year (2014-2019) Heritage Lottery Funded Project organised by the Peatlands Partnership. The Peatlands Partnership, is a partnership of organisations including The Highland Council, Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland, Environmental Research Institute (University of the Highlands and Islands), Plantlife International and individuals from the local community.

The aims of the project across the Flow Country which are currently taking place include –

- Restoring seven square miles of blanket bog habitat – removing forestry blocks, brash crushing and drain blocking on RSPB Forsinard National Nature Reserve.
- Promoting the Flow Country extensively as a key wildlife tourism destination to UK audiences.
- Creating improved and increased access, develop interpretation and learning opportunities for people across the Flow Country, including an active schools programme and other educational community activities.
- Developing linkages with a number of universities to further research and international collaboration.
- Creating community, art and cultural programmes.

The RSPB is the country's largest nature conservation charity, inspiring everyone to give nature a home.

The RSPB is a registered charity in England & Wales 207076, in Scotland SC037654

