



## **Volunteering for MARINELife Research Surveys**

Thank you for your enquiry about voluntary work with MARINELife (Registered Charity No. 1110884). Please keep this document safe for future reference.

As a leading scientific data-recording organisation for Cetacea and other marine life, we have been carrying out work in the English Channel and the Bay of Biscay since 1995. Our original and longest running project was the Biscay Dolphin Research Programme which was conducted on board the *Pride of Bilbao* from Portsmouth to Bilbao until the end of September 2010, when the route was withdrawn by P&O Ferries.

In 2005 we became a registered charity as MARINELife and under this name we now operate a range of other research surveys on ferry and freight routes from various ports around the UK.

Survey teams consist of two people – a team leader and one other. Ideally surveyors should be able to commit to MARINELife for at least a year or two. You might undertake two to four or more surveys a year depending on the personal time available, a willingness to travel to a variety of ports and the number of other people volunteering for each trip.

Research surveys are not whale-watching or bird-watching trips. As a new surveyor with MARINELife, no matter how experienced in identification and/or other surveys, you will be a trainee for at least your first survey and will be given guidance by your team leader in MARINELife survey methods, behaviour protocols, documentation and (if needed) identification. This is an important induction process for you.

As a trainee you will be given vital data recording duties that will mean filling in forms quickly and accurately during sightings. Immediately after your first survey your team leader will complete a trainee appraisal report and you will be asked to complete your own self-appraisal. These appraisals are confidential and help route coordinators to select teams with appropriate matching skills and experience as far as is possible.

A copy of the MARINELife Operating Procedures and Protocols will be emailed to you prior to your first survey. It includes a Surveyor Agreement to be completed in which you agree to abide by the survey methodology, bridge behaviour protocols and data confidentiality rules.

### **SURVEY ROUTES**

MARINELife's big ship surveys operate from passenger ferries or freight vessels on a monthly basis with the support of the shipping company. These ships provide a stable platform for making observations and save the considerable cost of chartering vessels. They operate on a set route which allows data comparisons to be made from season to season and year to year.

Surveys are subject to commercial sailing schedules so may be at weekends or during the working week. For any given route, however, the pattern is usually constant. All are return trips though for a few routes an overnight stay is required before the return journey. The exact dates and times for each survey are provided when team vacancies are notified by email.

For the current list of survey routes please visit [Survey Reports | MARINELife \(marine-life.org.uk\)](https://www.marine-life.org.uk/survey-reports)

## **COSTS TO VOLUNTEER SURVEYORS**

- Travel to and from the port.
- Parking in some departure ports (but please see the next section).
- Meals on some routes (again, please see the next section).
- Researcher polo shirt at cost price plus post and packing – see ‘Uniforms’ below.
- Hi Vis jacket/tabard for freight routes.
- Rarely, overnight accommodation at a local B&B if an early start is needed the following morning.
- B&B for one night in Warrenpoint on the Heysham route.

**We observe a no alcohol policy during surveys.**

## **FREE TO VOLUNTEER SURVEYORS**

- Cabin costs are covered by the shipping company but are not needed on one-day surveys. Some shipping companies provide two cabins and some only provide one which has to be shared with a same sex team member, a partner or a friend of the opposite sex.
- Meals are also provided by most shipping companies.
- Parking is provided free by most shipping companies.

Precise details are provided in the team vacancy emails from route coordinators.

## **TRAVEL INSURANCE**

We do not provide travel insurance for our volunteer researchers. We encourage volunteers to take out personal accident and travel insurance if they do not already have it. Rarely, ships may be delayed or cancelled due to weather, breakdown, medevac, etc., and MARINElife cannot pay any expenses arising from these, e.g., rail tickets booked for a specific date and time, B&B accommodation or cover costs related to medical or repatriation costs.

When travelling outside the UK researchers should take their European Health Insurance Card with them or GHIC to cover any qualifying medical costs whilst abroad. Please see further information at <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/travel-health-and-getting-healthcare-europe>

## **REQUIREMENTS**

The minimum age for volunteer researchers is 18.

**A full passport is required for international routes.** Alternative ID is acceptable on some routes e.g. Channel Islands, Warrenpoint, Belfast, and none is needed for the Lundy route.

Researchers must provide their own binoculars and we suggest that 8x42 or 10x50 or equivalent are used when on survey. However, compact or pocket binoculars are not suitable owing to the longer distances at sea. Surveys are normally conducted from the ship's bridge but are subject to COVID restrictions so wet weather clothing may be required. The ability to cope with the ship's motion under a range of sea conditions is important in order to maintain the research effort at all times.

We require that our researchers are familiar with the identification of cetaceans and/or seabirds at sea. MARINElife's work in research needs to meet strict scientific standards in order to be published in peer-reviewed academic papers, so some relevant experience with one or both these animal groups is important.

We realise that to gain expertise of cetacean and seabird identification it is necessary to spend time at sea and we therefore place great emphasis on the enthusiasm of each applicant to undergo field training as a trainee, helped by more experienced researchers.

## **WHAT IF I HAVE NO RELEVANT EXPERIENCE?**

For those with no experience of observing and identifying cetaceans and seabirds it will be necessary to gain some field experience with either of these groups. As a well-known and respected research organisation we need to ensure that our data collection is of the very best scientific quality. We therefore suggest the following ways of building these skills but there will be some personal expenditure and time commitment involved.

- Attend a one-day training course run by MARINELife at various venues around the country.

For details please visit:

[Take a training course | MARINELife \(marine-life.org.uk\)](https://www.marine-life.org.uk)

- Go on holiday whale-watching trips whenever you can.
- Go on cetacean/seabird watching boat trips from various locations around the UK or spend time watching from land. The following book will give you some ideas on where to go for cetaceans, but the locations mentioned are good for seabirds too:

*Whales and Dolphins of Great Britain: Where to Go and What to See* by Dylan Walker and Alex Wilson (Publ. Cetacean Publishing, 2007).

- Go on passenger ferry trips on big ships to observe marine wildlife from the outer decks and develop identification skills. This will help you to get used to making observations from higher decks where everything is seen from further away. It will also help you to evaluate your ability to cope with sea conditions and sea sickness.

While guidance on identification is provided during land-based training sessions using photographs or videos, there is no substitute for identification experience gained in the field.

## **ORGANISATION**

Each survey route has a MARINELife route coordinator. Once dates and times are agreed with the shipping company these are emailed to researchers on the General contacts list. Information is given on cabins (whether one or two provided) if relevant, whether parking and meals are provided free by the shipping company and if a Hi Vis jacket/tabard is needed. Researchers are invited to volunteer or 'bid' for any of the dates they can be available for. There is a closing date for these bids. 'Bidding' for available dates is an offer of availability and does not involve money!!

The route coordinator then selects teams according to identification skills and previous experience, whilst also trying to give everyone a fair chance to get on a survey. Everyone is informed by email whether they have been successful or not on that occasion.

The rota for the research teams is generally organised well in advance on most routes but occasionally we do have last-minute problems such as illness and this then gives new applicants an opportunity to gain a foothold by 'filling the gap'. Details are emailed by the route coordinator when this happens.

About a week to ten days prior to each survey trip the route coordinator sends a briefing email to the research team. Attached is a full information pack giving contact details and information on where to go and what to do. A copy of the MARINELife Operating Procedures and Protocols is also included when there is a trainee on the team. A trainee will also need to purchase a

MARINElife researcher polo shirt at this time and instructions for how to do this are included in the information pack.

## **UNIFORMS**

Teams work in a uniformed environment on the bridge of a ship when possible or an outside deck watch if COVID restrictions dictate, so all surveyors are required to purchase their own MARINElife researcher polo shirt, which bears our name and logo. For security reasons it is worn at all times in crew-only areas, including when conducting the survey on the bridge.

Researcher polo shirts come in unisex sizes S, M, L, XL and XXL and are sold at cost price and are currently £17 inclusive of postage and packing. Full instructions for purchasing the polo shirt will be emailed to you with the instruction pack for your first survey.

## **OTHER VOLUNTARY WORK**

We have volunteers in many capacities e.g., data input, giving talks ashore, and more specialised roles such as PR and IT management. Although many volunteers want to become involved with our ship-based research work, no single role is exclusive, so there is more than one way in which you can help us in our vital work for the conservation of whales, dolphins, seabirds, and other marine life.

You can spend as much time as you can spare, and we would be happy to discuss with you how you can become involved in our work ashore. As you can imagine, fundraising is a particularly important aspect of our work, without which our other research, conservation and educational activities could not take place. All that is needed is a sense of fun and perhaps some organisational skills.

In addition to our big ship surveys, we also operate some one-day small boat surveys from various locations on the English Channel and Northumberland.

We also provide educational guides on small boats in Lyme Bay, Dorset, and Wildlife Officers on some ferry routes to help passengers with wildlife sightings. Only the very best observers with good communication skills are selected for these.

If you would like to find out more about all our other voluntary work please contact Tricia Dendle, email [tricia.dendle@marine-life.org.uk](mailto:tricia.dendle@marine-life.org.uk)

## **WHAT TO DO NEXT**

Please complete the MARINElife Researcher Information 2023 document (including a colour passport-type photo) and return to [volunteers@marine-life.org.uk](mailto:volunteers@marine-life.org.uk)

In the document, please focus on the experience and skills you can bring to the work that we do. For ship-based research it is important that you highlight your experience with cetacean and/or pelagic bird identification (please mention species seen) and any other form of wildlife watching. Please let us know if you have obtained any of the qualifications listed in the document. It would also be helpful if you would give an indication of how flexible your availability is for survey work at short notice.

Your work history and education are not really relevant to us unless they are with cetacean or seabird surveys/research.

## **FINALLY**

It is a requirement that all our trainee research surveyors and research surveyors must become a Supporter of MARINElife to be eligible for surveys. Your support is important and will help to fund the vital research, educational and conservation work undertaken by MARINElife.

We keep all our supporters in touch with what is happening in MARINElife and the world of cetaceans and seabirds via our emailed regular newsletter.

If you are not currently a supporter, please follow this link

<https://marinelife.enthuse.com/Supporter#!/>

You can select the pre amount field or select I'd like to see other options... and enter either £3 or £5 depending on whether you are subscribing as a single or couple. Please also tick the gift aid box if you are a taxpayer.

Would you also please add in the leave message box whether this is for just yourself or for you and partner (add their name).

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best regards,

Rob Petley-Jones

Routes Manager

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Visit our website at: [www.marine-life.org.uk](http://www.marine-life.org.uk)



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