



# Residential Volunteer internship placement information:

## Practical Conservation, Forsinard Flows

### Overall purpose of the role

To support all aspects of work on - this internationally-important expanse of blanket bog, the RSPB's largest reserve in the UK. Assisting with the survey and monitoring, visitor and conservation science aspects of the site.

### In this role you will gain:

Valuable experience in a number of key areas including, natural history survey and monitoring skills, visitor operations, practical management, fieldwork and data management.

The knowledge and skills gained from these internships will be of benefit for anyone wishing to pursue a career in conservation in a variety of areas, including reserves, people engagement, habitat work, wildlife surveys and research.

We will provide formal and informal training in the three elements of the internships, to enable you to learn and develop in the role and help us to conserve this fantastic habitat.

## Main duties

You will spend one week in four on visitor operations, one week in four on the two Conservation Science research projects based on the reserve and two weeks in four with the reserve team undertaking surveying and monitoring, as follows:

Two weeks out of four you will be assisting with the reserve's survey and monitoring programme, this will include –

- Bird surveys – moorland bird surveys, monitoring other rare and vulnerable wetland species, farmland bird counts and raptor watches.
- Wildlife and habitat surveys – predator transects and deer surveys.
- Hydrological and ecological monitoring of habitat restoration areas.
- Introduction to data management and GIS mapping.

One week out of four you will assist with the visitor operations delivery at Forsinard, this will include –

- Meeting and greeting visitors in our visitor centre.
- Assisting with guided walks and other events.
- Membership recruitment
- Trail and infrastructure maintenance.

One week out of four you will assist with the two Conservation Science research projects on the reserve, this will include –

- Helping with the Common Scoter and Trout research project investigating the management of lochs used by breeding common scoters by assisting with a fieldwork programme that includes monitoring invertebrates, birds, fish and the physical properties of these lochs. A project outline can be found at <http://www.rspb.org.uk/forprofessionals/science/research/projects/363847-the-ecology-of-breeding-common-scoters-and-potential-conservation-approaches>
- Assisting with the Forest to Bog research project which compares different methods of restoration of blanket bog, learning about field trial design and how to monitor water tables using both manual and auto-logging techniques. Further details can be found at <http://www.rspb.org.uk/forprofessionals/science/research/projects/313910-from-conifer-plantation-to-blanket-bog-peatland-restoration-in-the-flow-country>.

## Skills required

### Essential:

- 18 years old or over
- Available for the full seven months
- Good level of physical fitness
- Driving licence
- Ability to identify key upland bird species by sight, song and call
- An understanding of the importance of working to methodologies and instructions, as well as keeping accurate and legible field notes
- A keen and broad interest in natural history and conservation
- An understanding of the importance of maintaining equipment and kit
- 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, especially Excel and a good standard of reading and writing

### Testimonial:

I had a fantastic time volunteering at Forsinard, surveying some of our most iconic birds and taking part in genuine conservation work in a unique landscape. I've never learnt so many new things so quickly, and I also gained the skills and experience I needed to begin a career working in conservation. I'm extremely grateful for the opportunity to volunteer at Forsinard, I would definitely recommend it!



David Jarrett now works for BTO and volunteered at Forsinard in 2013

- An understanding of the importance of following Health and Safety practices and protocols
- The ability to lone and team work
- A willingness to engage with the team

**Desirable:**

- Some knowledge of the RSPB as an organisation.
- Interest and some knowledge of the habitats in and challenges of UK uplands.
- Some ability to navigate by map, compass and GPS.
- Some experience in a people facing role.
- Experience of living in shared accommodation.
- Experience of living in a remote rural setting.

## 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, and there will be there will be excellent opportunities to learn new skills, gain new experiences and increase your conservation knowledge.

## 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.

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.

In 2001, a partnership of RSPB Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Forestry Commission and Plantlife began a five year £2.8 million project, funded by the European LIFE programme, to bring conservationists and foresters together to restore damaged bog on a landscape scale.

The RSPB is currently 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 Flows to the Future project across the Flow Country 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.

## Accommodation at Forsinard

The accommodation is provided in our new field centre, completed in October 2016. As well as a comfortable residential intern 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.

## How to apply

Please download the internship application form from the information page. Please return your completed application form by post to “Residential Volunteering Internships, Volunteering Development Department, RSPB UK HQ, The Lodge, Potton Road, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, or email to [Residential.interns@rspb.org.uk](mailto:Residential.interns@rspb.org.uk).

The closing date for application is 8<sup>th</sup> January 2018

Interviews will take place during week beginning 29<sup>th</sup> January 2018 and could be at our regional office in Inverness, via video link, or telephone.

Offers will be made week beginning 5<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

The successful applicant will be expected to start in the first full week of March 2018.

For further information about any of the locations mentioned above please see our website at <https://ww2.rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/>

If you would like any more information, or have any questions about the internship, please contact Claire Foot on 01641 571225, or [claire.foot@rspb.org.uk](mailto:claire.foot@rspb.org.uk).

Images

Shona surveying –  
Paul Turner

David Jarrett –  
David Jarrett

Ellie, Marina and ‘friend’ at  
The Caithness Show –  
Marina Bollo Palacios

Morven across the peatland –  
Andy Hay



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