

# NRS Mentoring Scheme

## Information for mentors



The Nest Record Scheme (NRS) is entirely dependent on skilled, committed and motivated volunteers. Currently almost 600 volunteers take part in the survey per annum, and around 80 new participants contribute each year. Training is important for equipping recorders with the skills needed to find nests and to carry out nest recording to a high standard, and so the Nest Record Scheme helps run training courses and also maintains a network of mentors.

Mentors are experienced nest recorders who can be contacted by other recorders for advice and training. They can help new nest recorders get started, they can demonstrate nest recording to those interested in getting involved, and they can help existing recorders who want to learn how to monitor new species.

### Who is eligible to be a mentor?

You do not need to be an expert on hundreds of species to become a mentor. Even basic tips about when and where the species that you focus on typically nest are of use to new nest recorders, many of whom are simply looking for reassurance that they are undertaking monitoring in a way that minimises disturbance. There is no obligation to cover species or habitats that you yourself are unfamiliar with. To take on the role of a mentor, you simply need to:

- Be registered with the Nest Record Scheme.
- Have substantial experience with at least one 'type' of nest recording, e.g. nest box monitoring, passerine nest finding, Sand Martin colonies, seabird colonies.
- Be able to commit to mentoring at least one new recorder per year.

### How do I register as a mentor?

To register, complete the accompanying registration form, indicating which part of the UK you are based in and which species you monitor, and return it to the address provided on the form. If at any time you wish to stop being a mentor, simply email us at [nrs@bto.org](mailto:nrs@bto.org).

### How will new recorders find and contact me?

Once registered, your approximate location, together with details of the species and habitats you are able to cover, will be displayed on an on-line map at [www.bto.org/nrs](http://www.bto.org/nrs), which website visitors are able to use to find a mentor and email them directly. On receiving a mentoring request, you will be able to correspond with the person, provide advice and, typically, arrange to meet for an introductory session.

How much time you spend mentoring a person will be entirely up to you—there will be no obligation to take on or continue mentoring an individual if you do not wish to. Demography Team staff will be on hand to assist with any issues or queries, and will also monitor requests sent so as to be able to offer assistance if, for example, a person is receiving rather a lot. If ever you are unable to offer help for a period, for example if you are away or already have enough requests to deal with, you will be able to request that you be listed as unavailable on the online map.

### How should I undertake my mentoring?

Mentoring is intended as an informal way for recorders to exchange knowledge and offer support, and it can be provided in a variety of ways, including giving advice over the phone, meeting recorders in the field for tutoring, and giving field demonstrations to people interested in nest recording. There is no structured protocol and mentors are encouraged to provide guidance in a way that they feel most comfortable doing. However, there are some basic principles that should be adhered to:

**Respond to requests promptly**—Get back to the person quickly, even if it is to say that you are unavailable for a while. If you receive a request but cannot or do not wish to reply, please let the Demography Team ([nrs@bto.org](mailto:nrs@bto.org)) know as soon as possible so a reply can be sent on your behalf. If you will be unable to respond to requests or offer mentoring for an extended period, please let the Demography Team know so that the mentors map can be updated to say that you are temporarily unavailable.

**Check whether the individual is a young person**—Young people (i.e. those under the age of 18) are asked to give their date of birth when requesting a mentor via the BTO website. If you are contacted by a person under the age of 18, you should either

follow the child protection policy (see below), or refer the person back to the BTO, depending on the terms you agreed to when registering.

**Check the individual is registered with NRS**—If you are contacted by someone who isn't a registered with NRS, the Demography Team will automatically send them a registration pack and will email you to let you know. If you continue to mentor them, please ensure that the person registers as a nest recorder.

**Assess the need**—Correspond with the person to find out what they require (which may not be the same as what they are asking for!). Requests will range from people wanting to know what nest recording is about to experienced recorders wanting advice on a specific species. Some people will simply request a chat via email or over the phone, while others will be seeking training in the field.

**Decide what you can offer**—Depending on both their needs and what you can commit to, decide how best to proceed. You do not have to commit to an extended period of training; even an hour spent tutoring a new recorder in the field will be of great help getting them started.

**Start with the Code of Conduct**—Start by covering the Code of Conduct, particularly if the person you are mentoring is new to nest recording. Doing this will both allay concerns the person might have about bird welfare and make clear from the beginning the standards that nest recorders are expected to follow.

**Emphasise the science**—Explain why the information is being collected and the importance of recording it in a standardised way. This will help those you mentor develop a conscientious approach to nest recording.

**Remember practical advice**—Remember to cover basics such as choosing a site, the importance of getting landowner permission, and the equipment to use, before getting into detailed field techniques.

**Be patient**—Many people will not have tried to locate and monitor nests before, and the learning curve is steep. Allow the person space to practice what you are teaching them and analyse mistakes constructively so that you both understand what went wrong and how it can be avoided next time.

## Frequently asked questions about being a mentor

**How much time will I have to commit?** It is well-worth registering if you can correspond with and potentially meet at least one person a year. Even an hour spent in the field with a new recorder can help them get started.

**Will I be inundated with requests?** Given demand for training to date, we do not envisage individual mentors receiving more than two or three requests per year. However, you can let the Demography Team know any time you are unable to take on additional requests and we will update the online map to say you are not available for the time being.

**What about species I don't know about?** Details of the species and types of nest recording you are happy to give guidance on are requested on the registration form and subsequently displayed on the online map. If someone contacts you about a species or technique you feel unable to advise on, you can refer them to the Demography Team.

**Can I decline any particular request?** Yes, but please let the Demography Team know so that the person can be put in touch with a different mentor.

**Will I have to travel to meet new recorders?** Not unless you want to. The person making the request is expected to travel to you if you agree to meet them.

**What about people under the age of 18?** There are special guidelines and a policy for mentoring young people (*i.e.* those under the age of 18), which are detailed below. When registering as a mentor, you can choose whether you wish to receive requests from young people or whether you wish to restrict your mentoring to people over 18 years of age.

**What about Schedule 1 species?** Under the terms of Schedule 1 licences issued by the BTO for ringing and nest recording, up to two people may accompany a named licence holder as helpers, meaning they may approach a nest under the direct supervision of the licence holder. A Schedule 1 licence therefore covers most mentoring activities, so long as you possess the appropriate licence. For more details about provisions for Schedule 1 helpers, please see the terms of your Schedule 1 Licence or contact the BTO's Licensing Officer, Jez Blackburn ([jez.blackburn@bto.org](mailto:jez.blackburn@bto.org)).

## Mentoring people under 18

To ensure the safety of young BTO fieldworkers (*i.e.* those under the age of 18), the BTO has developed guidelines for undertaking fieldwork with young people (see below) and also a Child Protection Policy for NRS Mentors (also below). NRS

mentors are expected to follow both the guidelines and the policy. In addition, mentors who intend to regularly supervise young people are expected to register with the relevant national vetting scheme and allow the BTO to check that they are registered. Please contact the NRS Organiser on 01842 750 050 or at [nrs@bto.org](mailto:nrs@bto.org) if you have any questions about mentoring young people.

### **Guidelines for Undertaking Fieldwork with Young People**

There is no lower age limit for taking part in BTO surveys, and the BTO wishes to encourage young people to develop an early interest in bird research. However, for the benefit of all parties, we do require written parental consent before allowing any person under 18 to take part in a BTO survey on their own account.

If you will be undertaking fieldwork with a young person who is not your own child, it will help safeguard the interests of the child, yourself, and the BTO, if you observe the following guidelines:

- Review your plans in the light of the young person's capabilities: they may not have the same physical strength, stamina, or emotional development as an adult.
- Make sure that the young person fully understands any risks associated with the fieldwork and the measures you have taken to mitigate them.
- Modify your behaviour so that it is appropriate to the young person's age and maturity; consider the appropriateness of, for example, smoking, swearing or making suggestive comments.
- Problems can arise through differences of perception, either on the part of the young person or of other adults: avoid touching in ways that could be misconstrued as sexual or physical abuse.
- Where practical, avoid being alone with a young person who is not your child, or tell someone where you will be going and what you will be doing.
- Respect young people's privacy, for example during toilet breaks or when changing clothes.
- Take care with photographing other people's children: it is advisable not to do this without obtaining the parents' permission.
- Be prepared to voice your concerns if you believe a child's safety or welfare may be at risk. If possible, do this with the person responsible first.

The NSPCC offers a variety of resources for understanding and dealing with child welfare issues, including a Child Protection Helpline. See [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

### **Child Protection policy for NRS Mentors**

- Check peoples' age when they make contact. Young people (*i.e.* those under the age of 18) are asked to give their date of birth when requesting a mentor via the BTO website.
- When responding to a request from a young person, ensure that a parental consent form has been completed and returned to the BTO. The parental consent form can be downloaded from [www.bto.org/sites/default/files/u15/downloads/taking-part/nrs\\_reg\\_form.pdf](http://www.bto.org/sites/default/files/u15/downloads/taking-part/nrs_reg_form.pdf) or requested from the Demography Team ([nrs@bto.org](mailto:nrs@bto.org)).
- Observe the BTO's Guidelines for Undertaking Fieldwork with Young People (see above).
- If you intend to regularly supervise young people, you must first contact the Demography Team about registering with the relevant national vetting scheme. You will be required to register with the scheme or provide the Demography Team with details if you have already registered. You must allow the Demography Team to check you are registered.
- When meeting a young person, ask that they be accompanied by their parent or guardian, at least for the first meeting.
- When meeting a young person, if they are not to be accompanied by their parent or guardian, provide clear information to the parent or guardian about the meeting, telling them when it will start, roughly when it will finish and agreeing how and when the young person will get home. Leave your contact details (mobile phone number) with the family.
- When meeting a young person, ensure that Risk Assessments are appropriately reviewed in view of the young person's age and capabilities.
- Concerns about the safety and welfare of young people should, if they cannot be resolved locally, be reported to the NRS Organiser (01842 750050).
- Ensure that the young peoples' personal details are kept confidential.