

A2. Taking action for nature: volunteer time spent in conservation

Type: Response Indicator

Summary

The amount of time people spend volunteering to assist in conservation in part reflects society's interest in and commitment to biodiversity.

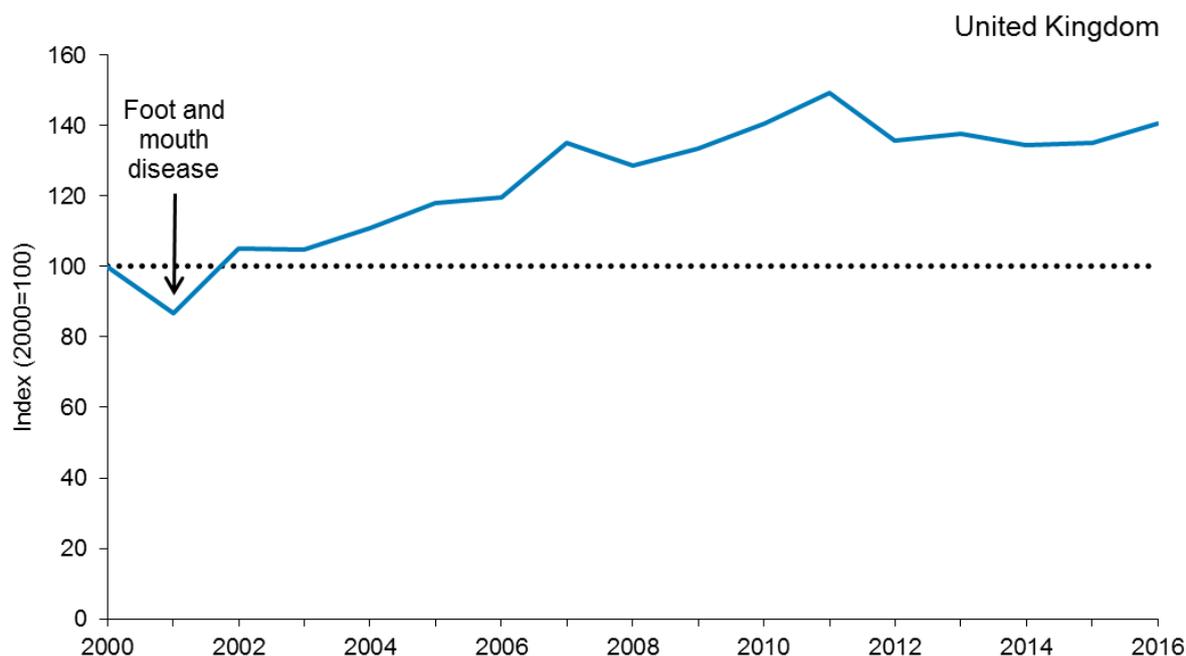
Between 2000 and 2016, the amount of time contributed by volunteers in the UK has increased by 40%. It decreased by 6% in the 5 years to 2016, but in the most recent year available, the amount of time spent volunteering has increased by 4%.

The indicator is assessed as increasing over the long term and showing no change over the short term.

Indicator Description

This indicator presents an index of the number of hours worked by volunteers for 13 UK conservation charities and public bodies (including National Parks England which represents all National Parks in England – see background section for a full list). Conservation volunteering includes any voluntary activity for an organisation or community undertaken to: further the understanding, protection or enjoyment of the natural environment, including wildlife recording and surveying; practical countryside management; providing education, training and guided walks; and administration or other office support.

Figure A2i. Index of volunteer time spent in selected UK conservation organisations, 2000 to 2016.



Notes:

1. The index is calculated using a non-weighted aggregation across organisations. It is therefore strongly dependent on the trends reported by the organisations recording large amounts for total volunteer hours.
2. Historical data were not available for all organisations in all years. To make best use of available data and to allow a combined index to be compiled, interpolation estimates have been used to fill gaps. Further details are given in the background section.
3. Data provided by The Conservation Volunteers, Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority, Natural England, the Canal & River Trust (formerly British Waterways), National Parks England, RSPB and The Wildlife Trusts were for financial years rather than calendar

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years. Financial year data have been assigned to the first calendar year (e.g. 2016/17 data were allocated to 2016).

4. The data series has been revised since the 2017 publication due to some organisations, most notably The Wildlife Trusts, providing updated figures for previous years (see background section for further details).
5. The methodology used to calculate the interpolated estimates was also revised in 2018. This chart is therefore not comparable to those presented in previous publications.

Source: Bat Conservation Trust, Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland (formerly Botanical Society of the British Isles), British Trust for Ornithology, Butterfly Conservation, Canal & River Trust (formerly British Waterways), The Conservation Volunteers, Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority, Natural England, National Parks England, Plantlife, RSPB, The Wildlife Trusts, Woodland Trust.

Assessment of change in volunteer time spent in conservation			
	Long term	Short term	Latest year
Conservation volunteering	 2000–2016	 2011–2016	Increased (2016)

Indicator description

A decrease in time spent volunteering between 2000 and 2001 can be attributed to a decline in all conservation activity due to controls on countryside access during the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak. The small peak in volunteer time in 2007 was largely driven by an increase in volunteer numbers at The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) which initiated a number of large youth programmes in that year. The 2011 high point, however, was driven by increases in the volunteer hours reported by 9 of the 13 organisations in the indicator and the subsequent decrease in 2012 was due to a drop in the number of volunteers across 7 of the organisations, most notably: the British Trust for Ornithology, The Wildlife Trusts (TWT), TCV and the RSPB. These changes reflect (i) the cyclical nature of some projects undertaken, such as tree planting and work on specific nature reserves and (ii) the revised methodologies used to survey and record the number of volunteer hours.

The indicator has increased slightly since 2014 and while TCV figures showed a substantial decrease from their peak in 2007, they now appear to have levelled out. Finally, while most organisations are reporting similar or lower numbers of volunteering hours compared with those they reported in 2011, Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority are reporting a 2-fold increase in volunteering hours and The Canal and River Trust a 4-fold increase. The latter has been actively recruiting additional volunteers since 2011 and was formerly known as British Waterways until 2012.

The assessments are based on 3-year averages from the baselines; the long-term assessment uses the 3 earliest consecutive years available.

Relevance

Volunteer time is one way of assessing the level of public engagement with biodiversity. Volunteering for conservation charities is critical to the successful delivery of many of the objectives of the country biodiversity and environment strategies – for example, volunteers collect much of the data used for monitoring the status of species and also undertake practical work to manage threatened habitats.

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Background

The indicator is based on data on volunteer hours supplied by 13 conservation charities and public bodies operating in the UK:

- Bat Conservation Trust
- Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland (formerly Botanical Society of the British Isles)
- British Trust for Ornithology
- Butterfly Conservation
- Canal & River Trust (formerly British Waterways)
- The Conservation Volunteers
- Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority
- National Parks England
- Natural England
- Plantlife
- RSPB
- The Wildlife Trusts
- Woodland Trust

National Park data for England is now collected through the National Parks England Head Office, rather than by contacting individual National Parks directly.

Table A2i provides information on whether the organisations contributing to the indicator provided data for the whole or part of the United Kingdom or Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales).

Table A2i. Organisations contributing data to the indicator

Providing UK- or GB-wide data	Providing data for part of the UK
Bat Conservation Trust	Canal & River Trust (formerly British Waterways)
Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland (formerly Botanical Society of the British Isles)	Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority
British Trust for Ornithology	National Parks England
Butterfly Conservation	Natural England
The Conservation Volunteers	
Plantlife	
RSPB	
The Wildlife Trusts	
Woodland Trust	

Some organisations were able to provide accurate figures for the number of hours worked; others provided estimates based on the number of volunteers and an estimate of average days worked by their volunteers each year.

Data are not available for all organisations in all years. For the current indicator, missing values have been estimated by Defra statisticians. In the historical dataset estimates have

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been used in the index calculations for the Canal & River Trust (formerly British Waterways) (2000–2009), Butterfly Conservation (2000–2002), The Conservation Volunteers (2000–2005), Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority (2000, 2001 and 2003), National Parks England (2000–2008), Natural England (2000 and 2002), Plantlife (2000–2006), The Wildlife Trusts (2000–2003 and 2006), and the Woodland Trust (2000 and 2001). The estimates were based on (a) the trend in the data provided by the organisation, and (b) the trend in the data provided by other organisations for the missing years. The number of volunteer hours has been converted to an index (set to 2000 = 100).

The methodology used by conservation charities can change from year to year. This can cause fluctuations in the data, particularly where there are revised methods used by charities that have previously recorded large amounts for total volunteer hours. In 2014, TWT improved their methodology to more accurately record volunteer hours and to only report activities undertaken by registered volunteers, rather than those undertaken by registered and casual volunteers. This resulted in a 40% drop in recorded hours for that year. As TWT accounted for 20% of the total number of volunteer hours in 2014, this change had a noticeable effect on the overall trend and it was largely responsible for the significant fall in the indicator from 2013 to 2014 that has been reported in previous publications. It also had a negative impact on the short-term assessments of this indicator reported in 2016 and 2017. Rather than continuing to allow this methodological change to adversely affect the results, when the actual fall in volunteer hours was much smaller than that previously reported, Defra statisticians have obtained additional information from TWT. This information has been used to scale the data from 2000 to 2013 in such a way that it now provides estimates for volunteering that are broadly equivalent to those provided under the new methodology. While the chart, values and accompanying [datasheet](#) are therefore not comparable to those in previous publications, they do present a clearer trend for conservation volunteering in the UK since 2000.

In broad terms, the type of work undertaken by volunteers falls into 4 categories:

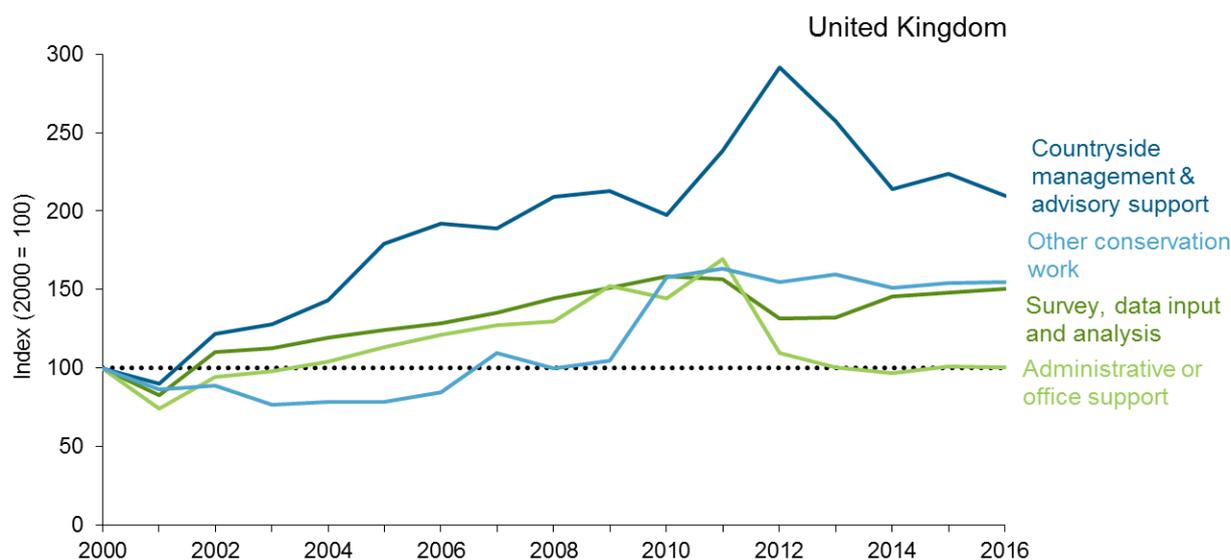
- Countryside management and advisory work;
- Surveys, data input and analysis;
- Administrative or office support; and
- 'Other conservation work', which includes activities such as fundraising, training and educational events.

Not every organisation provides the breakdown of volunteering hours shown in Figure A2ii, and therefore the trends shown in this figure are different from the overall assessment in Figure A2i.

Volunteer hours relating to surveys, data input and analysis have increased slightly in 2016 whereas hours relating to countryside management and advisory work have decreased. Volunteer hours relating to the other 2 categories, 'administrative or office support' and 'other conservation work', have remained similar between 2015 and 2016 (Figure A2ii). The 2011 to 2013 peak in countryside management and advisory work was driven by several organisations, most notably the RSPB and the Woodland Trust reporting a higher than average number of volunteer hours for this category. The sharp rise in hours relating to other conservation work in 2010 was driven by the RSPB and the sharp fall in hours relating to administrative or office support by the British Trust for Ornithology, the latter reporting an end to the 'Bird Atlas Project' as a reason for the decrease. Historically, organisations have reported that changes are due to shifts in strategic focus that result in significant adjustments to projects such as tree planting. They have also cited the need to consider changes to volunteer numbers in order to comply with health and safety regulations. .

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Figure A2ii. Index of volunteer time spent in selected UK conservation organisations, shown by category of work, 2000 to 2016.



Notes:

1. Interpolated estimates have been used to fill missing years for Butterfly Conservation (2000–2002), Natural England (2000 and 2002), Plantlife (2000–2006) and the Woodland Trust (2000 and 2001).
2. The data series has been revised since the last publication in 2017 due to some organisations, most notably The Wildlife Trusts, providing updated figures for previous years (see background section for further details).
3. The methodology used to calculate the interpolated estimates was also revised in 2018. This chart is therefore not comparable to those presented in previous publications.

Source: Bat Conservation Trust, Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland (formerly Botanical Society of the British Isles), British Trust for Ornithology, Butterfly Conservation, Natural England, Plantlife, RSPB, Woodland Trust.

Goals and targets

Aichi Targets for which this is a primary indicator

Strategic Goal A. Address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss by mainstreaming biodiversity across government and society.



Target 1: By 2020, at the latest, people are aware of the values of biodiversity and the steps they can take to conserve and use it sustainably.

Aichi Targets for which this is a relevant indicator

Strategic Goal A. Address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss by mainstreaming biodiversity across government and society.



Target 2: By 2020, at the latest, biodiversity values have been integrated into national and local development and poverty reduction strategies and planning processes

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and are being incorporated into national accounting, as appropriate, and reporting systems.



Target 4: By 2020, at the latest, Governments, business and stakeholders at all levels have taken steps to achieve or have implemented plans for sustainable production and consumption and have kept the impacts of use of natural resources well within safe ecological limits.

Web links for further information

Reference	Title	Website
Bat Conservation Trust	Home page	http://www.bats.org.uk/
Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland	Home page	https://bsbi.org/
Canal & River Trust	Home page	http://canalrivertrust.org.uk/
Association of Inland Navigation Authorities	Quantifying the extent and value of volunteering in relation to inland waterways	https://www.aina.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/AINA-Volunteering-Report-Apr11.pdf (PDF, 508 kb)
The Conservation Volunteers	Home Page	http://www.tcv.org.uk/
British Trust for Ornithology	Home page	http://www.bto.org/
Butterfly Conservation	Home page	http://butterfly-conservation.org/
Plantlife	Home page	http://www.plantlife.org.uk/
Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority	Home page	http://www.lochlomond-trossachs.org/
Natural England	Home page	https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england
RSPB	Home page	http://www.rspb.org.uk/
The Wildlife Trusts	Home page	http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/
Woodland Trust	Home page	http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/
National Parks England	Home page	http://www.nationalparksengland.org.uk/

Full details of this indicator, including a datasheet, are available at:

<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-4253>

Last updated: July 2018

Latest data available: 2016 (and financial year 2016/17)