

**Volunteering in the natural  
outdoors in the UK and Ireland:  
A literature review**

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## **1. Introduction**

The Tomorrow Network is undertaking a piece of research on behalf of the Countryside Recreation Network (CRN) to explore volunteering within the natural outdoors throughout the UK and Ireland. The Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) was asked by CRN to complete a literature review as part of this project. The review drew predominantly on literature referring to the UK and Ireland, but also considered international sources.

The aims of the literature review were:

1. To explore current policies and agendas affecting volunteering within the natural outdoors, and also throughout wider forms of volunteering.
2. To investigate the characteristics and levels of volunteering within the sector, including key challenges and issues.
3. To explore current and future trends in volunteering within the sector, including those trends affecting wider forms of volunteering.

The literature review was based on an extensive review of existing literature. This included databases such as the Social Sciences Citation Index, BIDS, ARNOVA (the Association for Research on Non Profit Organisations and Voluntary Action) and the Foundation Center's Catalog of Non Profit Literature. It also included libraries such as the integrated catalogue of the British Library, the library of Volunteering England and the John Hodgson Library online catalogue. The Voluntary Sector Studies Network (VSSN) was also used to identify appropriate literature. Key search words included 'volunteering', 'voluntary action', and 'community'; and 'nature', 'conservation', 'environment', 'ecology' and 'heritage'. Online searches of the internet were made using Google and Google Advanced Scholar. The websites of major environmental and conservation organisations (e.g. BTCV, the Wildlife Trusts and the National Trust) were searched to identify literature describing their volunteering policies and practices.

Over 150 abstracts of academic and policy research reports were reviewed in the process. This figure was narrowed down to 80 research reports, strategies, evaluations, books and other publications which informed the final literature review.

## **2. Definitions**

Firstly, it is important to clarify what we mean by volunteering itself. The Volunteering Compact Code of Good Practice, the agreement between the government and the voluntary and community sector, defines volunteering as "an activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or individuals or groups other than (or addition to) close relatives" (Home Office, 2005, p.4). Davis-Smith (2000) in turn highlights the four key characteristics of volunteering as: that it should not be undertaken for

financial gain; that it should be undertaken in an environment of genuine freewill; that there are identifiable beneficiaries or a beneficiary; and that there can be formal and informal types. Activities that meet these definitions also encompass both formal and informal volunteering. The government's Citizenship Survey defines formal volunteering as that which takes place through "groups, organisations or clubs" while informal volunteering as an activity takes place independently of such structures, as an individual (Kitchen et al, 2005).

Secondly, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by the 'natural outdoors'. The Tomorrow Project decided upon 'the natural outdoors' as the working definition for the project following a consultation meeting in November 2006 with key stakeholders working within the sector. The natural outdoors was taken to cover the public open and outdoor environment, including flora and fauna, biodiversity, wildlife habitats, countryside, and urban parks and green spaces. Volunteering in the natural outdoors therefore includes any activity taking place in relation to these spaces that meets the Compact (Home Office, 2005) and Davis Smith's (2000) criteria of volunteering. It includes those activities of a practical and direct character, such as habitat conservation, working *within* the natural outdoors. However, it also includes activities of a more indirect character, such as volunteering in offices and in administration roles in conservation organisations, working *for* the natural outdoors.

Literature does not use the term 'the natural outdoors' to specifically describe volunteering within the sector; instead, it most commonly uses the term 'environment'. There are some forms of volunteering in the environment that do not meet the Tomorrow Project's definition of the natural outdoors, for example, volunteering in relation to recycling programmes or lobbying for carbon reductions, and these will therefore not be discussed in the literature review. A considerable body of literature refers to volunteering in 'nature conservation'. This has perhaps the closest relationship to volunteering in the natural outdoors. Where relevant, the study will also refer to volunteering within heritage conservation, as this frequently can take place within the natural outdoors. Volunteering will therefore be discussed in relation to the environment, nature, conservation and heritage throughout the literature review. It will, however, use the term 'the natural outdoors' when it is considered appropriate.

### **3. Breadth and type of volunteering**

Volunteering in the natural outdoors has considerable breadth. The range of activities can be structured using Davis Smith's (2000) typology of volunteering. He identified four types of volunteering: mutual aid or self help; philanthropy or service to others; participation; and advocacy and campaigning. Each will be discussed in turn in relation to volunteering in the natural outdoors. However, the typologies discussed are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and volunteering activities can often fit within more than one category.

### 3.1 Mutual aid or self help

This form of volunteering involves people with shared problems, challenges or conditions working together to address them (Davis Smith, 2000). This can be particularly relevant to health and social welfare, often being the main system of social and economic support in developing countries (ibid). Certain forms of volunteering within the natural outdoors in the UK and Ireland nonetheless appear to fit within this typology. Community gardening and community-based agriculture often have health and nutrition as their key objectives (Holland, 2004). Again in relation to food provision, Crouch (1989) discusses the “co-operative basis for management of allotments” (p.194), which includes maintaining an allocated budget, letting plots and evicting people who fail to suitably manage their plots. Because the prime beneficiary of gardening within an allotment will be the gardener and/or their family, this form of activity does not fit with Davis Smith’s (2000) description of voluntary activities. However, involvement in allotment management committees as discussed by Crouch (1989) does constitute a legitimate form of volunteering.

### 3.2 Philanthropy or service to others

This typically concerns volunteering through a voluntary or community organisation to provide some form of service to one or more third parties or beneficiary (Davis Smith, 2000). This form of volunteering is often more common within developed societies (ibid). The third parties or beneficiaries of the natural outdoors can include the environment itself, the individuals and communities that use or benefit from the environment, and future generations. Much volunteering within the natural outdoors therefore fits within this category and can often be of a practical nature. Powell (1997) found that 80% of volunteers with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) carried out practical tasks. However, it is also important to recognise that volunteers are able to help the environment in an indirect way: 93% of BTCV’s volunteers would also conduct office administration (ibid).

It appears that the way in which people volunteer through organisations and groups may be changing. The government’s citizenship surveys found that while the total number of people volunteering was increasing (see section 5.2), a growth in regular volunteering was not seen (Attwood et al, 2003; HOCS, 2004). This appears to have been reflected by the development of a greater number of opportunities for ‘one-off’ or ‘episodic’ volunteering activities throughout all forms of volunteering. Ellis Paine and Malmersjo (2006) discuss a “new generation of volunteers” (p.13) who want to engage in short-term or time-limited volunteer opportunities. In the natural outdoors, conservation holidays provide an example of this ‘episodic’ involvement, allowing volunteers to undertake activities at a time convenient to them without having to make a long-term commitment (Wilkinson, 1998).

Another change to the way in which people can get involved in philanthropic forms of volunteering is as a result of the increase in employer-supported

volunteering (ESV) opportunities; this includes the provision of opportunities to volunteer during work time. In 2005, 24% of employees worked for an employer with a volunteering scheme, an increase from 18% in 2003 (Kitchen et al, 2005; HOCS, 2004). The environmental sector has proven to be receptive to this form of volunteering, providing host organisations in many cases. In an evaluation of Barclays Bank PLC's ESV programme, 80% of volunteers were involved in painting, decorating, or gardening (IVR, 2004). The National Trust has also led the development of a major ESV programme in partnership with the RSPB, BTCV, Wildlife Trusts and the Youth Hostel Association. In 2004, 3,550 volunteers contributed over 21,000 hours to environmental conservation projects as part of the programme (National Trust, 2004). In their evaluation of the programme, the Trust describe a "relatively new and already dedicated group of volunteers" (ibid, p.15).

### 3.3 Participation

Participation includes the involvement of individuals in the political, governance or decision-making process at any level, having an emphasis on 'user involvement' (Davis Smith, 2000). This can range from sitting on committees to taking part in forums or decision-making panels. Many of the forms of participation that relate to sustainable development and the Local Agenda 21 (LA21) developments of the 1990s fit well in this category. Holland (2004) describes how "community gardens offer an example of the grassroots community development that LA21 envisaged" (Holland, 2004, p.291). As has been observed, however, such examples of volunteering can also be closely related to self help.

There is considerable debate as to what actually constitutes participation (Warburton, 1997). Freeman et al (1996) are typical in their understanding that "community participation itself tends to mean all things to all people" (p.67). The variation in understandings was typified in Arnstein's 'ladder of participation' (1969) where she describes a situation in which individuals are involved from manipulation at one end of the scale to complete citizen control at the other.

### 3.4 Advocacy or campaigning

This type of volunteering concerns collective action in formal or informal groups, or as individuals, to secure or prevent change (Davis Smith, 2000). It can often be focused on raising public awareness of certain issues that may be seen as damaging to the environment or can involve campaigning against environmental destruction (ibid). Within the UK, as with many countries, there has been a long history of such volunteering, Wall (1999) describing the 1930s Kinder Scout mass trespasses, through to Greenham Common in the 1980s, and the anti road-building protests of the 1990s. Groups such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth are typical environmental campaigning organisations, as are some of the more radical organisations, such as Earth First! and their protests against road building. While much of the focus of such organisations will be on the natural outdoors, a considerable amount of environmental advocacy and

campaigning is likely to be broader. It can extend to the environment as a whole, including protests against whaling, or more recently the UK government's decision to renew Trident.

There is potential for this form of volunteering to conflict with the aims of the state; in many cases, this can be a direct objective. At one end of the scale, this can take the form of 'soft' protest, using the bureaucratic system to resist development: Curry (2000) notes how 10% of applications by communities for funding for the Countryside Agency's Millennium Greens gave their specific aim as 'to oppose another development' and protect the green space. Conflict can also be far more confrontational, often taking on the policies of the state directly. As a result of the sometimes illegal methods of protests, the volunteers of much environmental activism can become an enemy of the state. In the US, Scarce (2006) describes how "radical environmentalism's destructive side is portrayed as the functional equivalent of Al Qaeda" (p.259).

A body of literature interprets environmental activism as a distinct type of advocacy and campaigning. Many of its participants appear to have actively sought such a distinction. In some cases, they have distanced themselves from the more traditional lobbying group, who they see as 'standing still' (Scarce, 2006), ineffective (Wall, 1999) or having failed (Doherty et al, 2000). It may be possible to interpret 'conventional' campaigning and lobbying organisations as part of the state, or at least the 'institution', that has frustrated this group of new environmental activists. In this way, it could be argued that a new form of social expression and volunteering has emerged as a result of a perceived stagnation and inaction.

While all forms of volunteering will be affected by developments in technology, evidence appears to suggest that the rise in the internet culture has had a particular impact on advocacy and campaigning volunteering. Small groups can use the internet and ICT to help tie themselves together in loose networks (Daly and Howell, 2006). Davis Smith (2000) is in agreement, stating how the internet has provided campaigning and community groups with a new resource to establish and spread ideas. He quotes the United Nations Development Programme which states that "socially excluded and minority groups have created cybercommunities to find strength in online unity and fight silence on abuses of their rights" (UNDP, 1999 cited in Davis-Smith, 2000).

It is evident that there are many different forms of volunteering. Many of the activities that constitute the Compact's definition of volunteering (see section two) extend beyond understandings of volunteering as only being relevant to the delivery of public services, or that which is undertaken formally through organisations. It is important that the extent of this diversity is considered in any understanding of volunteering within the natural outdoors.

## **4. The development of volunteering**

While volunteering in the UK and Ireland has a long and established history, it is still developing in the context of numerous political and social changes.

Volunteering in the natural outdoors is not exempt from these factors. If it is to be fully understood, it is important to explore the principal reasons behind its historical and continued development.

### 4.1 The development of participation

A body of literature has discussed a trend of increasing distrust of government, institutions and experts (Curry, 2000; Goodwin, 1998). This appears to have been accompanied by a loss of trust in the wider political process. The 2006 Power Enquiry describes how turnout in parliamentary elections has fallen steadily since 1992, apart from a small increase in 2005 (cited in Rochester, 2006). A range of impacts have been attributed to this development, including the development of a more individualistic culture (Curry, 2000) and an increased desire to celebrate localness (Adams, 1998, cited in Curry, 2000).

Despite an apparent lack of interest in participating in formal political processes, there appears to be evidence to suggest that individuals still want to be involved as part of the solution. Giddens (1998) describes how members of society have sought to express their social cohesion and involvement in new ways as a result (cited in Curry, 2000). It appears possible that people feel that there are more effective ways to make a difference to society, desiring new forms of social expression. Etherington (2007) highlights that 37% of people that told the Power Enquiry that they did not vote were members of, or active in, a charity, community group, public body or campaigning organisation. Warburton (1997) states how environmental protests emerged as a new form of participation that is closely linked to a public distrust of traditional democratic institutions.

Literature suggests that the government has been receptive to this increased demand for new forms of engagement, Goodwin (1998) noting how participation has been increasingly recognised in policy making as a direct result. Warburton (1997) agrees, stating that the growth in support for participation was part of a recognition that it was at the local level that environmental problems mattered the most to people. Participation has been integrated into the planning process since the publication of the Sheffington Committee on Public Participation in Planning in 1969 (Warburton, 1997). The Rural White Paper for England (1999) has since established the principle of partnership working, acknowledging that decisions on rural issues were best taken at the local level (Curry, 2000). Curry (2000) also notes how much participation in urban life developed in the 1990s as a means of allowing local communities to play a more central role in their lives. Some of this increased focus on participation appears to have been related to practical issues. Warburton (1997) states how participatory approaches are often being seen as more effective solutions to deliver projects and programme objectives.

## 4.2 The rise of environmental awareness

As recognition of the value of participation and the role of the individual has grown, awareness of environmental problems appears to have increased considerably. Recognition of and concern for environmental problems has long been seen on the international scale. In 1987, the Brundtland Commission highlighted an urgent need for a new form of progress. The Commission defined sustainable development as that which “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own” (WCED, 1987 cited in Sachs, 1998, p.74). In 1992, the UN Conference on Environment and Development took place in Rio de Janeiro. While many commentators at the time and more recently were critical of what the ‘Earth Summit’ materially achieved, the conference stressed the central importance of ‘bottom-up’ participatory and community-based approaches (O’Riordan, 2000).

Throughout the 1990s, a wealth of policies were developed by governments to implement sustainable development at the local and regional level. By 2000, 77% of all local authorities throughout the UK had developed Local Agenda 21 (LA21) strategies to take this forward (Holland, 2004). Freeman et al (1996) argue that this moved the local authority to a new position of ‘joint stakeholder’ with the community. Holland (2004) notes how self-help, self-development and community involvement were central parts of the original LA21 process. Community participation and involvement was also increasingly emphasised as a central part of the solution in strategies such as *‘Sustainable Development: the UK Strategy’* and the *‘UK Biodiversity Action Plan’*, both launched in 1994 (Warburton, 1997). The latter stated explicitly that “the conservation of biodiversity requires the care and attention of individuals and communities” (DoE, 1994, p.94). This has also been recognised more recently in the government’s ‘Cleaner, Safer, Greener Communities’ programme. This has a key objective that concerns “engaging and empowering local people and communities” (ODPM, 2004) in the development and improvement of local green spaces. Therefore, the ‘supply’ of opportunities for participation in the environment has been directly developed and encouraged by government in what can be seen as a top-down approach.

At the same time, authors have highlighted a developing awareness of environmental problems amongst the public. This has led to an increase in the ‘demand’ for further opportunities to participate in the environment, in a bottom-up process of engagement. Scarce (2006) describes how the increasing scale of problems such as species loss has contributed to the development of environmental activism. Similarly, Curry (2000) notes how the threat of development facing vacant urban land in the 1980s led to increased community action in towns and cities. In the countryside, the 1980s ‘Roads to Prosperity’ policy of the Thatcher government and the relaxation of the Green Belt laws created a danger of increased development and a subsequent increase in campaigning (Hunt, 2006).

### 4.3 The coming of age of volunteering in the natural outdoors

In a political and social culture in which the demand for, and supply of, opportunities for participation appears to have increased, volunteering has been welcomed and increasingly encouraged as an effective means for communities to take part and get involved as part of the solution to problems. While it has a long history within the UK and Ireland, having many of its roots in nineteenth century philanthropy (Davis Smith, 1995), many commentators agree that volunteering has rarely received as much support from a government as it has since Labour were elected in 1997 (Ellis Paine and Malmersjo, 2006). Rochester (2007) notes how New Labour has included volunteering as a major theme within its policies and programmes since 1997.

The conservation and environmental sectors appear to have become increasingly receptive to the concept of involving people in the management of nature and providing opportunities for volunteers. There has been a recent shift from a situation in which humans are interpreted as distinct from ecology to one in which they are seen to occupy a central part of nature and the ecosystems (Berkes, 2004). People are increasingly seen as playing a central role in the solution to environmental and conservation problems. Berkes (ibid) states that this has directly contributed to the development of 'community-based conservation', and an end to 'expert-based' solutions and management. In such a context, authors have observed a growth in opportunities for volunteer engagement in environmental and conservation organisations. Curry (2000) argues that the launch of BTCV in 1959 spawned the volunteer movement in its formalised sense, while the start of Groundwork in the 1980s significantly increased the framework for community effort. Together, these developments have helped to provide a solid foundation for the involvement of volunteers in the natural outdoors.

## **5. Extent of volunteering**

The number of people volunteering can be recorded in a variety of different ways. National surveys frequently provide information on the total number of people involved as well presenting the figures as a percentage of the total population. Individual organisations will also frequently record the number of volunteers they work with and support. It is therefore possible to get a good indication of the extent of volunteering in a variety of different sectors throughout the UK and Ireland, including any trends in the number of people taking part.

### 5.1 Current levels of volunteering

Volunteering within the UK and Ireland currently demonstrates high levels. In England and Wales, 44% of people took part in formal volunteering at least once in the past year (Kitchen et al, 2005). The figures are similarly high in Northern Ireland where 35% of the population engaged in formal volunteering (Ulster Marketing Surveys, 2001). In Scotland, a lower figure of 23% had volunteered within the past 12 months (Scottish Executive, 2004 cited in VDS, 2006b). This

can be partly attributed to the way in which the question was asked in the Scottish Executive's Household Survey. In Ireland, the latest figures show that one-third of the population engaged in voluntary activity between 1997 and 1998 (Donoghue, 2001).

In these national surveys, the nearest category to 'the natural outdoors' is frequently a variant of the 'environment'. The percentage of people volunteering in this sector suggest a comparatively low number of people, especially when compared to those volunteering within health or sport. The 1997 National Survey of Volunteering found that 5% of current volunteers in the UK volunteered with organisations whose main purpose was 'the environment' (Davis Smith, 1998). This can be compared to 26% of current volunteers taking part in sports or exercise activities (ibid). In England and Wales, 12% of those people that took part in formal volunteering at least once in the past year did so with organisations working with the 'environment/animals' (Attwood et al, 2003). This equates to 1.94 million people. In Northern Ireland, the figure is 5% for 'environment/conservation' (Ulster Marketing Surveys, 2001), while 2% volunteered in the 'environment' in Scotland, amounting to 18,400 people (Scottish Executive, 2004).

It is possible that the figures in some of the national surveys may not reflect the true level of volunteering in environmental activities. As part of the 1997 National Survey of Volunteering, Davis Smith (1998) notes that the findings measure the 'main purpose' of the organisation and not the 'field of activity'. Therefore environmental activities that took place within an organisation such as the Scouts would not have been recorded as 'environmental' volunteering, but as youth volunteering instead.

There are a limited number of studies that compare volunteering between different countries. In one of the few studies, a comparison of volunteering between 47 countries found the US and Britain to have the highest percentage of people volunteering in the 'environment' at 8%, followed by Sweden and Canada at 4% (Hodgkinson, 2003).

It should be noted that any comparison between countries using different studies can be problematic. Different surveys often employ different descriptions of the environment, or conservation, with many including animals or heritage within the same category. It can therefore be difficult to determine the extent to which variations in levels of volunteering between surveys can be attributed to real differences or to variations in the definitions used; direct comparison between different surveys is therefore not appropriate.

When individual organisations working within the natural outdoors are examined, high numbers of volunteers appear to be evident. A survey of 279 national, regional and local environmental groups in the UK in 1992 revealed the involvement of over 200,000 volunteers (Pinkney Baird, 1992). A survey in the

same year by the University of Kent highlighted the extent of the volunteer workforce, finding that there to be approximately 45 times as many volunteers as paid staff in the environmental voluntary sector (Pinkney Baird, 1994). Despite being relatively out of date, these figures appear to be echoed by contemporary data: BTCV involves over 130,000 volunteers (BTCV, 2005); the Wildlife Trusts over 32,000 (IVR, 2006); and before the creation of Natural England in 2006, English Nature nearly 2,000 (English Nature, 2006). The number of volunteers involved in heritage conservation is also considerable. The National Trust currently has over 43,000 volunteers giving their time in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (National Trust, 2005).

Organisations also frequently record the contribution of their volunteers in terms of work days. BTCV volunteers contribute over 330,000 work days each year (Heritage Link, 2003), while, in 2005, Groundwork supported volunteers to give 444,000 days of their time to more than 6,000 projects which improved local liveability and green spaces (Groundwork, 2006).

## 5.2 Trends in the numbers volunteering

While there appears to be significant numbers of people volunteering, a considerable amount of literature indicates that many organisations are finding competition and demand for volunteers to be increasing (Schrock et al, 2000; Lysakowski, 2002; Bussell and Forbes, 2001; Hager and Brudney, 2004). Evidence does suggest that the 1990s saw a slight decrease in the total number of people volunteering in the UK: the 1997 National Survey of Volunteering found that the percentage of people engaged in formal volunteering in the UK decreased from 51% in 1991 to 48% in 1997 (Davis Smith, 1998). In England and Wales, more recent evidence suggests that this trend has been reversed, however. The government's citizenship surveys found that the percentage of the adult population in England and Wales who had volunteered had increased from 39% in 2001 to 44% in 2005 (Attwood et al, 2003; Kitchen et al, 2005).

Within the environmental and nature conservation sectors, evidence appears to reflect this increase in the number of people volunteering. In 1992, Pinkney Baird found that 97% of environmental organisations planned to involve more volunteers in the future (Pinkney Baird, 1992). Increased numbers of volunteers in individual organisations can be seen in more recent figures: the National Trust saw a 30% increase in the number of people volunteering between 1993 and 2003 (Heritage Link, 2003); and the number of volunteers with the Wildlife Trusts increased from 23,000 to 32,300 between 2003 and 2005 (IVR, 2006).

Involvement in advocacy and campaigning bodies witnessed considerable increases throughout the 1980s in the UK. Between 1981 and 1991, membership of Friends of the Earth rose by 533% to 114,000 and Greenpeace by 1260% to 408,000 (Della Porta and Diani, 1999). Not all of these members will be active volunteers, but the figures give a likely indication of the increase in this form of volunteering.

## **6. Motivations of volunteers**

People choose to volunteer for a variety of different reasons, ranging from altruistic desires to help others to personal motivations or just to have fun. This diversity is reflected in the considerable amount of literature discussing the motivations of individual volunteers (Rochester, 2006). Evidence also suggests that a wide range of motivational factors operate to encourage people to volunteer in the natural outdoors. It appears that many of these reasons have much in common with volunteering in other sectors, while a considerable number are unique to the context of the natural outdoors.

### 6.1 A love of nature

Literature suggests that the natural environment can provide an attractive environment in which to be, as an object which people are attracted to. Providing a somewhat seminal exploration of this attraction, Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) describe four reasons why people engage with nature:

1. Being away (the physical and conceptual distance from everyday life);
2. The extent (the physical and imagined size of nature);
3. Fascination (the beauty of nature and the ability for people to reflect);
4. Compatibility (the ability to feel comfortable and 'at home' within nature).

The authors review a number of studies that show that this connection is applicable to different forms of nature, with that found within gardens and 'local' nature being equally valuable to wilderness. This can also be seen in Kellert and Wilson's (1993) description of the 'biophilia' concept, a notion that humans have a biological attraction to nature. A major reason that people volunteer in the natural outdoors appears to be related to a close connection with nature and landscape and such 'fascination'. Volunteers working with English Nature said that "the beautiful surroundings in which they work" were closely related to their enjoyment of volunteering (England Marketing, 2004, p.22).

While volunteering in heritage conservation is closely linked to the environment, appreciation and enjoyment of nature appears to exert less significance as a motive for volunteers. In an evaluation of the National Trust's volunteering programme, Brewis (2004) found 'wanting to make a difference to the environment' to be only the eighth most important on a list of motivations.

### 6.2 Environmental awareness

There is evidence to suggest that people volunteer with the natural outdoors in order to help manage and look after the environment, as an object in need of protection. The interest of volunteers in nature conservation often appears to be related to their wider appreciation of environmental issues and problems. In a study of environmental volunteering within Scotland, Dalgleish (2006) found that the most common motivation of volunteers was a wish to improve the 'environment'. Individual examples of volunteering in the natural outdoors concur

with this observation. Ralston and Rhoden (2005) found the main motivator of volunteers working with the management of the National Cycle Network to be a commitment to the environment and sustainable transport. They identified a number of altruistic motives including enhancing the local environment and helping future generations.

Environmental awareness often appears to be closely linked to wider lifestyle choices of those that volunteer. Ralston and Rhoden (ibid) note how the volunteers often made 'green' choices outside of their volunteering. Carroll and Harris (2000) found a close link between volunteering within Greenpeace and the lifestyle and ideology of its volunteers. When volunteering activities are linked to a lifestyle choice, the force of commitment and belief in the cause amongst individuals can be significant (Doherty et al, 2000).

### 6.3 Social and cultural

Dalgleish (2006) notes the impact of social factors working in combination with environmental motivations in many volunteers within the environment in Scotland. This appears to exert significant influence at the scale of the individual, on the micro-level. Wilkinson (1998) found the main motivator of participants in BTCV, National Trust and Sunseed conservation holidays to be social. Similarly, an evaluation of the Employer Supported Volunteer Programme run by the National Trust and other major conservation organisations listed social, personal and team value as the main reasons participants took part in the volunteering (National Trust, 2004).

It appears to be the case that much volunteering in the natural outdoors can involve individuals undertaking activities on their own: 71% of English Nature volunteers did so rather than working in groups (England Marketing, 2004). Ralston and Rhoden (2005) also note how significant numbers of volunteers working with the National Cycle Network in the UK undertake tasks in isolation. However, the authors found that social connectedness and social contacts still provided important motivators for the volunteers. This suggests that a degree of, but not necessarily continual, social contact can be an important motivator in some instances.

As a motive to volunteer, social, and also cultural, factors appear to have an influence beyond the individual, often working on the level of wider society at the macro-level. Curry (2000) notes how volunteers involved in the development of Millennium Greens demonstrated a commitment to their local community, illustrating notions of community ownership and management. Similarly, Holland (2004) describes how many community gardens developed as a response to social exclusion, poverty and a lack of play or recreation facilities.

### 6.4 Skills and employability

There is growing evidence to suggest that one of the reasons that people volunteer is for personal and individual gain. Evans and Saxton (2005) point

towards the development of what they call the “selfish volunteer”. They highlight a trend in which individuals are becoming increasingly demanding of what they can get out of their volunteering. As a result, they encourage the sector to consider volunteering as a product to be sold to prospective volunteers, as a package of benefits (ibid). Ellis Paine and Malmersjo (2006) also suggest that there is an increased need to focus on this ‘demand’ side of volunteering. Such recognition can frequently include appreciating the place of skills development and enhanced employability as a direct result of the volunteer activity.

In many cases, volunteers in the natural outdoors appear to recognise the potential career-related benefits of their activities. Powell (1997) found that 79% of BTCV volunteers in a survey had volunteered with the organisation in order to improve their chances of getting a job, with only 8% giving altruistic reasons to their volunteering. She found a particularly close relationship between volunteering and employability in the younger volunteers. Of those volunteers aged between 18 and 24 years of age, 98% agreed that the job was the main motivator, compared to only 38% of volunteers aged over 40 years (ibid).

Increasing numbers of organisations are offering accreditation and certification for their volunteers, allowing them to record their skills and experiences. Brewis and Ponikiewski (2004) note the “recent explosion of a number of innovative accreditation schemes at a variety of levels” (p.20) for volunteering. The authors describe, however, that accreditation for volunteering is in the early stages of development. This may explain the apparent lack of literature regarding such a move in relation to volunteering within the natural outdoors. What evidence there is appears to suggest that accreditation is not an important motivator. In an evaluation of the National Trust’s volunteering programme, the desire to achieve accreditation did not appear to act as a notable motivator: only 8% of volunteers said that they valued their volunteering with the Trust as a way to get a recognised qualification (Brewis, 2004).

## **7. Value and impact**

There is a considerable body of literature that discusses the impact of volunteering. The effect on the third party or beneficiary can be enormous, and there is a large volume of evidence to suggest that hundreds of organisations could not exist without the work of volunteers. Literature also emphasises that society as a whole would be very different in the absence of people giving their time in this way. However, there is growing recognition of the impact of volunteering on the individual volunteer themselves, ranging from enjoyment to improved employability. Volunteering within the natural outdoors demonstrates a similar diversity of impacts to volunteering in other sectors. This diversity will be discussed in relation to four different themes: economic and financial; environmental; social and cultural; and political. These themes are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

### 7.1 Economic and financial

The 17.9 million people who volunteered at least once in the past year through an organisation or group were estimated to have made a contribution of £22.5 billion to the economy in England and Wales (HOCS, 2004). Specific figures for the financial contribution of volunteering to the environment appear to demonstrate considerable variation, however. The 1997 National Survey of Volunteering estimated the value of those volunteering within the 'environment' to be £2 billion throughout the UK (Davis Smith, 1998). Alternative figures for environmental volunteering appear to suggest a significantly smaller contribution. A figure of £7.8 million a year was quoted in 1994 for England and Wales (Volunteer Centre UK, cited in Pinkney Baird, 1994). A more up-to-date figure, in relation to Scotland, is provided by Volunteer Development Scotland. Based on a survey of 204 environmental organisations, they found the value of volunteering to be approximately £14.25 million, based on the average weekly wage for Scotland (VDS, 2006b).

Figures provided for individual organisations seem to suggest that volunteering in the environment is making a smaller, but still significant financial impact. The National Trust estimated the annual contribution of their volunteers to be £16.3 million (National Trust, 2005). A study into 4,000 volunteer groups working with parks and green spaces across the UK estimated the annual contribution to be in the region of £17.3 million, a figure the authors admit is likely to be conservative (Ockenden and Moore, 2003). BTCV estimates that the value of its volunteering in Scotland to be £2.84 million (BTCV, 2005).

Surveys frequently employ different techniques in their estimation of the financial contribution of volunteering. Figures provided by the Home Office Citizenship Survey (HOCS, 2004) and Volunteer Development Scotland (VDS, 2006b) use average wage figures to calculate the financial contribution of their volunteers. Many other surveys use minimum wages on the other hand, which will result in a lower figure. Surveys are also frequently completed at different times, meaning that inflation and economic growth will influence the extent to which the figures demonstrate real or abstract growth. Comparison between surveys in terms of financial contribution of volunteering can therefore be inappropriate.

Warburton and Lutley (1991) describe how communities and volunteers can be a cost-effective means of working with and improving open spaces in urban areas, improving the sustainability of results. The authors are careful to stress that the volunteers should not be seen as a 'cheap alternative' as they, and all other volunteers, require support and resources. This is a current debate in the use of volunteers in other sectors, especially within the public services. Much of this concerns a fear that volunteers are increasingly being seen as a free labour source that risks being taken advantage of in order to deliver cheaper health, police and educational services, for example.

## 7.2 Environmental

A body of literature suggests that the effect of volunteering in the natural outdoors is to have a material effect on its condition. Scarce (2006) notes a number of victories for environmental activism including saving areas from development. Church and Elster (2002) stress the significance of the cumulative and collective impact of individual environmental volunteer projects, which may initially appear insignificant in their own right. In such a context, Dalgliesh (2006) describes how the impact of volunteering in woodland planting, creation and management, and peat conservation can be linked to carbon off-setting.

There appears to be evidence to suggest that volunteering in the natural outdoors can help to enhance the environmental awareness of those that take part in the activities. In their annual report, English Nature state that “reconnecting people with their natural environment is a major force for our work” (English Nature, 2006, p.37). As a result of taking part in conservation holidays, Wilkinson (1998) observed a direct increase in the environmental awareness of the volunteers: 76% of respondents said that their volunteering made them more aware of environmental issues in general. Scottish Natural Heritage (2007) understands a major benefit of volunteering in the environment as providing a step towards the wider development of ‘environmental citizenship’.

Much of the work and everyday functioning of individual environmental and conservation organisations appears to depend on the contribution made by their volunteers. The National Trust estimates that 45% of the total work of the organisation is carried out by volunteers, equal to 1,330 full time jobs (Heritage Link, 2003). The Trust appreciates the contribution of volunteering to all organisations working in the sector, saying that “traditionally, the spark for and sustainability of the UK’s key environmental organisations has depended on the active support of volunteers” (National Trust, 2004, p.1).

A significant amount of literature discusses volunteering in relation to biological recording and monitoring. A great many volunteers are involved in the collection of information about plant and animal species, including distributional and frequency data. In 1994, this led the then director of the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) to state that “Britain could have the best developed and most highly integrated volunteer-based schemes for ornithological monitoring” (Greenwood, 1994, p.490). A number of authors agree that organisations and major surveys have long since relied on the work of volunteers (Newman, Busching and Macdonald, 2003, Foster-Smith and Evans, 2002). Surveys including the BTO’s distributional breeding atlases of birds (Greenwood, 1994), the garden bird watch survey, and, in the US, the Environmental Protection Agency’s water quality survey (Newman, Busching and Macdonald, 2003) all rely on the central contribution of volunteers.

On the one hand, the involvement of volunteers in biological monitoring appears to be a move that is actively supported by the science community. Volunteer

naturalists are now being encouraged to record Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) relevant species by the English Nature and the UK Biodiversity Group at the Natural History Museum (Ellis and Waterton, 2004). A number of authors have discussed the benefits of involving volunteers in monitoring, including the ability to collect large amounts of information in a short amount of time (Foster-Smith and Evans, 2002) and their invaluable ability to “provide a basis for sound conservation action” (Greenwood, 1994, p.490). Individual studies have also found that lay volunteers are able to make accurate and valuable contributions to the work of scientists in surveys (Foster-Smith and Evans, 2002; Newman, Busching and Macdonald, 2003).

Conversely, literature does suggest that a number of people appear less convinced of the role of volunteers in biological monitoring. As a result of complexity and the requirement for technical knowledge, authors acknowledge that volunteers may be better suited to certain tasks (Newman, Busching and Macdonald, 2003; Foster-Smith and Evans, 2002). In the US in 1993, such debate led the House of Representatives to prohibit the use of volunteers in the US National Biological Survey due to concerns around bias and competence (Newman, Busching and Macdonald, 2003). Authors have commented that rather than a lack of competence, this is perhaps more to do with providing sufficient support and training to volunteers (*ibid*) and designing realistic and achievable tasks for them to complete (Foster-Smith and Evans, 2002).

There also appears to be some debate around the type of impact that volunteer naturalists can have. In some cases, there seems to be concern that the science community interprets volunteers as little more than “mere biological recording cards” (Ellis and Waterton, 2004, p.99). This can be partly explained by what Goodwin (1998) calls a “potential mismatch” between the expectations of conservationists and local participants. He says that this has resulted in viewing volunteers as working towards the achievement of “a predetermined end” (*ibid*, p.495). Warburton (1997) appears to be in agreement, stating that any process of participation needs to be recognised as an end in itself rather than simply as a means to an end.

There appears to be considerable evidence to suggest that involvement in an activity such as biological monitoring has numerous impacts far beyond the collection of data. It can play an important part in increasing feelings of responsibility towards the environment and understanding of its management (Evans and Birchenough, 2001 cited in Foster-Smith and Evans, 2002). Similarly, Ellis and Waterton (2004) discuss the part played by a “passionate engagement with nature” (p.100). Newman, Busching and Macdonald (2003) also describe how involvement in environmental monitoring can help increased numbers of people develop their understanding of science, helping to address the government’s desire for more people to understand scientific debate.

### 7.3 Social and cultural

A significant number of authors stress how the environmental and social impacts of volunteering in the natural outdoors can be closely connected. In a study of participation and sustainable development, Church and Elster (2002) state how the impacts can be two-fold, with many projects beginning with a social benefit which can then demonstrate an indirect environmental improvement. The authors note, however, how it is possible to successfully integrate social and environmental impacts at the local level. Holland (2004) also observes how there is a close link between the social and environmental impacts of community gardens. In a report to DEFRA, GHK Consulting (2004) state that “volunteering not only provides environmental benefits but also contributes to improvements in health, community development, social inclusion and skills development” (GHK, 2004, p.14).

It is possible to explore the social impacts of volunteering in the natural outdoors at the level of the individual volunteer. The National Trust (2005) found that 97% of their volunteers said that they enjoyed their volunteering, and that 92% agreed that it allowed them to meet new people (Brewis, 2004). Volunteering also seemed to have an impact on the careers of some of those that took part. As a result of involvement in biological monitoring, Newman, Busching and Macdonald (2003) found that 4.5% of the volunteers in the study changed their career as a direct result of their voluntary experience.

There is a significant body of literature to indicate that volunteering in the natural outdoors can have a significant impact on the mental and physical health of individual volunteers. BTCV (2005) stated that throughout 2004/05, 1,313 people in the UK took part in their Green Gym programme. This is a conservation volunteer programme with the twin objectives of improving the local environment while also providing an opportunity for physical exercise. In a study of Green Gyms in Northern Ireland, Humphreys (2003) found that 90% of participants had become more aware of the importance of physical activity on their health, and 80% had reported increased energy levels. Most participants in an evaluation of two Green Gym projects in England reported feeling fitter and more flexible, and as having more stamina as a result (Reynolds, 2000). Reduced stress levels and a sense of fulfillment could also be major benefits for the individual volunteers (Birch, 2005). This relates closely to Kaplan and Kaplan's (1989) observation that nature can provide a restorative effect, helping recovery from mental fatigue.

Davis Smith (2000) notes how volunteering has numerous social benefits and can build social capital, trust and reciprocity between cultures. The social impacts of volunteering in the natural outdoors can therefore also be understood at the community and societal level. The building of social networks and the subsequent cohesion as a result of volunteering activities such as tree planting and woodland management can be notable, providing “opportunities for community capacity building and empowerment” (Land Use Consultants, 2004). A number of authors discuss a range of benefits including commitment to the

community (Curry, 2000), “grassroots community development” (Holland, 2004), and providing a step to active citizenship (Church and Elster, 2002).

#### 7.4 Political

There is evidence to suggest that some forms of environmental and nature conservation volunteering have helped to change the relationship between the state and individual, in which the government has moved from an executive role to one that is enabling (Curry, 2000). This is particularly evident within much participation, with schemes such as Millennium Greens helping to create a system of “devolved responsibility” (Curry, 2000, p. 32). Holland (2004) also describes how community gardens have helped to create new structures for communities to input into democracy at the local level.

A new relationship between state and individual appears to be evident as a result of much advocacy and campaigning within the environment. Doherty et al (2000) argue that such activities have helped to create a more radical culture, and that “direct action in British environmentalism has played an important part in transforming British politics” (Doherty et al, 2000, p.21). Della Porta and Diani (1999) agree, stating that direct action has helped to challenge existing power structures, enriching democracy and creating “new decision-making arenas” (p.254). In some cases, it appears possible for volunteering through activism to force the hand of governments, especially in relation to the development of policy (Scarce, 2006). Wall (1999) highlights the key role of these individuals in helping to halt the government’s road building programme of the 1990s.

The role of volunteering at the local level appears to be increasingly recognised by local and regional government. Local authorities are under obligation to develop Local Area Agreements (LAA). While environmental targets are not statutory under the four core key blocks, volunteering is, and increasing numbers of councils appear to be recognising the importance of bringing volunteering and environmental targets together within LAAs. A key aim of the West Berkshire Partnership’s LAA is “to protect and enhance biodiversity” a target that will be measured by “the increase in the total number of volunteers working on countryside conservation projects” (p.129). Similarly, Wakefield Partnership’s LAA has included a target to “increase the number of hours of volunteering in support of nature reserves and open spaces” by 2009.

### **8. Challenges and issues facing volunteering**

A considerable body of literature suggests that despite volunteering’s continued growth and development throughout the UK and Ireland, it faces a number of challenges which need to be addressed for it to reach its potential. Evidence appears to suggest that volunteering in the natural outdoors can be affected by a wide range of these factors, some of which may exert a greater influence than they would in other sectors.

### 8.1 Diversity of volunteers

There is a significant amount of literature to suggest that volunteering as an activity is socially inclusive and can help to address many of the symptoms and causes of social exclusion (see in particular IVR, no date give; and Kinds, Munz and Horn, 2000). Similar arguments appear to have been made of the environment itself, with a number of authors discussing its ability to be socially inclusive: in relation to volunteering, Dalglish (2006) discusses the concept of “nature for all” (p.13) and an equality of opportunity in which the categories into which people are normally placed can be broken down. However, there is considerable evidence to show that in practise, those that volunteer in the natural outdoors demonstrate a lack of diversity.

There is some evidence to suggest that there is a lack of diversity in the age of volunteers within the natural outdoors. The National Trust (2005) found that 52% of their volunteers were over 65 years of age. A review of the Wildlife Trusts volunteers in 2002 found that 46% were retired (IVR, 2006). However, there does appear to be considerable variation between organisations. BTCV, for example, has a much higher number of volunteers drawn from lower age brackets (Powell, 1997). Volunteer Development Scotland also found good representation of younger volunteers in environmental organisations, with 18% aged between 16 and 25 years of age (VDS, 2006b). This figure corresponds to the same percentage as all volunteers in Scotland in the same age bracket (ibid). However, the study did note that 48% of the volunteers in BTCV were in this age bracket, indicating that volunteers not working with BTCV are older than the average.

There appears to be a lack of ethnic diversity among volunteers within the natural outdoors. In a survey of environmental organisations in England and Wales, Pinkney Baird (1992) found that 14% of groups involved volunteers from ethnic minorities. The case seems to be similar when figures for individual organisations are examined: Brewis (2004) found that 99% of the volunteers within the National Trust were of white background; a 2002 review of the Wildlife Trusts volunteers identified 98% of their volunteers as white (IVR, 2006); and of the volunteers directly managed by BTCV, 96% were classed as white (BEN, 2002).

These figures appear to compare unfavourably to statistics on the involvement of volunteers from a ‘non white’ background throughout all forms of volunteering. The Home Office Citizenship Survey of England and Wales found that 24% of the ‘non-white’ adult population was involved in some type of formal volunteering (HOCS, 2003). It also noted that participation rates varied between different ethnic groups; highest rates were observed for volunteers of a black and mixed race background (ibid).

A number of authors have observed wider problems of participation and equality in volunteering in conservation. Berkes (2004) states that community-based conservation needs to focus increasingly on empowerment and equality, being

currently overly focused on the involvement of what he describes as 'elites'. Goodwin (1998) is in agreement, stressing that participation within conservation needs to include new communities of interest. He states that a tendency to focus programmes and initiatives on existing powerholders and activists is "disempowering and undermines public support rather than extending it" (p.496).

While it has already been established that volunteering in the natural outdoors can take place in urban areas, a great deal will occur within the countryside. A body of literature discusses some of the problems facing ethnic minorities attempting to participate in rural areas. This can range from a feeling of being in an alien environment (Pinkney Baird, 1994) to one in which people can be actively excluded through a process of "incipient apartheid" (Lin Wong, 1998). This appears to be a particular problem with the English countryside. Chakroborti and Garland (2004) note how interpretations of Englishness can be rural and often nationalistic, having been employed as "exclusionary devices to decide who does and does not belong" (p.385). Lin Wong (no date given) argues that this means that such groups can often miss the "first crucial step" (p.24) of contact with nature, therefore failing to develop a meaningful attachment towards it.

Chakroborti and Garland (2004) state that ethnic minorities in the countryside can often remain invisible and isolated. As a result of policy-makers tending to ignore race and racism within the countryside, Neal (2002) describes a tendency towards "colour-blind approaches to rural policy making" (p.457). She highlights the Countryside Agency's 1999 'State of the Countryside Report' as making no reference to ethnicity or race. Neal does, however, state that increasing numbers of policy makers are starting to consider ethnicity and there appears to be some evidence that this is now taking place. For example, the Scottish Executive (1997) have described a desire to "bring into volunteering people who are not normally thought of as the most likely to participate in environmental initiatives" (p.1), identifying these groups as "deprived communities, the young and asylum seekers".

Such consideration also appears to be increasingly recognised within individual organisations. Lin Wong (1998) notes that "ethnic participation is now on the agenda of environmental organisations", stating that the environment and conservation sectors are "open to the concepts of multi-culturalism and social inclusion" (no date given, p.24). Evidence suggest that this appears to be the case with a number of key organisations working with the natural outdoors in the past few years. The Wildlife Trusts' 'Unlocking the Potential' programme aimed to increase the involvement of volunteers from diverse backgrounds. An evaluation of the programme found that the ten 'diversity' projects successfully recruited over 750 volunteers, nearly 500 being from the original 'target groups' (IVR, 2006). The 'Environments for All' programme of BTCV aims to increase the organisation's involvement with disadvantaged groups in conservation. A project evaluation found broad levels of success when working with disadvantaged

groups, although did identify lower levels of success with volunteers from black and minority ethnic backgrounds (BEN, 2002).

The available evidence appears to suggest that the challenges associated with the diversity of volunteers in the natural outdoors are primarily discussed in terms of the age and ethnic background of those that volunteer; there appears to be little evidence to consider wider forms of diversity such as disability or sexual orientation, for example. One exception is the National Trust, who has monitored the number of their volunteers with some form of disability, finding that 11% of their current volunteers fall into this category (National Trust, 2005).

### 8.2 Structure and formalisation

Volunteer-involving organisations and groups within the environment and natural outdoors sector appear to face issues associated with a lack of sustainable funding and resources. In a survey of 204 organisations working in the natural heritage of Scotland, 45% were found to have an annual income of less than £10,000 (VDS, 2006b). Church and Elster (2002) describe one of the impacts of such financial insecurity as inhibiting the development and sustainability of community projects.

There does not appear to be a great deal of evidence to directly relate the quality of volunteer management to the availability of funding. Dalglish (2006), however, does state how low levels of funding and resources can prohibit organisations from giving sufficient priority to volunteer management, which can lead to an over-focus on financial survival at the expense of the development of training and volunteer infrastructure.

A number of commentators do note that problems of volunteer management are evident within organisations working with the environment and conservation sectors, although they do not provide evidence for it being necessarily being connected to low levels of resourcing. While Volunteer Development Scotland identified evidence of good practice in the management of volunteers in environmental organisations, they found that many policies were informal (VDS, 2006b). Low levels of volunteer management training were also observed in a number of environmental organisations (VDS, 2006a). In particular, Volunteer Development Scotland observed low reimbursement of out of pocket expenses amongst environmental organisations: they found that 50% of organisations did not offer expenses to their volunteers, compared to 21% of all organisations that are registered with them (VDS, 2006b). Throughout the UK, Pinkney Baird (1992) found that only 27% of environmental groups had a written policy on volunteers. Such problems appear to remain an issue within even the largest of organisations. Brewis (2004) found that 64% of volunteers with the National Trust felt that their volunteering could be better organised.

While wider literature does not explicitly examine the link between poor volunteer management and the occurrence of volunteers leaving an organisation, a

considerable amount establishes a connection between positive aspects of volunteer management and retaining volunteers in the longer term. Practises such as ensuring that volunteers receive full expenses (Knapp et al, 1995), training (Britton, 1999) and are managed, supported and organised well (Lysakowski, 2002; Locke et al, 2003) are highlighted as important.

There seems to be some evidence to suggest that the involvement of volunteers in the environment has grown in an organic, independent and sometimes fragmented manner. The sector appears to lack a central, coordinated infrastructure, something that has contributed to a wider lack of focus throughout environmental organisations in terms of volunteering (Dalglish, 2006). The Wildlife Trusts have 47 separate trusts throughout the UK, which have traditionally grown independently of one another. The lack of a central, national resource to enable Trusts to develop volunteering activity has meant that the volunteer management capacity of individual Trusts has varied considerably (IVR, 2006). This can have a more significant impact on the smaller organisations that involve volunteers, many of which are volunteer-led (Pinkney Baird, 1992). In particular, this can include isolation as a result of a lack of support networks in their area (Pinkney Baird, 1994; VDS, 2006b).

There appears to be some evidence that a number of organisations have recognised the need to develop a more coordinated and standardised approach to the management and development of volunteering. The evaluation of the Wildlife Trusts' *Unlocking the Potential* found that as a result of the programme, organisational cultures with regard to volunteering had started to change: in some Trusts, for example, the status of volunteering and volunteer management had been enhanced, while the presence of a central volunteer development function was widely valued (IVR, 2006). The importance of consistency of volunteer support also seems to have been recognised by the National Trust. In their report *'Vital Volunteers'*, they note how they have introduced Trust-wide standards in various aspects of volunteer management such as recruitment and induction, acknowledging it to be part of making their approach more professional (National Trust, 2005).

### 8.3 The relationship between people and nature

Despite the long involvement of volunteers in conservation and nature, there appears to be continued debate concerning the place of people and the role of participation (Berkes, 2004; Throop and Purdom, 2006). An example of this is "the paradox of public participation" (Throop and Purdom, 2006, p.498), in which the involvement of volunteers in natural environments threatens the very wildness they are attempting to conserve. While Berkes (2004) states that there is now widespread acceptance that solutions to conservation challenges need to involve people in order to be successful, he argues that the place of people in nature remains unclear. He notes how this has led to confused understandings and implementation of community-based conservation in practice. This debate can be seen in relation to the move of a number of UK conservation

organisations to amend their mission statements to place people at the centre of what they do, steering away from a sole focus on nature and ecology. BEN (2002) note that such moves remains new and challenging to organisations such as BTCV, and can be met with as much resistance as support.

## 9. Some initial conclusions

Volunteering has rarely enjoyed as much public support from government as it does now. With every survey that comes out, the numbers of people volunteering in all sectors throughout the UK and Ireland is seen to have increased. The environmental sector has also seen a rise in the number of people volunteering, within organisations, as well as independently of formalised groups. Many of these people have been giving their time *to*, and *in*, the natural outdoors. Much of this rise can be attributed to an increase in interest in and awareness of environmental issues, both global and local. Despite the rise in numbers volunteering, however, the proportion of people involved appears to be relatively low when compared to other forms of volunteering, such as health or education.

Evidence suggests that volunteering in the natural outdoors will continue to grow into the future. However, if it is to do so and reach its potential, it has a number of challenges to address:

- Low levels of resourcing and funding. This appears to be having considerable influence on the consistency and quality of volunteer support provided and the sustainability of some community projects.
- A lack of diversity of those that volunteer. There is an urgent need to become more representative of both the national population, and of the population engaged in wider forms of volunteering. Volunteering in the natural outdoors, environment, and nature conservation currently experiences low participation from people of ethnic minority backgrounds, something which urgently needs to be addressed. There is evidence of a number of organisations undertaking innovative and exciting work to improve the diversity of their volunteers, but they appear to be in the minority at this stage.
- A lack of consistency in approaches towards volunteer support, management and development. While many organisations provide comprehensive and innovative support to their volunteers, there is currently considerable variation in the quality of practices and policies offered to volunteers in the natural outdoors.

Authors have spoken of a lack of focus for volunteering in the environmental sector, contributing to a lack of identity. This has been reflected in the numerous descriptions of volunteering within the sector, including environmental, biological, ecological, nature, and conservation. This literature review has identified a group of highly committed individuals who have a common interest in improving and managing the natural environment. The use of the term 'the natural outdoors' may therefore be helpful in the creation of a sense of a much needed identity and

cohesiveness throughout the sector, allowing it to respond to the challenges it faces and develop long into the future.

## **10. Areas for future research**

This literature review has highlighted that the term 'the natural outdoors' has not before been used to consider volunteering. However, it has identified a significant volume of research that has explored and evaluated specific examples of volunteering that successfully meet the definition used by the Tomorrow Project. This is with the exception of research relating to volunteering in the natural outdoors within Ireland, where there appears to be a deficit.

A considerable number of authors appear to be in agreement that there is currently a lack of wider research into environmental and nature conservation volunteering, however. In particular, several authors feel that the impact of environmental volunteering requires further research. While Land Use Consultants (2004) identified the contribution of tree planting in building social capital in communities, they stressed that further research is required. Birch (2005) too feels that this aspect of research is lacking, particularly "the ways in which conservation volunteering or volunteerism is valued" (p.250).

This review has identified a gap in research that adopts a broad overview of volunteering in the sector. This is with the notable exception of Scotland, which has undertaken a considerable amount of work into 'environmental volunteering' through Volunteer Development Scotland and the Scottish Executive (Dalglish, 2006; Scottish Executive, 2007; VDS, 2006a; VDS, 2006b).

As part of this the Scottish Executive (2007) has nonetheless recognised the need for further research and has recommended that the Environmental Analytical Services Division within the Environment Group lead on any new research. Based on the recommendations from Dalglish (2006), they have identified a need for research into an exploration of the economic impacts, its role in developing community activity and cohesion, and whether it appeals disproportionately to certain age groups. Volunteer Development Scotland (2006a) have stated the need for research into the motivations of environmental volunteers, the elements that distinguish it from other forms of volunteering, whether an increase in environmental knowledge and skills leads to a change in attitude and behaviour towards the environment, and the involvement of volunteers in the public sector.

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