EUROPARC CONSULTING

Volunteer Management in European Parks

EU-GRUNDTVIG Multilateral Project

Research on impact of volunteering in European protected areas




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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study has demonstrated that both volunteers and volunteer co-ordinators see substantial benefits in volunteering in protected areas. These benefits accrue both to the volunteers themselves, to the protected areas in which they work, and to the communities in and around these protected areas.

Volunteers themselves:

- are virtually unanimous in viewing their volunteering as beneficial to themselves, as well as to the parks in which they work (over 98% of respondents felt that they had derived personal benefit from volunteering);

- see the greatest benefits identified as lying in social contact, fitness and wellbeing, and overall motivation, with over 75% identifying major benefit under the first two headings and over 60% under the third – these benefits apply across the whole age range;

- perceive substantial benefits in other areas such as improved self-confidence, skills development, general self-confidence (all rated major benefits by between 40 and 50% of respondents), self-discipline and career choice. These are most widely reported in the younger age groups;

- are in general well-satisfied with their experience, although they have many suggestions for improving it still further;

- are drawn from right across the age spectrum, from students to people well past retirement age;

- are predominantly male (by 60% to 40% overall), although this bias is far less pronounced amongst those aged 60 or less, but there appear to be few differences between the sexes in their perceptions of the benefits that volunteering has to offer; and

- tend to live in or close to the protected area in which they volunteer (45% within 10 kms, 75% within 50 kms), although the picture here differs substantially between countries and types of protected area.

Protected areas and the communities in and around them benefit from volunteering through:

- the contribution that volunteers make to the maintenance of the environmental assets of the area, which are generally its key asset, and to the experience of people visiting it (in some cases volunteers can account for up to 30% of the total time available for park management);

- the additional resources that their involvement can bring to protected areas by allowing them to tap new sources of funding, against which volunteers' time can be matched;

- the role that volunteers can play in improving communication and increasing mutual understanding between park managers and their local communities (over 85% of volunteer co-ordinators saw this as a significant benefit);

- the enhanced profile that volunteers can bring to protected areas by spreading the word about their attractions (again assessed as valuable by 85% of volunteer co-ordinators);

- (to a limited degree) injecting extra money directly into the local economy.

These findings, particularly in relation to the benefits to volunteers themselves, are very much in line with assessments of the benefits of volunteering more generally and support the idea that volunteering can contribute significantly to Lifelong Learning and to the quality of participants' lives.

Other significant messages to emerge from the research were as follows:

- Volunteering is well-established as a means of increasing the resources available for protected area management, and now playing an increasing role in southern and eastern Europe, as well as further north and west.

- The precise form of volunteering varies widely, and reflects the culture and traditions of the country in which it takes place as well as the location, physical character and needs of individual protected areas.

- Using volunteers is not an "easy option" for protected-area managers. It requires thorough planning and considerable time and expertise, although the net resource benefit amply justifies this.

- There may well be scope for more self-management of volunteers but experience shows that this too must be carefully handled.

- There is potential to involve volunteers across a wider range of activities. Volunteers themselves would like greater flexibility in both tasks and timings.

- In some countries the ageing of the current volunteer population presents a problem and in all it is important to find ways of engaging and maintaining the interest of younger people.

- In parts of central and eastern Europe, the term "volunteer" has unwelcome overtones, especially for the older generation, and it is desirable to find ways of presenting opportunities to contribute voluntarily to the work of protected areas rather different language.

Despite differing characteristics and contexts across Europe, there is much to be gained by developing and sharing good practice amongst protected area managers and volunteer co-ordinators, especially as many of the broader challenges that they face – such as economic austerity and ageing populations – are common to much of the continent. We therefore **recommend** that in order to improve the management of volunteer activity in protected areas throughout Europe and thereby to further increase the contribution that environmental volunteering can make to Lifelong Learning and the general well-being of society, action is taken to further investigate and share best practice in the following areas:

- securing volunteer feedback and maintaining contact with those who have volunteered previously;
- making best use of IT-based systems to programme volunteer activity, taking into account the interests, skills and availability of individual volunteers;
- expressing appreciation and rewarding long or outstanding service;
- giving regular volunteers an effective opportunity to contribute to thinking about the future policies and priorities of the protected area in which they volunteer;
- ways of attracting more young people into parks, both as volunteers and simply for the experience, for example through the use of social media;
- developing a long-term volunteering strategy for an individual protected area or organisation managing a number of protected areas;
- increasing self-management amongst volunteers, encouraging and training people to undertake it;
- involving local communities more closely in the recruitment and possibly the management of volunteers;

- strengthening the links between volunteering organised by protected areas themselves and environmental NGOs with volunteering capacity and skills;
- expanding volunteering activity in order to cater for a wider range of interests and skills and thereby to broaden the volunteer base;
- taking advantage of the volunteer resource potentially available from sources such as industry secondments and student placements;
- overcoming the resistance to participation generated in some countries by the use of the word “volunteer”.

1. PROJECT BRIEF

This study forms one part of the wider project "Volunteer Management in European Parks" co-financed by the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Union. This project runs from November 2010 to October 2013. It is dedicated to professional volunteer management in European protected areas, such as national and regional parks, biosphere reserves and nature parks, landscape protected areas and Natura 2000 sites. It is designed to advance existing approaches to Lifelong Learning through professionally managed conservation volunteering at a European level and to deliver means of consolidating these as integral parts of volunteer management in protected areas. The research results on the impact of volunteering in European protected areas presented in this report are one crucial output of the overall project.

Project partners

The project partners are EUROPARC Atlantic Isles (UK), The Conservation Volunteers (UK), Rodna Mountains NLP (Romania), EUROPARC España (Spain), EUROPARC Deutschland (Germany), Federparchi-EUROPARC Italia (Italy), the Association of Lithuanian State Parks and Reserves (Lithuania), the Nature Conservation Agency of Latvia (Latvia), EUROPARC Federation (Germany) and the Environment Agency of Iceland (Iceland). Also involved, as "silent partners" is the EUROPARC Nordic Baltic Section.

Information about the project was circulated throughout the EUROPARC network and volunteering was the subject of a workshop at the EUROPARC conference at Genk (Belgium) in October 2012. This research thus draws upon survey responses and other material from a number of European countries beyond those represented in this partnership.

The project aims are:

- highly skilled volunteer co-ordinators in European protected areas who can deliver effective opportunities for people to volunteer in protected areas;
- learning opportunities through mutual tutoring for volunteers, park staff and hosting protected areas;
- participants who have had their horizons expanded, and their innovation and creativity stimulated;
- higher park and public awareness of the value of volunteering as part of a culture of active citizenship;
- greater recognition of the contribution that volunteering can make to informal Lifelong Learning, when backed up by professional management and public esteem.

The specific impacts sought are:

- progress in professionalising volunteer management in European parks so that it is sustainable and supports the Lifelong Learning of volunteers;

- an active network of skilled volunteer co-ordinators, consulting and supporting each other and training new co-ordinators;
- skilled volunteers in parks with broadened horizons relating to citizenship, ecology, culture and social cohesion;
- higher awareness in parks of the value of volunteering that leads to the future promotion of volunteer management.

Project work package "Research on impact of volunteering in European protected areas"

The purpose of this research is to establish the benefits of volunteering in protected areas for the volunteers themselves, especially its contribution to their Lifelong Learning, and for the communities within and around such areas, particularly in terms of the relationship between them and the park authorities. This work has strong linkages with other activities that formed part of the wider project, such as the international learning exchanges between volunteers and park staff across Europe, the preparation of Guidelines for Good Quality Management of Volunteering in Protected Areas, and the training provided for volunteer co-ordinators, all of which aim to bridge the learning gap between protected areas.

2. BACKGROUND

The value of volunteering as a means of mobilising additional effort in pursuit of socially desirable goals, of adding interest and diversity to individuals' lives and of reinforcing the sense of citizenship and collective purpose has been increasingly recognised in recent years. The benefits that it can bring were compellingly set out in the European Commission Communication COM (2011) 568 "Recognising and Promoting Cross-border Voluntary Activities in the EU"[i] and in recognition of them 2011 was designated "European Year of Volunteering". The wide range of projects carried out under the auspices of this initiative were recorded and will in due course be available on the European Commission's website. The Grundtvig programme was specifically mentioned in that Commission Communication, which saw it as a significant contribution to the wider effort.

There is a long tradition of voluntary interest and effort in the field of natural history and environmental protection, with many achievements to its credit. However, as the Commission Communication itself makes clear, the number of people volunteering in this field is not as high as in spheres such as sport, social care and health. Furthermore, much of the early activity was organised by NGOs with an interest in specific forms of wildlife, and sometimes in reserves which they themselves owned or managed to safeguard such interests, rather than in protected areas that had been formally designated, such as national parks. Until recently In protected areas managed directly by the state there has generally been less emphasis on voluntary effort. Although there are many examples of fruitful partnerships between protected-area managers and NGOs to take advantage of the volunteer resources which the latter can bring to bear, there has often been a degree of wariness on both sides. Some NGOs which have relied heavily on volunteers to run their own operations have understandably been reluctant to make their limited volunteer resources available to publicly-funded bodies. Staff members of public bodies, for their part, have sometimes been fearful of the management challenges that organising volunteers can present and have even perhaps seen the successful use of volunteers as ultimately posing a threat to their own jobs.

As in other fields, organised volunteering in the environmental arena was initially viewed predominantly as a means of securing additional resources to pursue a worthwhile end. Indeed, many participants themselves saw it almost exclusively in that light – as a personal contribution to a greater good. Many of the comments received in the course of this study show that for many, perhaps most, volunteers this remains the primary motivation. However, from at least the 1960s onwards, it was increasingly appreciated that volunteering could bring wider benefits to the individuals taking part, and to the society of which they were members. One organisation which had these broader goals in terms of personal development and social cohesion at the centre of its philosophy from the outset was the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (now The Conservation Volunteers - TCV). This acted as an intermediary between individuals looking for opportunities to

volunteer in the environmental field and organisations, both public and voluntary, which had need of their services. Increasingly it operated not just in Britain but more widely, and also took a proactive role in encouraging volunteering, especially in communities (such as ethnic minorities) which had not previously had much experience of such activity.

Smartening up the waymarking, Alvão, Portugal. Photo: TCV.

Social trends have played a part in focusing attention on the broader benefits of volunteering. Earlier retirement and longer life expectancy have increased the number of active elderly people keen to find a new outlet for their energy and talents. A more mobile society, with fewer of the traditional bonds of community and workplace, has greater need of alternative means of forging relationships and creating a sense of common purpose. A widely shared desire to provide an increasingly urbanised population with a first-hand experience of nature has prompted efforts to engage more young people in such activity. Voluntary activity has also assumed growing importance as a means both of acquiring the experience and of demonstrating the skills and personal qualities increasingly demanded by employers. Combined with the constraints on public funding which have over the last few years led people to look for new ways of providing the resources needed for protected area management, all these factors have helped to underline the fact that volunteering in protected areas can do much more than simply help to look after the environment.

The GRUNDTVIG Learning Partnership “European Volunteers in Parks” (August 2008–July 2010) sought to extend these benefits across national boundaries. Most of the ten partners in the present project collaborated

successfully in it. Their common activities mainly consisted of international workshops for volunteer co-ordinators in parks and the international exchange of volunteers in parks for short-term volunteering (www.ehrensache-natur.de/international/european-vip/). Building on its foundations, the GRUNDTVIG project "Volunteer Management in European Parks" aims to further establish a European network of volunteer management in European parks.

"Lebenshilfe" volunteers, Harz National Park (DE).

3. METHODOLOGY

The work package description envisaged an approach involving the elaboration of assumptions on the basis of scientific literature, interviews with volunteers, park staff and representatives of local communities in representative parks in at least eight different European countries, and a comparison of the information gathered with the initial assumptions. The methodology used essentially followed this sequence but for a number of practical reasons set out below departed from it in certain detailed respects. The research thus involved the following stages:

i) a desk-based literature review designed to establish what previous research into the benefits of volunteering to volunteers themselves and to their Lifelong Learning had found; what techniques had been used to investigate this issue; and the extent to which these had already been applied to volunteering in protected areas;

ii) a set of questionnaires developed in the light of this previous research and circulated by e-mail and online, with the help of partner bodies, to a wide range of volunteers, volunteer co-ordinators and community representatives across the protected areas in the EUROPARC network;

iii) a series of interviews with partner bodies and with selected volunteer co-ordinators, designed to expand upon the information gathered through the questionnaires and to clarify the broader context for volunteering in ten countries across Europe;

iv) attendance at the EUROPARC conference in Genk, Belgium, in October 2012, and in particular at a workshop on volunteering organised as a part of it, and at a meeting of the UK Association of National Parks Volunteer Co-ordinators network in Pembroke Dock, Wales, in September 2012; and

v) an analysis of all the information collected in these various ways and the presentation of the resulting findings and conclusions in the present report.

Central to this approach were the questionnaires. It became clear from discussion with a number of volunteer co-ordinators that, for the study to give a true insight into the benefits of volunteering in the many and diverse parks and protected areas across Europe, it would be necessary to gather a reasonably large number of responses. It was not realistic to identify one park in each country that would be representative of the experience of all. Nor was it practical for the researcher personally to visit even this number of individual parks

across the continent. The alternatives – telephone or Skype interviews by the researcher, or interviews conducted by partner body representatives – both posed problems. For the former option these included communication, especially where there was a language barrier, and the sheer scale of the recording task if sufficient feedback was to be gathered. The latter presented additional challenges in terms of organisation, ensuring consistency of approach, and collating and analysing responses from a diversity of sources.

Furthermore, for the volunteers in particular, it was important to make the task of responding as easy as possible. This meant, especially, addressing the question of language, as there could be no assumption that all the volunteers would be able to speak English, or feel comfortable being interviewed in a language other than their own. It was also crucial to ensure that they felt free to express their true opinions – something most easily achieved in the absence of an interlocutor.

From all these perspectives, an approach based on easy-to-complete questionnaires, (where necessary translated into the appropriate language), seemed the most promising approach. It both avoided the need to ask partners to arrange and carry out many interviews and, through the use of a standard format, aided the collation and analysis of the information gathered. The latter advantage was further reinforced when, at the partners' suggestion, the decision was made to use the online SurveyMonkey tool to collect most of the responses. Those gathered by other means were subsequently entered into SurveyMonkey by the researcher, making it possible to use that tool for all the numerical analysis.

Volunteers at Pomorie Lake, on Bulgaria's Black Sea Coast. Photo: TCV.

The online survey was made available in English, Spanish and Latvian versions, whilst a German translation was circulated by e-mail. In total 182 volunteers, 42 volunteer co-ordinators and 6 community representatives submitted responses to their respective questionnaires. Unfortunately a question about their country of residence was accidentally omitted from the initial version of the volunteers' questionnaire and, even after it had been added, not all the respondents answered it. Of the 87 volunteer respondents (just under half) who did, more than 20 each were based in Germany, Spain and the UK. Single figure responses came from Belgium, Estonia, France, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia and Sweden. One person claimed to come from the EU, whilst another was currently based in Hong Kong.

The volunteer co-ordinators' responses came from a broadly similar spread of countries, with 10 or more from Germany, Spain and the UK, 3 from Latvia and 1 each from Denmark, Finland, France, Iceland, Ireland and Lithuania.

The number of community representatives responding was disappointingly low, at only 6. This reflected both the difficulties experienced by partner bodies in identifying suitable individuals to provide such a perspective and reluctance by even those identified to offer a view. Of those who did respond, 4 came from the UK, 1 from Ireland and 1 from Latvia.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

A comprehensive overview of volunteering throughout the European Union was provided in 2010 by a study funded by the Directorate General Education and Culture of the European Commission: "Volunteering in the European Union"[ii]. This document underpinned the Commission Communication on volunteering referred to in the Introduction. It contains not only a description and assessment of voluntary activity across the EU, including analyses of the relative frequency of volunteering in different sectors and of the benefits to participants, but also more detailed "National Reports" for each of the Member States. These are a key source of information about the nature and extent of volunteering in individual countries, and of the legal and institutional framework within which it takes place. They also offer insights into the benefits of volunteering generally, as perceived either by public bodies or by researchers and commentators within the country. They do not, however, look specifically at those associated with any particular form of volunteering other than sport.

Indeed it became apparent that the amount of research conducted into the benefits of specifically environmental volunteering appears in Europe is very limited, with research into the benefits of volunteering in protected areas being even rarer. Although (as was subsequently confirmed by the survey responses) most volunteer co-ordinators in protected areas sought at least some feedback from their volunteers, and some even carried out periodic in-depth surveys of volunteer satisfaction, the results were treated essentially as management information. So far as the researcher could establish, none of the information generated found its way into published literature.

Existing published material consisted largely of the following:

i) Policy advice and project reports, developed under the auspices of the European Commission, in some areas as part of the European Year of Volunteering 2011. These included the Policy Agenda for Volunteering in Europe (P.A.V.E.) produced by the EYV 2011 Alliance and presented to the European Commission at the 4th EYV 2011 Thematic Conference in December 2011[iii], a tool for assessing voluntary experiences (AVE) prepared under the Leonardo da Vinci Programme in 2006[iv] on the basis of experience in seven European countries, and the MOVE (Mutual Recognition of Skills and Competencies Gained Through Volunteering) project which reported in 2007[v].

ii) Material of a more promotional character prepared by NGOs to convince prospective supporters, including public body sponsors, of the benefits of volunteering, an example being BTCV's "Inspiring People, Improving Places" pamphlet[vi].

iii) A small number of more systematic studies of the impact of environmental volunteering, mainly in the UK, examples being an evaluation of BTCV's "Green Gym" initiative by Oxford Brookes University (Voluntary Action Vol. 2, No. 2, Spring 2000)[vii]; a review by the Institute for Volunteering Research of the Wildlife Trusts' "Unlocking the Potential" project (2006)[viii]; Ivey's study of environmental volunteering in South West England: "Making volunteering easier" (2007)[ix]; and a discussion paper prepared for the then Scottish Executive on "Opportunities for environmental volunteering to deliver Scottish Executive policies" (Jane Dalgleish 2006)[x]. A relevant German study is by Bremer, Erdmann and Hopf "Freiwilligenarbeit im Naturschutz[xi].

iv) A broader range of literature devoted to describing and assessing the impact and benefits of volunteering across society more generally. Again much of this work has been carried out by the Institute for Volunteering Research at Birkbeck, University of London. It includes publications such as "Volunteering Works -Voluntary and Social Policy" (2007)[xii], "Assessing the impact of volunteering in a London borough" (2006)[xiii], and tools for assessing the impact and value of volunteering such as the "PROVIDE volunteer impact assessment" (2009)[xiv] and "VIVA – the Volunteer Investment and Value Audit" (second edition 2011)[xv].

Although limited in number, these various sources between them provided a good insight into the range of benefits that volunteering could be hoped and expected to deliver and, together with preliminary discussions with key project contacts, provided the basis for the design of the questionnaires used to seek information from the volunteers and volunteer co-ordinators.

Volunteering to provide nature education about snails, Harz National Park (DE).

Findings from the literature review

The overall message that emerged from this literature was clear:

- volunteering could indeed benefit not only the receiving organisation but also those participating,
- the benefits to volunteers could, and usually did, take a wide variety of forms.

To the elderly and the unemployed the social contact, physical exercise and the contribution to overall motivation tended to be particularly valuable, whereas for younger age groups and those in work other benefits, including work experience, improved self-confidence and communication and the acquisition of specialist expertise tended to assume rather greater significance.

Whilst researchers had found it difficult to quantify the precise extent of these benefits, they were clear that they existed. Indeed the picture presented – certainly in the environmental sector - was one of volunteers whose experience and satisfaction in general exceeded their expectations.

An experienced volunteer builds a new culvert in the Yorkshire Dales National Park (UK). Photo: YDNP.

Many of the challenges identified (in the South West England study, for example) were those of initial recruitment, and especially of broadening the recruitment base, and of effective management, particularly by relatively small organisations.

These insights provided a useful background and benchmark against which to assess the protected area experience investigated through the present research. In particular they indicated the types of benefit that should be looked for and emphasised the importance of exploring how far the balance of these benefits changed with age.

The aspect of the study that the literature did not greatly illuminate was the role that volunteering might play in helping local communities to derive benefit in protected areas from volunteers. Individual volunteers from the community will be expected to gain the same benefits as other volunteers, but for all communities volunteering is a means of obtaining extra resources to address tasks of common interest beyond those that can be afforded out of limited public funds. However, the extent of any wider benefits to communities – whether in direct income generation or in terms of improved relationships between park managers and local residents – can only be assessed in relation to this particular form of volunteering.

5. COUNTRY PROFILES

The following short sketches try to summarise briefly the current character and extent of volunteering in protected areas in ten countries across Europe, highlighting in particular features which distinguish practice in one country from that in others. They draw mainly upon information from project partners and from interviews with volunteer co-ordinators, supplemented by insights from the literature review (most notably the Country Reports prepared for the Study on Volunteering in the European Union) and the questionnaire responses.

Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania)

In all of these countries the term "volunteering" has somewhat negative overtones – a legacy from the communist era when participation in many so-called "voluntary" activities was in effect compulsory (see, for example, the Study of Volunteering in the European Union Country Report for Lithuania). Protected-area managers report that as a result even local people who engage on an unpaid basis in activities such as clean-ups do not see themselves as volunteers, and certainly do not wish to be described as such.

In some cases this resistance on the part of potential volunteers may be compounded by a reluctance amongst paid staff to adopt a way of working which, in the long term, might pose a threat to more traditional models and even their own employment. In the eyes of the EUROPARC Nordic-Baltic section, however, a more pervasive constraint lies in the severe cutbacks that have been imposed on park budgets and staffing in recent years. In Estonia and Latvia these have involved the substitution of country-wide parks services for the previous individual national park administrations. These changes have militated against both providing the management time required to organise successful volunteering and developing the links to local communities that might encourage more voluntary effort.

In these circumstances the protected areas' approach to volunteering is largely reactive rather than proactive. In Latvia, parks are looking for students to help with work in visitor centres on an unpaid basis, but as part of their course. They are not seeking to recruit volunteers themselves, although they do try to respond positively to requests from people from abroad who express a wish to volunteer in a protected area. The European "Youth in Action" programme has been a significant source of volunteer effort in the Baltic region, with Lithuanian parks in particular providing placements for volunteers under the programme who spend up to a year working within them. Lithuania, which continues with a system of separate park administrations, is indeed better placed than the other Baltic States to develop volunteering and is looked to by them to provide a lead in this arena.

Environmental NGOs exist in these countries, although there are none specifically dedicated to recruiting volunteers to work in protected areas. Some do, however, successfully organise community volunteering and in Estonia, the Estonian Fund for Nature regularly approaches the park services to enquire what work suitable for volunteering effort is required. It then organises weekend work camps, for which it levies a charge on participants designed to cover the cost of food, accommodation and transport. Park staff frequently accompany these volunteers out of a desire to support them and the work that they undertake, despite the fact that such activity does not feature as part of their job description.

Volunteers at work in Kirna, Estonia. Photo: TCV.

Belgium

Environmental volunteering is well-established in Belgium and Belgian NGOs (notably Natuurpunt in Flanders and Natagora in Wallonia) play a key role not only in organising volunteers but in managing protected areas throughout the country.

Natuurpunt's 210 local branches cover 95% of Flanders. Volunteers are central to the whole range of activities, from the initial purchase of nature reserves, through the development of management plans for them, to on-the-ground habitat management and the running of environmental education courses. The volunteers are drawn not only from the ranks of its own family members (86,000 in all) but also from private companies and from schools.

Natuurpunt finds little difficulty in recruiting volunteers; the challenge lies in securing their continued

involvement. Its 300 professional members of staff regard giving their volunteers greater responsibility as a key means of generating such long-term commitment.

A model in which professional staff act as advisers to teams of volunteers who take responsibility for the management of individual reserves has worked well in this respect. It has, however, proved to have some drawbacks. In particular, the culture and atmosphere that prevail in some of these volunteer groups have proved a deterrent to prospective new participants, who have found them too rigid and devoted to established ways of working, too reluctant to delegate and unwilling to communicate, and too serious in their mood. Bringing about changes of practice in such settled cliques of volunteers is not easy and requires a combination of critical but constructive feedback and steps to highlight good practice elsewhere.

Natuurpunt has noticed a change in the balance of motives amongst its volunteers over the years. From a situation where most were simply prepared to give their time in a good cause ("to work for a better world"), the emphasis has shifted further towards personal benefit through, in particular, social contact and self-development. To maintain a committed volunteer force it is now vital to meet their expectations in all these areas.

In the light of these changes, which also include a tendency for volunteers to seek volunteer opportunities nearer to home and on a more flexible basis, Natuurpunt has developed a range of tools to help with recruitment. These include job descriptions for a range of volunteering activities, suited to people with different skills and abilities, a welcome kit and special events designed both exclusively for new volunteers and as a means of bringing new and existing volunteers together.

Finland

Finland is a large country, much of it sparsely populated. Some of its most extensive protected areas lie in very remote and hostile terrain, where management activities are only possible during a limited period in the summer. It has a quite well-developed network of environmental NGOs (part of a wider tradition of volunteering, especially in the social care sector) and in fields such as species monitoring there is a lengthy history of voluntary effort. Since the European Year of Volunteering in 2011 there has been a drive to put volunteering in protected areas on a more systematic basis and to extend its scope. Following a "Labour of Love" seminar that year, a co-ordinator has been appointed within the State forest/parks service Metsahällitus, who tries to keep track of all the volunteering that takes place across the 37 protected areas within the country for which it is responsible.

About half the volunteers working with Metsahällitus (1,000 out of 2,000) attend work camps, which are spread throughout the country. Most of these (15 to 20) last for a week, with the longest being two weeks long, and some taking only a day. They are concentrated in the summer months (April to late September) and attract a certain number of volunteers from abroad. In all, these volunteers contributed in 2012 work effort equivalent to about 16 full-time posts, about four times the amount of time that Metsahällitus staff, including the co-ordinator, spent on organising their activities.

Overall, about 50% of this volunteering is organised in co-operation with NGOs. Metsahällitus has decided that the best way to expand volunteering in the environmental field lies in further co-operation with NGOs, including those working in fields such as recreation and social care. They are also trying to establish "Friends of Parks" organisations in a few places (for example the Archipelago National Park) and view these as potentially an important way of building links with local communities and winning their support for Park objectives.

Germany

Germany has a well-developed system of volunteering in its protected areas. Most of the volunteers live in or close to the protected areas in which they work, and volunteer on a one- or part-day basis, often over many years. Longer-duration work camps are relatively uncommon, although parks do work with a number of NGOs which organise them, especially for younger people.

Volunteers help children to learn playfully - Harz National Park (DE).

The majority of the volunteering activity is managed by park staff and there is a network of over 40 volunteer co-ordinators, overseen by EUROPARC Deutschland. All of these work in parks that are members of the EUROPARC Federation and have received at least five days training in volunteer management. Many parks have "Friends" organisations, of which a minority (15 to 20%) have groups of volunteers who undertake practical work in their park, either under their own management or that of park staff. Some also draw on volunteers provided by NGOs which have their own volunteer groups, such as the German wings of Birdlife International and Friends of the Earth. Others work with NGOs whose primary purpose is to encourage and facilitate volunteering more generally to provide opportunities for work in the environmental field.

To help volunteer co-ordinators to exchange experience, EUROPARC Deutschland organises an annual three-day meeting. Some park administrations also encourage volunteers to broaden their horizons by visiting other protected areas. In Brandenburg, for example, the ranger organisation responsible for all 15 protected areas (the Naturwacht), arranges a yearly excursion to assist such interchange. EUROPARC Deutschland also aids individual protected areas in their efforts to motivate and reward volunteers by producing gifts which they can distribute at the end of the volunteering season. These serve not only to encourage the volunteers but to publicise EUROPARC itself.

Junior Rangers, the future volunteers, are one of EUROPARC Federation's great success stories. Photo: EUROPARC Federation

Many parks have a junior ranger programme, designed to introduce children to the world of nature and a remarkable 37 of them participate in EUROPARC's international Junior Ranger Programme. To maintain their interest, and to help to build up a volunteer force for the future, EUROPARC Deutschland is keen to find ways of easing the transition between involvement in these programmes and voluntary action as an adult.

Unfortunately it finds that this task is complicated by the widely varying upper age limit placed upon junior rangers in different parks.

Iceland

With its small and geographically concentrated resident population and demanding climate and conditions, Iceland is the extreme example of a country which has traditionally relied upon volunteers from abroad, who come for a holiday experience. For this, as well as climatic reasons, volunteering is concentrated in the summer months from June to August. A significant proportion of the volunteers come for the full two and a half month period, whilst others form part of holiday groups, supplied by NGOs such as The Conservation Volunteers and Working Abroad. In addition, the single manager who co-ordinates volunteering across the country does his best to accommodate the demand from smaller groups and individuals, who seek volunteering experience as part of their visit to the country. In total about 165 volunteers contributed approximately 2,200 days of work in 2012.

At any one time, there are usually about seven or eight teams working across the country. The team leaders are themselves volunteers who come back regularly and who generally stay for five weeks or so. With such a limited co-ordinating resource, experienced volunteers who are prepared to help to organise programmes are particularly valued.

Various attempts have been made to recruit volunteers from within the country. An association of community volunteers was set up in the 1990s but eventually collapsed as its initial members aged and the association failed to attract younger members. Within the past year the present co-ordinator has, once again, tried to recruit local volunteers through the main environmental organisations in the country, but with only limited success (only six people attended a volunteering weekend with a target attendance of 20). He hopes to improve upon this in future years, perhaps by advertising and looking beyond specifically environmental organisations. Despite a generally philanthropic culture there is, however, no tradition of environmental volunteering in Iceland. It may well take considerable time and effort to develop a locally-based volunteer force capable of making a significant contribution.

Italy

As elsewhere in Europe, environmental volunteering in Italy accounts for only a small proportion of overall volunteer effort and is dwarfed by activity in the social care and health sectors, much of it organised under religious auspices. The majority of volunteering in Italian protected areas is organised by NGOs such as WWF,

Legambiente and Birdlife rather than by the park authorities. With the exception of some of the larger parks in the northern half of the country, few of these have any experience of managing volunteer activity themselves. By and large the work carried out by volunteers is regarded by park managers as an add-on to their activities, rather than as an integral part of park management. This attitude is reinforced by the need to ensure that volunteers do not take over the jobs of paid staff.

Much of the work undertaken is species monitoring, the traditional specialism of NGOs, but volunteers also assist with tasks such as footpath maintenance and visitor information, including in some cases guiding. In marine protected areas volunteer divers make an important contribution to the monitoring of fish populations and may in future be central to efforts to track the spread of alien, invasive species.

Volunteers are mainly students and young adults under 40 from the cities, who take part in activities lasting between one and three weeks, usually in the summer. They are joined, particularly in the Alpine parks, by a number of others of similar age from other countries. Participants divide more or less equally between the sexes.

Although most Italian protected areas are inhabited, and in some cases contain quite sizeable settlements, relatively few volunteers are drawn from these local communities. This reflects to some extent the hostility towards designation that still lingers within many of them, sometimes forcefully expressed by a vocal minority. As a result volunteering has not hitherto played a significant role in fostering better relations between parks and the communities living in and around them.

Compared with some other European countries, volunteering is thus at a comparatively early stage in its development across Italian protected areas. Federparchi, the Italian Federation of Parks and Nature Reserves, does however see considerable potential for protected areas to make greater use of volunteers, especially if their activities can be spread more evenly through the year. It is keen to identify the types of activity that are particularly suitable for volunteers and to help parks to develop more expertise in volunteer management, drawing on experience from across the EUROPARC network.

Spain

As in most countries, volunteering in Spain is less well developed in the environmental sector than in the social arena, accounting for well under 5% of total volunteer activity (see Study on Volunteering in the EU, Country Report for Spain). There is nevertheless a good deal of volunteering in national parks and other protected areas. Some of this forms part of a national programme across the national parks but much of it is organised

by individual parks and by joint initiatives between protected areas at a provincial or regional level. Some provincial administrations, such as Andalucía, strongly promote such volunteering and EUROPARC Spain is working with the government bodies which administer parks to further develop volunteering as a key tool for citizen participation.

Most volunteering in Spanish protected areas is organised through NGOs such as Birdlife and WWF in Spain. A majority of volunteers comes from within the country and many park administrations encourage volunteering amongst the communities within or close to their park. From the responses to the present survey it would appear that about 20% of volunteers live locally to the protected area in which they volunteer.

Practical management tasks, including species survey and monitoring activities, tend to predominate amongst the activities undertaken by volunteers, with a significant proportion (around 20%) also contributing to visitor enjoyment and wider communications and education efforts. In terms of time commitment, Spain provides a good spread of volunteering opportunities from one-day events (the largest single category) to work camps lasting over a week. This is perhaps one reason why volunteering in Spain appears to be rather less skewed to particular age groups than in some countries, where either longer or shorter assignments predominate.

EUROPARC Spain held a workshop on volunteering at its last congress, the conclusions of which will be available soon on its website (www.redeuroparc.org).

UK - England and Wales

Environmental volunteering has a lengthy history in England and Wales, dating back in some cases to the 19th century. Some national parks, such as the Peak District, have deployed volunteers since their establishment in the 1950s. The activities undertaken include both those organised by protected areas themselves and those arranged by NGOs such as the National Trust, the Wildlife Trusts and The Conservation Volunteers (previously BTCV). Most national parks have volunteer forces of several hundred people and in one case (the North York Moors National Park) the number of days worked amounts to about one third of the total number available to the managing authority.

The range of tasks carried out tends to be wider than in most other countries, with a significant contribution to more office-based administrative roles. Visitor enjoyment, including volunteer rangering, emerges as the single most common volunteering activity – a feature reflected in the fact that a much higher than usual proportion of volunteer time is spent on routine activities rather than specially designed tasks.

Before and after – volunteers improve a culvert in the Yorkshire Dales National Park, U.K. Photo: YDNP.

The overall pattern of volunteering has thus tended to be regular, one-day volunteering, mainly undertaken by men over the age of 50, many of them retired. Although a significant proportion of volunteers have come from communities within or local to the protected areas, many of these people have themselves been incomers to the area, rather than long-term residents. Not infrequently, volunteering has for many of them been a means of establishing social contacts in a place where they have not previously known many people.

Many national parks have, over the past ten years or so, made efforts to move away from this traditional pattern of volunteering, in an attempt to connect with a wider range of social groups and to achieve a more even balance between the sexes. The Lake District National Park, for example, has raised the percentage of under-30-year olds from 1% to 12%, and the male/female split from 72/28 to 60/40. Others have targeted groups such as the disabled and special-needs children (North York Moors), young people seeking work experience (Northumberland) and even offenders serving prison sentences (Broads Authority). There have also been various major volunteer initiatives mounted in co-operation with NGOs, such as the "Fixing the Fells" project – a joint venture between the Lake District National Park and the National Trust, a voluntary conservation body that owns around 25% of the land in the park.

This effort to diversify the volunteer base has gone hand-in-hand with a drive to involve volunteers in a wider range of activities, particularly on the communications side (for example in the Lake District and Pembrokeshire Coast National Parks) but also in office and even home-based work such as data analysis.

UK - Scotland

Although it inevitably has many characteristics in common with the rest of the UK, Scotland's experience in the field of protected area volunteering is worth describing separately because the country has been a relative

latecomer to the national parks movement, its first two parks being only ten years old. It does, however, have a longstanding tradition of voluntary environmental activity, including the integration of volunteers into the countryside ranger services managed by local authorities. As in the rest of the UK, many of its nature protection areas are in private or voluntary-body ownership. There is an established tradition of volunteering in some of these, usually arranged either by the NGO owning the site (such as the National Trust for Scotland, RSPB or the Scottish Wildlife Trust) or by one with the primary purpose of organising environmental volunteering (notably TCV and its predecessor organisations). The government agency owning and managing the majority of the country's national nature reserves (Scottish Natural Heritage) has, however, only relatively recently begun to try to involve local people in the management of these sites, having previously treated this as very much an in-house task.

Of the two national parks, the more remote (the Cairngorms) has not until recently actively sought to expand on the volunteering programmes that had been established by the local authorities operating within its boundaries. Its latest National Park Plan, however, highlights the aim of increasing it, largely through the existing local, private ranger services rather than through NGOs already active in the field. This approach is consistent with its general policy of acting as a facilitator of action, rather than carrying it out itself.

The Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, by contrast, has made significant use of volunteers for a number of years – not least because of its location and access to a broad population of 3 million people in the central belt of Scotland. Much of the work has involved volunteer rangers. When this proved very staff-intensive, the Park found a way of reducing the management burden by deploying volunteer rangers in pairs on prescribed routes. The volunteer co-ordinator is also hoping to train up some experienced volunteers to manage others. Since the Park does not itself own land, it undertakes its conservation management in partnership with landowners. In doing so, the Park takes on responsibilities such as health and safety, liability and insurance, which are difficult for individuals and small bodies to handle. It also uses volunteers to represent it at public events.

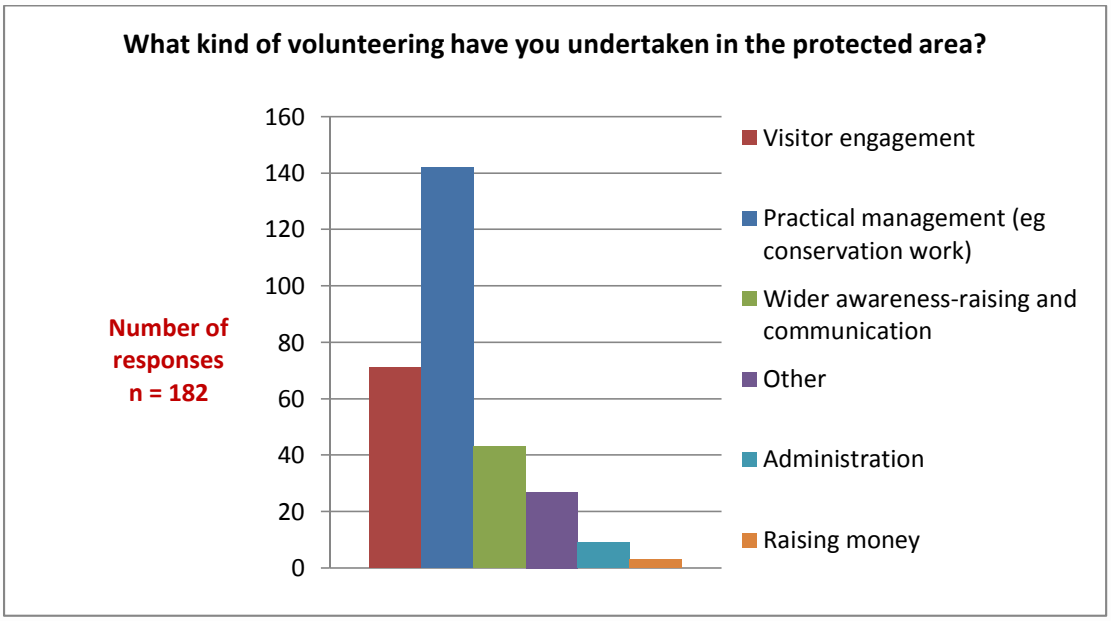
Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park is one of the first protected areas to use an IT-based system to organise all its volunteering. This has ensured ample sign-up (the demand for volunteering opportunities exceeds supply) and has minimised the number of cancellations, although it has resulted in some complaints about lack of contact with staff. Overall, however, the feedback received through the systematic survey of volunteers undertaken every three years has been very positive.

6. ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RESULTS

This section of the report investigates what the questionnaire responses, supplemented where necessary by interview information, tell us about the nature of the activities that volunteers undertake in protected areas, about the volunteers themselves, about their relationship with park managements, and about the benefits that both they and volunteer co-ordinators see as flowing from their volunteering. Boxes inserted into the text at relevant points highlight issues where the feedback suggests that sharing experience amongst protected area managers through the EUROPARC network could significantly improve volunteer management in protected areas, to the advantage of participants, local communities and the parks themselves. These suggestions are then picked up in the recommendations at the end of the report.

(i) PART ONE: SURVEY OF VOLUNTEERS

Activities undertaken



Those who volunteer in protected areas, and especially those who do so regularly, are of course not restricted to a single type of activity. This is clear from the statistics, which show that about 75% contribute in more than one way. Overall, however, practical management such as habitat conservation and species monitoring emerges as by far the most common activity undertaken by volunteers.

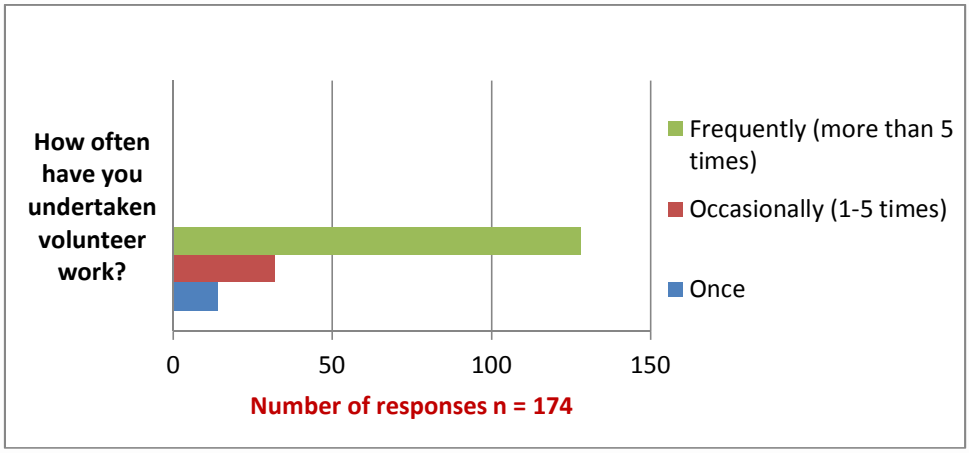
85% of volunteers record themselves as doing work of this kind, as against roughly 45 % who are involved in visitor engagement and just under 25% who participate in wider communications and awareness-raising

activity. Although a significant proportion (14%) mention “other” activities, only a very small proportion (just 5%) carry out administrative-type duties and fewer than 2% assist with fund-raising.

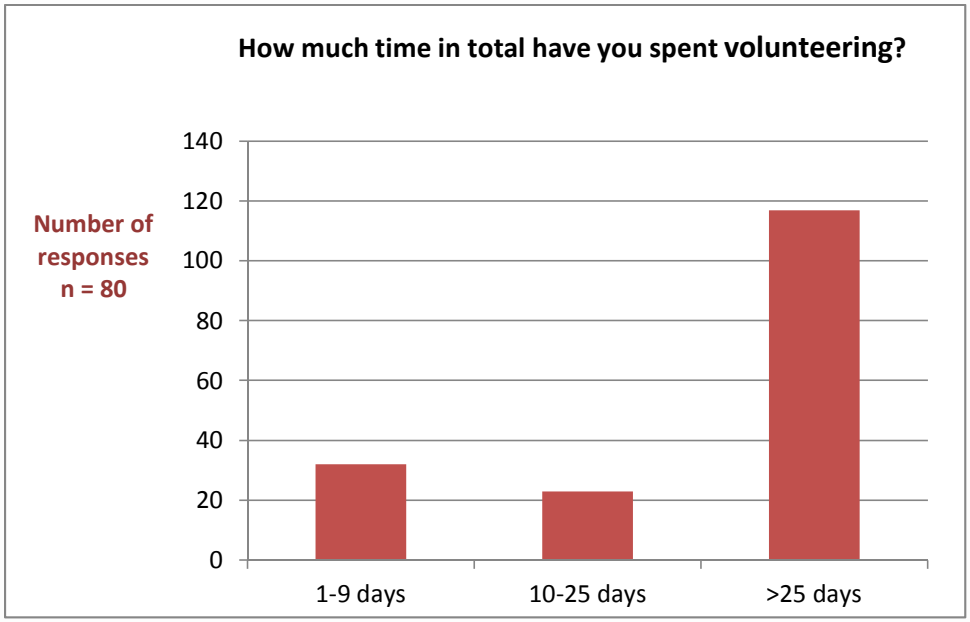
There were significant variations between countries in the distribution of effort, with all volunteers in Spain recording some practical management activity and only 20% mentioning visitor engagement, whilst in Germany over half (52%) said that they undertook some form of guiding or other interaction with visitors. Similarly in Belgium three quarters of the (admittedly small) number of respondents played a role in visitor management. Only in the UK did more office-based activity feature at all strongly.

Unsurprisingly, volunteers who undertook long-term placements in protected areas, such as EVS placements in Lithuania, tended to participate in a wider range of activities than those who volunteered on a shorter-term basis, even when they did so regularly over many years.

Frequency and time commitment

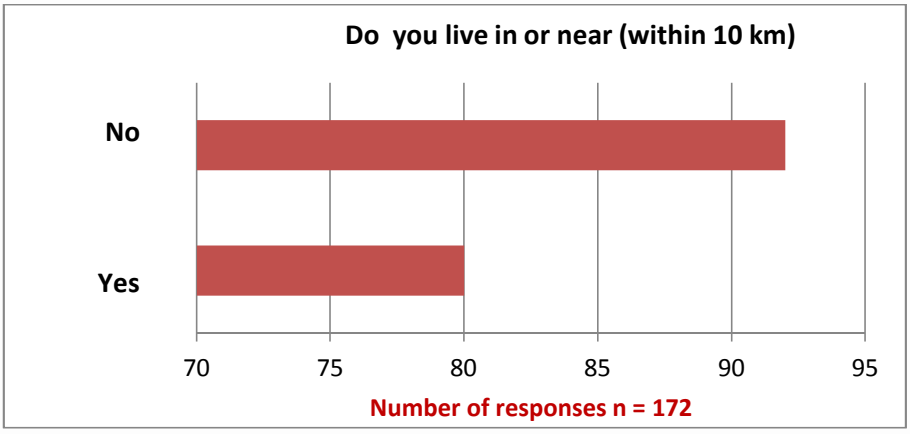


Almost three quarters of respondents (74%) had volunteered more than five times, as against fewer than 10% who had participated only on a single occasion. Although regular volunteers were no doubt more likely to have completed the questionnaire than those with less experience, the picture that emerges is unquestionably one of a dedicated and strongly motivated body of people. Amongst the countries with a significant number of respondents, the pattern that emerged was pretty consistent, although interview information bears out the reasonable supposition that where volunteering is more of a holiday experience, as in Iceland, repeat participation, although by no means uncommon, is not the norm.



The figures for the total time spent volunteering tell a similar story of ongoing commitment. Over 70% of respondents had devoted more than 25 days' time to volunteering, and another 12% between 10 and 25 days. Although the same pattern was evident across all countries, it was noticeable that it was especially marked in the UK, with its long-established tradition of environmental volunteering.

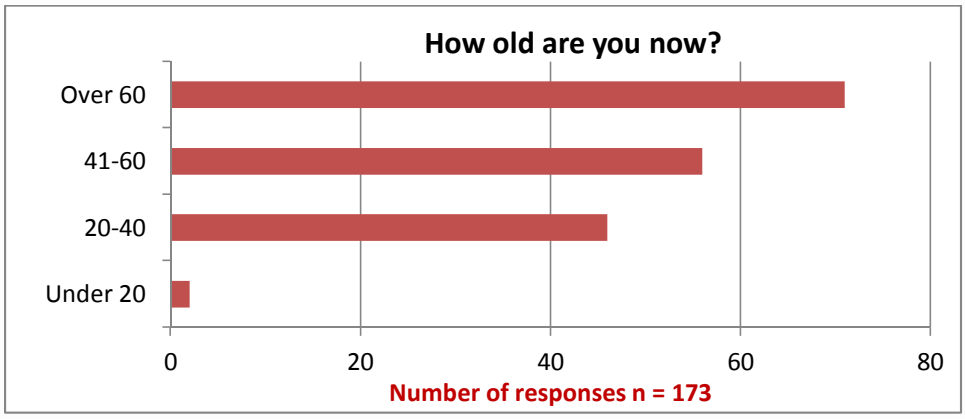
Location



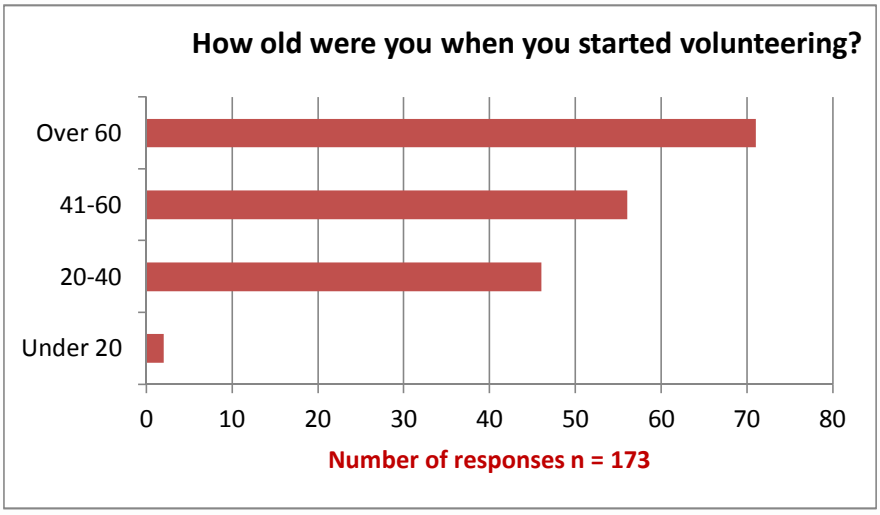
Overall about 45% of respondents live in or very close to the protected area (less than 10 km) in which they volunteer. Of the remaining 55%, roughly half, live within 50 km and half further afield. In this area there were noticeable differences between countries, with about 60% of volunteers who recorded themselves as resident in England living within or close to the protected area, as against 43% in Germany and 26% in Spain. Once again other evidence would suggest that in countries such as Iceland, Finland and perhaps the Baltic countries the figures would be towards the lower end of this spectrum. To some extent these differences reflect the

nature of the protected areas themselves: protected cultural landscapes typically have far higher resident populations than nature reserves, especially in countries which are sparsely populated overall. It may also reflect the different types of work undertaken, with countries where work camps devoted to major pieces of one-off work – such as habitat management or trail maintenance – more commonly drawing more of their volunteers from a distance, whilst those whose volunteers predominantly take part in ongoing activities such as rangering rely more heavily on the local population as a source of volunteers.

Age

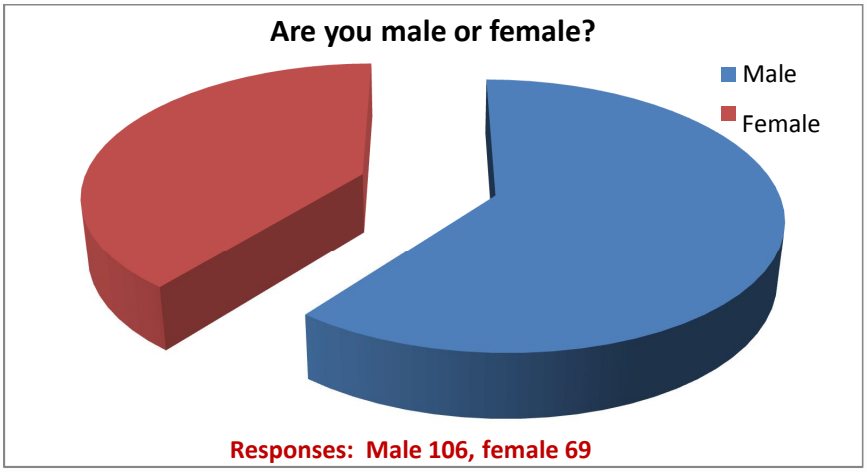


The largest single-age group, comprising almost 40% of the total volunteer workforce, consisted of those aged 60 and over. Very few (only 2) of those completing the questionnaire were under 20. The remaining 60% were fairly evenly divided between those aged 20 to 40 and 41 to 60, which the latter predominating slightly. There were some marked differences between countries, with the over-60s featuring particularly strongly in the UK (around two thirds of those identified) and constituting almost half of volunteers in Germany. By contrast, none of the Spanish respondents recorded themselves as over 60, although 63% fell into the 41 to 60 age bracket.



Looking at the age when respondents first started volunteering, however, demonstrates that volunteering does not only appeal to those seeking outlets for their energy post-retirement. Although 20% of them (half of those now in the oldest age group) had indeed started volunteering over the age of 60, 38% had begun between 41 and 60, and 34% between 20 and 40. 8% stated that they had first become involved before they were 20, suggesting that the low number of respondents currently in that age group may well have under-represented the true proportion (an interpretation supported by the estimate given by volunteer co-ordinators – see below). In Spain particularly, it appears that many volunteers currently in the 41 to 60 age bracket began volunteering in their 20s and 30s and have remained involved ever since.

Gender



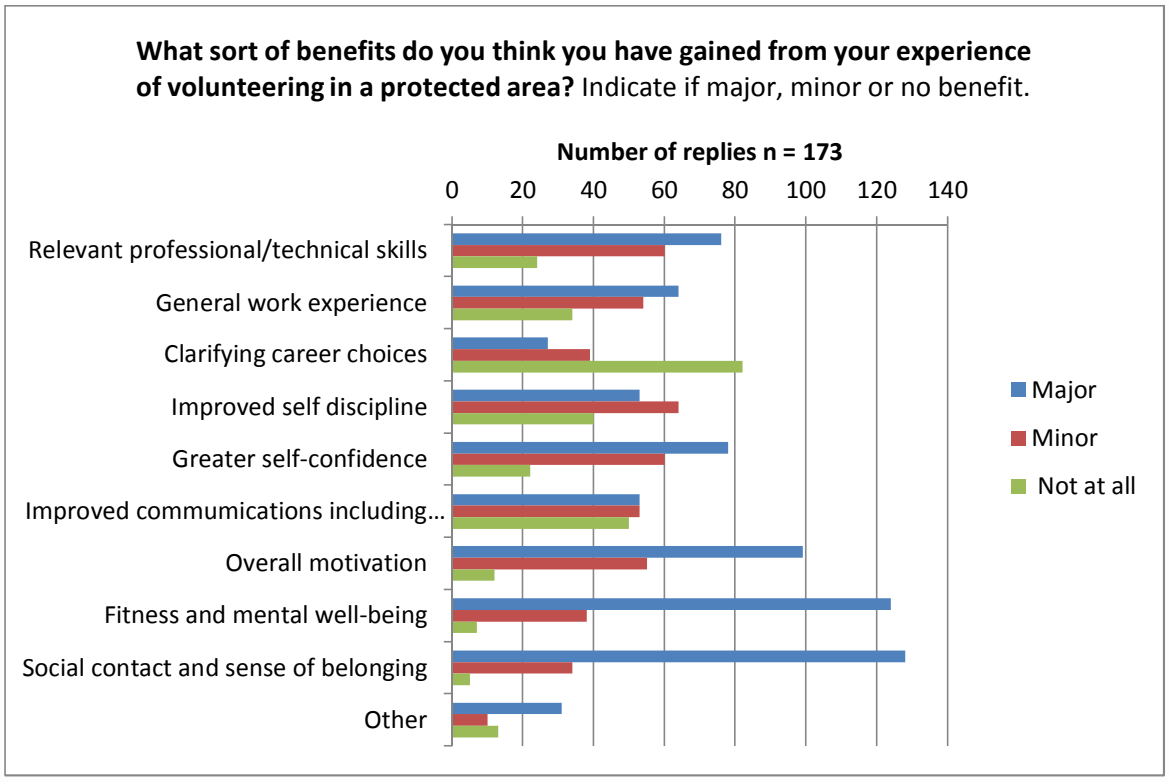
The overall balance between the sexes was 60% male to 40% female, with a higher (3 to 1) ratio amongst German respondents and figures rather closer to equality amongst respondents identifiable as being from

Spain and the UK. More notable were the differences related to age, with 72% of the over 60s being male, as against 53% in both the lower adult age groups. This bias is particularly striking given the longer life expectancy amongst women.

Benefits

Respondents were virtually unanimous in stating that they had benefited personally from the experience of volunteering in protected areas. Only three (less than 2%) thought otherwise. Even amongst these, two qualified their marking by making it clear that their assessment was based more on a view that volunteering should not be seen as primarily about individual advantage but about benefit to the environment and to the receiving organisation. The one wholly negative response criticised the priority given in briefing volunteers to health and safety matters rather than to issues likely to be of greater interest to them.

The nature of the benefits reported was very wide, with all the areas of possible benefit presented in the questionnaire being rated as of major benefit to them by at least 20% of respondents. Only the clarification of career choices was scored as of no value by more than half (53%) of respondents. Fewer than 7% of respondents felt that they had received no benefits in terms of social contact, fitness and mental wellbeing, and overall motivation.



The area of benefit rated most commonly as of major significance (by very nearly 80% of respondents) was social contact and sense of belonging. Volunteering's contribution to fitness and wellbeing followed closely behind, at 77%, whilst 62% saw it as making a major contribution to their overall motivation. Just under half reported a major boost to their self-confidence. In the other categories of professional and technical skills, general work experience, improved self-discipline and communications skills the balance between major and minor positive impacts emerged as more even but exceeded 70% in total in most cases. Only 48 respondents (rather under 30%) noted a benefit in the "Other" category but of these 56% judged the impact to have been major.

Age was a significant factor in differentiating the ratings and rankings accorded to the various categories of benefit. The social contact brought by volunteering was particularly highly prized by the over-60s, 83% of whom felt, unsurprisingly, that volunteering had contributed nothing to their choice of careers. Again it is perhaps to be expected that this age group would see less benefit than younger generations in terms of life

skills such as communications and self-discipline, with many of them probably feeling that these were areas where they were already adequately equipped and competent. Interestingly, the acquisition of new skills and enhanced self-confidence emerged strongly as benefits even to this group, with over 75% mentioning them as being of at least minor benefit.

Despite the very small number of respondents in the under-20 age bracket, it is perhaps worth noting that neither of them dismissed any of the possible areas of benefit as of no advantage to them. Both of them registered major benefits in terms of overall motivation, professional and technical skills, communication and fitness and mental wellbeing.

Amongst the 20-to-40 age group the social and fitness benefits, although still the highest scoring overall, featured less strongly than they did for the whole sample, with most of the other benefits being relatively more highly rated. The proportion noting a major benefit in the realm of self-confidence was 12 percentage points above the overall figure (61% to 49%), for general work experience it was 15 points higher (58% to 43%), for professional and technical skills 18 points higher (65% to 47%), for improved communications 23 points higher (57% to 34%) and, most notably of all, for clarifying career choices 31 points higher (50% to 19%).

The results for the 20-to-40 age group are perhaps the least predictable. This group attributed a higher level of major benefit than volunteers in general to overall motivation (72%/+ 11 percentage points), self-discipline (42%/+7 points) and improved self-confidence (54%/+5 points). They also scored benefits to fitness and wellbeing and social contact (both 81% major benefit) somewhat higher than the overall average, whilst the clarification of career choices, general work experience, professional and technical skills and improved communications were all rated between 11 and 3 percentage points lower than the average.

There were very few significant differences in ratings between the sexes. Many of the relatively minor differences that there were (for example in the higher weight given to benefit in clarifying career choice and perhaps in contributions to self-confidence) are explicable by reference to the somewhat different age profile of the sexes amongst volunteers. Possibly of significance were the rather lower ratings, in terms of major benefits, accorded to overall motivation, fitness and social contact, which were all between 3 and 5 percentage points lower, without an obvious origin in age differences. But none of these relatively minor discrepancies suggest a major gender-based divergence in the benefits associated with volunteering.

Causes of dissatisfaction

Very few respondents voiced dissatisfaction with their volunteering experience. Even those who were sceptical of the personal benefits of volunteering stressed that they still saw benefits to the organisation for which they were volunteering. Indeed, it seems that they wanted to underline the fact that their motives for participating lay in a desire to benefit the environment and the body that was looking after it, rather than themselves. This desire to care for nature and to benefit the public realm also emerged strongly from some of the other comments made, which spoke, for example, of the individual's duty to shoulder collective responsibilities and to give something back.

Helping walkers explore the countryside safely by improving boggy ground.
Photo: Yorkshire Dales National Park, U.K.

As mentioned previously, the only specific grievance raised was one individual's comment that the briefing given to volunteers had given greater attention to the need to comply with health and safety requirements than to addressing issues that the volunteers themselves might have wished to raise.

Suggestions for improvements

Despite the high level of satisfaction that was apparent from the general tenor of the responses, over half those responding offered suggestions as to how protected areas could make even better use of volunteers and improve the volunteering experience. The strongest single plea was for a **greater effort to publicise and acknowledge the value of the work undertaken by volunteers**. This was seen both as a way of attracting more volunteers and as a means of showing appreciation to those already committing their time and energy to the work. Underlying it, and mentioned explicitly in some responses, was an evident **desire to feel part of a**

wider team committed to the future wellbeing of the protected area. Some respondents also called for **more individual feedback**, as well as formal acknowledgment of individual contributions.

Many of the other suggestions revolved broadly around the theme of **better management**.

Improvements called for included:

- more forward-planning and more clearly-defined goals;
- better and more targeted communication about volunteering opportunities, including advance notification when the places at individual events were already exhausted in order to prevent people turning up when they were not needed;
- fuller briefings about the protected areas in which they were to work and the rationale for the activities that they were undertaking there;
- (in a few cases) a need for more training and equipment for the specific jobs that were being assigned.

Another sizeable category of respondents sought **more opportunities to volunteer, across a wider variety of tasks, and with greater flexibility over the frequency and timing of participation**. Predictably, it was those with full-time work commitments who emphasised the latter and in particular the need for more weekend activities.

There was a widespread sense that volunteering had the **potential to contribute substantially more to protected-area management** than it was currently delivering. This was balanced, however, by recognition that staff members in many protected areas were already working under heavy pressure and that lack of time on their part was the principal constraint on the expansion of volunteering in the directions that the respondent would like to see.

Sharing good practice… how to:

Take advantage of IT-based systems to programme volunteer activity, taking into account the interests, skills and availability of individual volunteers.

Concern over parks' limited capacity to organise more volunteering activity led some respondents to propose **more self-management of volunteers**, including the suggestion that "Friends" groups should be set up to take on the responsibility for managing some individual protected areas. As mentioned above, several respondents underlined the breadth and depth of experience possessed by many volunteers, with the implication that this

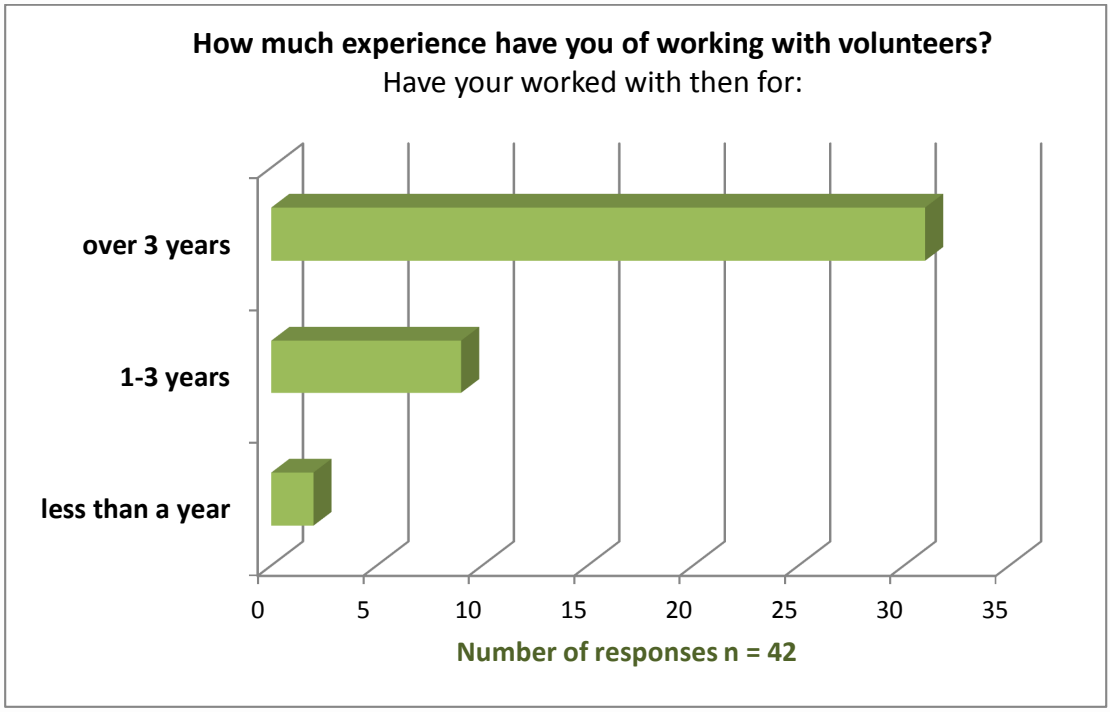
could be put to better use in the organisation of voluntary activity.

The costs and difficulty of travel to protected areas emerged as a concern and was in particular highlighted as a factor inhibiting participation by younger people. **Help with travel expenses and other action designed to make protected areas more accessible** were put forward as possible solutions, as was the **identification of work that volunteers could carry out remotely from their own homes.**

The last area to attract a good deal of comment was that of **networking and exchange visits**. A substantial number of respondents mentioned the benefits that could flow from more exchange of experience between volunteers in different protected areas. One mentioned specifically how much had in the past been gained from a link-up between wetland parks in Belgium, the Netherlands and the UK. The level of enthusiasm evident in the responses suggested that opportunities to participate in exchange visits could be one of the most effective ways of rewarding and motivating long-serving volunteers.

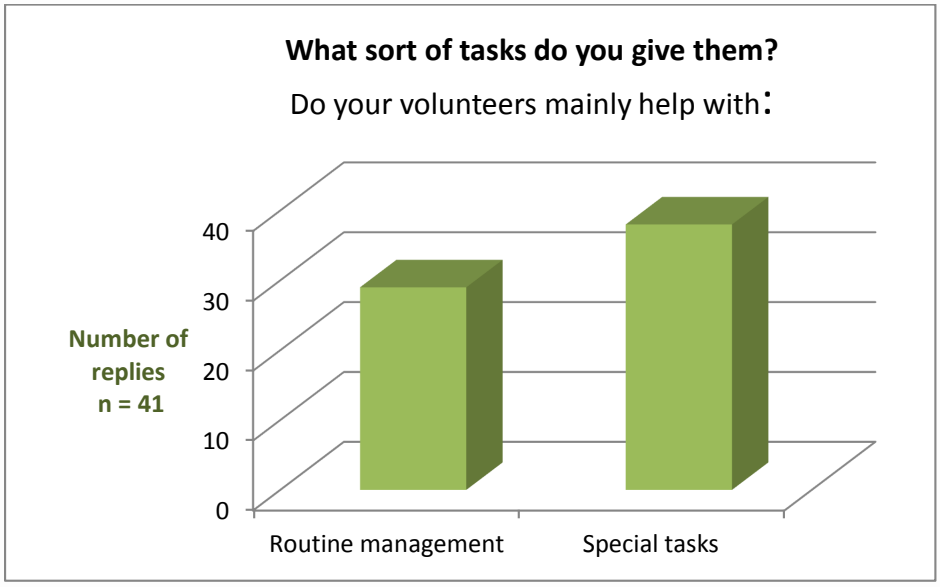
(ii) PART TWO: SURVEY OF VOLUNTEER COORDINATORS

Experience



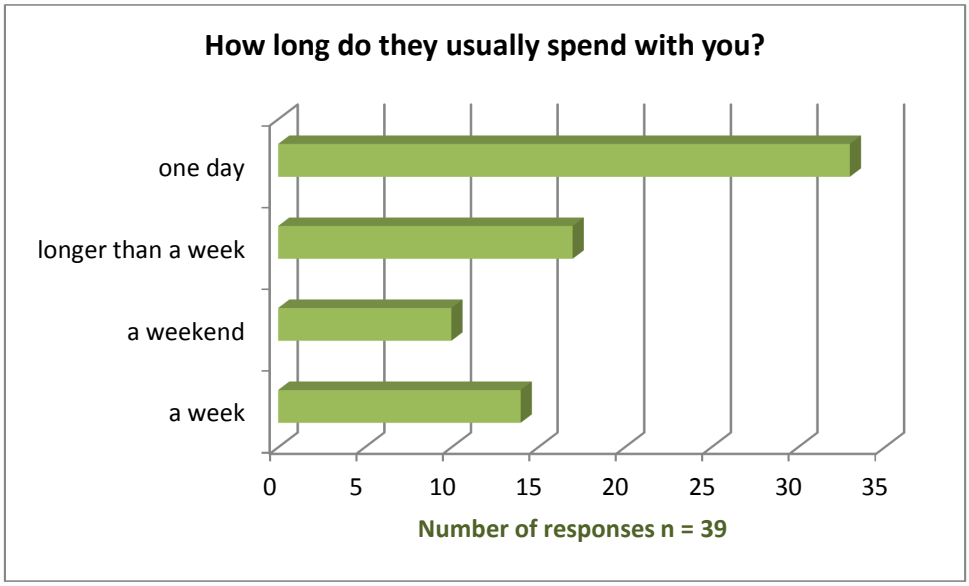
Volunteer co-ordinators emerge as generally a very experienced group, with almost three quarters having worked with volunteers for over 3 years. Only 5% had started in their role within the last year.

Nature of volunteering activity managed



Slightly less than 70% of the work that volunteers undertook was described as “Special Tasks”, specifically designed for them. The overlap with the almost 45% classified as “Routine Management” probably reflects the fact that in areas like rangering the activity itself is very much part of the park’s ongoing core-business but that a proportion of it has been assigned to volunteers and arranged around their availability and abilities.

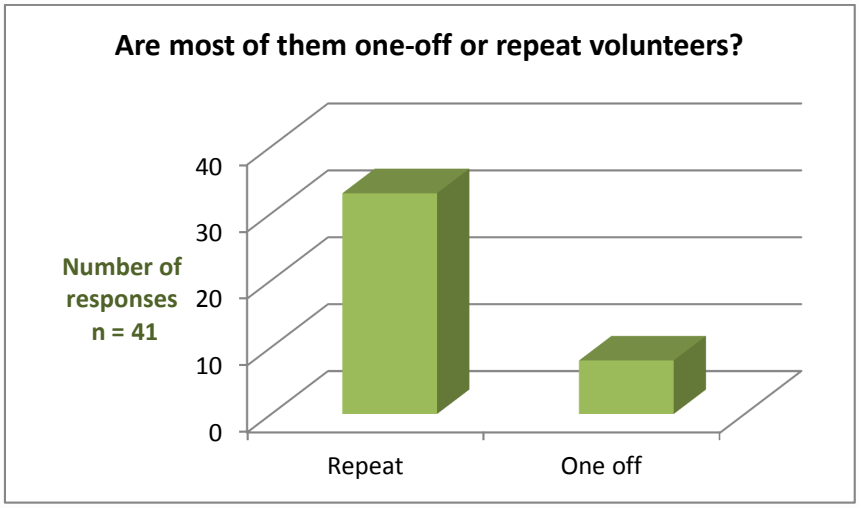
Duration of volunteering activities



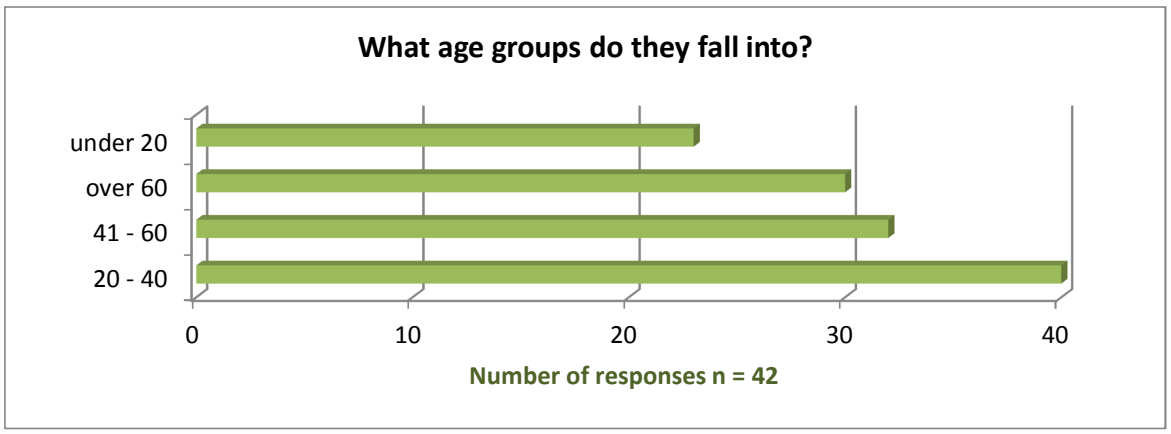
The largest single category was one-day volunteering, with 74% of co-ordinators saying that they organised events of this duration. Over 50% also had experience of organising events lasting longer than a week. About

20% each had arranged volunteering over a week or a weekend. In the UK and Germany there was a rather stronger bias towards single-day volunteering, which is consistent with the larger element of regular volunteering by relatively locally-based individuals in these countries.

One-off or repeat

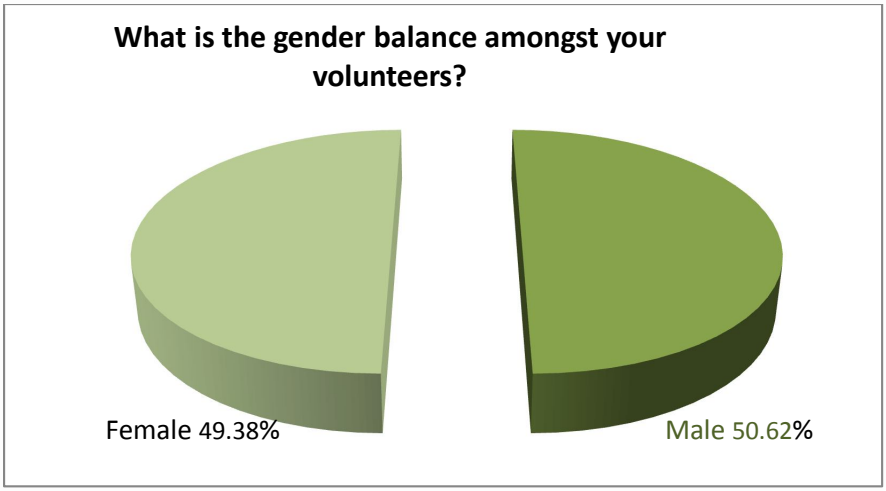


Relatively few volunteer co-ordinators dealt only with either one-off or repeat volunteers; most of them handled a combination of the two. In this instance, however, the UK was the exception, with all the respondents claiming that they dealt solely with repeat volunteers. Overall, repeat volunteers outnumbered those attending only a single event by roughly 4 to 1. From comments made there are signs that, as might be expected, repeat volunteering is associated particularly with one-day activity, whereas some of those who have volunteered for long periods (for example under EVS) have done so on a one-off basis. Anecdotally it is also clear that that some of those who engage less often but for longer periods (e.g. by attending work camps) do so on a regular basis. Indeed, such repeated involvement can be crucial in providing the experienced volunteers - who can be trained up to provide volunteer management in countries such as Iceland - with very limited professional co-ordinator capacity.



Interestingly, and as mentioned previously, the age profile of volunteers as recorded by the volunteer co-ordinators is rather different to that of the volunteers who responded to the questionnaire. Particularly notable is the higher proportion in the two younger age groups (under 20 and 20 to 40). These two groups account for approaching half of the volunteer effort as described by the volunteer co-ordinators, as against the substantially lower figure of around 30% implied by the volunteers' own responses. It seems likely that the co-ordinators' assessment is the more accurate one.

The discrepancy possibly reflects not just a bias towards the more regular participants in the older age groups amongst the volunteers who completed questionnaires but also the higher proportion of young people in the longer duration events such as work camps. This explanation would be consistent with the fact that the proportion of effort attributed to the younger age groups is substantially lower (well under a quarter) in the UK, where regular, short-term volunteering is more of the norm in programmes organised by park staff themselves (though not by NGOs such as TCV). Whatever ambiguities there may be in the survey results, they strongly suggest that participation in volunteering in protected areas extends right across the age spectrum, from young people of school and university age to those of quite advanced years, with all making a significant contribution.



Gender Balance

Once again the gender balance reported by the volunteer co-ordinators differed somewhat from that recorded by the volunteer respondents themselves, being effectively 50/50. Although this may reflect approximations on the managers' part, and even a wish to demonstrate a commitment to sex equality, it is also consistent with the previously mentioned differences in age profile amongst volunteers as perceived from the two perspectives. As the proportion of female volunteers is higher amongst the younger age groups, a perspective that sees the latter as contributing more of the overall effort is likely to record less of an imbalance towards male participation.

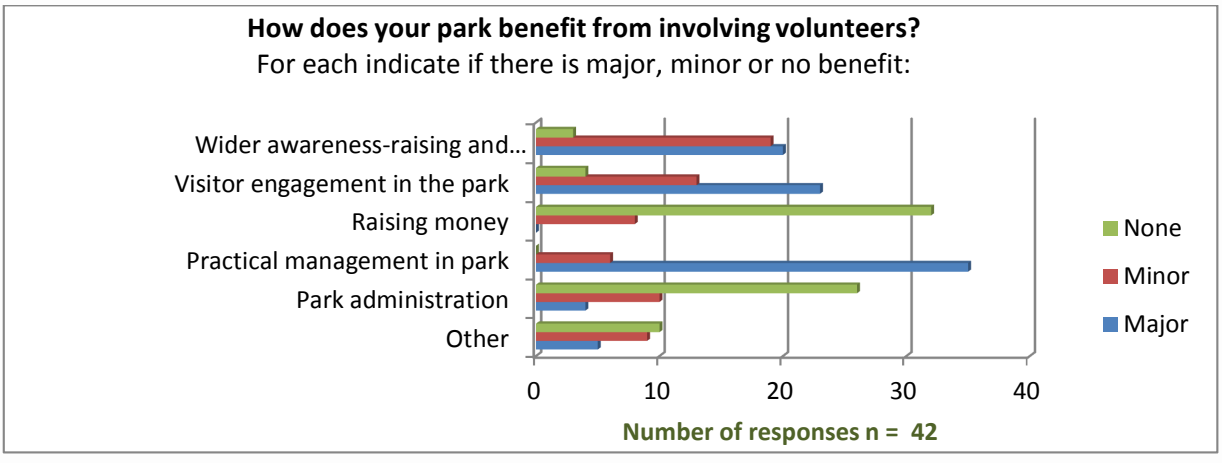
Volunteer residence and engagement

The picture of where volunteers live relative to the protected areas in which they volunteer as painted by the co-ordinators is broadly in line with that recorded by the volunteers themselves, with both reporting that between 40 and 50% live within or near the park.

As would be expected, the proportion of volunteers who record themselves as frequent volunteers (75%) is significantly higher than the percentage of volunteers whom the co-ordinators report as becoming regular helpers (roughly 30%). This latter average figure also disguises a wide variation in the situation as presented by individual co-ordinators. This is probably no more than a reflection of the enormous diversity of protected areas, in terms of the number of people living in or near them and of the nature of the activities carried out within them. Parks near to centres of population, with habitats requiring active management and attracting large numbers of visitors, are far more likely to provide regular volunteering opportunities than remote, physically hostile or fragile ones, which may require only occasional bouts of intense activity. These differences underline the widely varying character of the volunteer management role. This can be assembling teams of people who can be relied upon to undertake, with minimal supervision, rangering and wardening activities on a regular basis over a lengthy period. It can also be the organisation of a series of sizeable work camps, running perhaps for several weeks each, in locations far removed from many facilities and attracting young, inexperienced volunteers from a number of different countries speaking several different languages.

One area where there is unanimity, however, lies in the co-ordinators' assessment of the impact that volunteers' experiences has on their attitude towards the park. Without exception they judged this to be at least neutral and, in over 80% of cases, positive. All therefore viewed volunteering as a useful way of building up support for protected area objectives.

Benefits to the protected areas

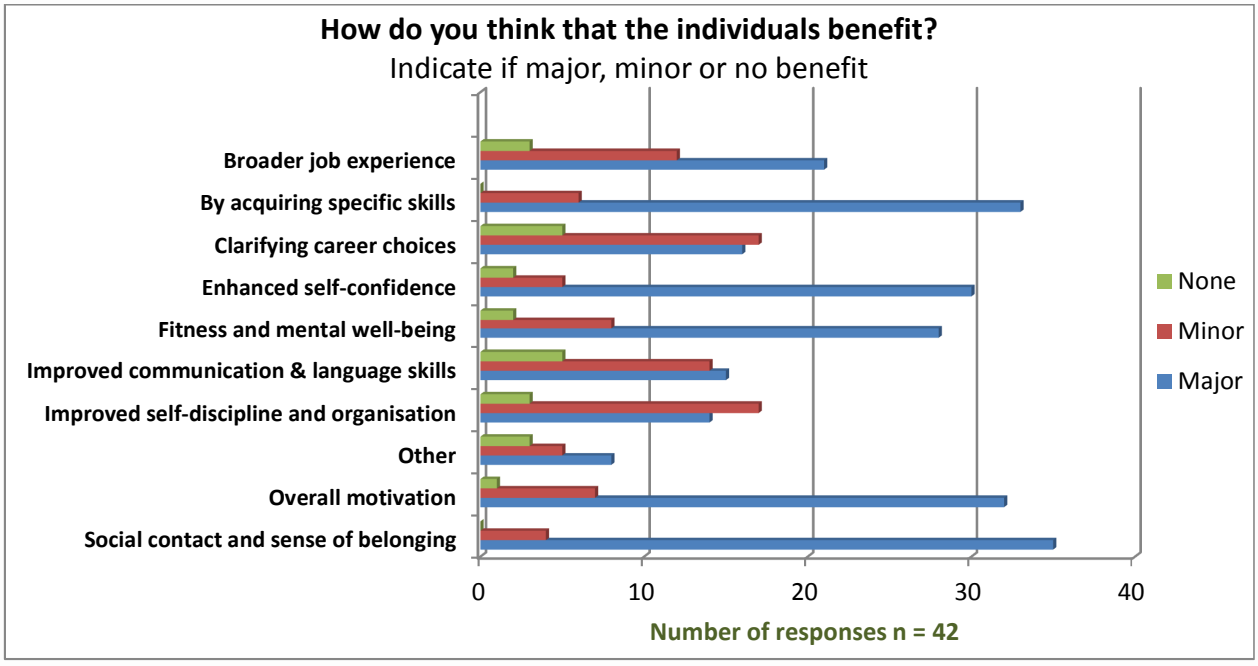


All volunteer co-ordinators reported that volunteers were making at least some contribution towards the practical management of their protected areas, and in 85% of cases this was judged to be a major benefit. Volunteers were also recorded as being heavily involved in visitor engagement (61% major benefit) and wider awareness-raising and communication (50% major benefit), although in these two fields there were some protected areas (around 10% of the total) which did not deploy volunteer effort in these arenas. Much less use was made of volunteers in park administration and fund-raising, with only 11% reporting the first as a major activity and none the second.

Overall, more than a third of respondents said that their volunteers made at least some contribution to park administration and over a quarter that they played some part in raising money. The "Other" category was significant here, with 60% of volunteer co-ordinators indicating that they deployed at least some volunteer time on activities apart from those specified in the questionnaire.

Although the nature of these activities was not apparent from the responses themselves, these estimates do illustrate the breadth of contribution that volunteers can make and suggest a willingness on the part of many co-ordinators to make take advantage of the diversity of skills and experience that volunteers may have to offer. Indeed, a comparison with the feedback from volunteers themselves indicates that volunteer managers may be more alive to, and keen to exploit, these other talents than many volunteers themselves recognise.

Benefits to the volunteers



In this arena the judgments offered by the volunteer co-ordinators are obviously a less reliable guide than the volunteers' own feedback, although particularly for the younger age groups it may be that an experienced

professional eye picks up changes in behaviour and attitude that individuals themselves fail to notice. This is perhaps especially likely where the volunteering experience has been of some duration and has involved a good deal of teamwork and personal interaction.

That said, the overall pattern of benefits as assessed by the co-ordinators does not depart radically from that which emerges from the volunteers' own responses. Both recognise the high value of the social contact that volunteering brings and of the contribution that it can make to fitness and mental wellbeing and to overall motivation, although the co-ordinators tend to rate the physical benefits slightly less highly and those to overall motivation more highly than do the volunteers themselves.

"Lebenshilfe" volunteers ready for action in the Harz National Park (DE)

Areas where the co-ordinators appear to overstate the benefits by comparison with the volunteers' own assessments include most notably the acquisition of specific skills (84% scored this as a major benefit, as against 47% of volunteers) and clarifying career choice (39% as against 19%). Although some of these discrepancies may have been exaggerated by the failure of some co-ordinators to distinguish between magnitudes of benefit (major versus minor), they are consistent with the proportions of each population awarding the factors a zero rating (53% of volunteers as opposed to 14% of co-ordinators for clarifying career choices and 13% as against 0% for specific skills). Similarly, the contribution that volunteering can make to the development of communications skills was judged significant by over 80% of co-ordinators, as against two thirds of volunteers themselves.

As suggested earlier, some of these differences may be attributable to the insight and wisdom that experienced managers can bring to their assessment. As protected-area managers they are also likely to attach a particularly high value to some of the technical skills that they help to impart to the volunteers, whilst the latter may regard these simply as a necessary element of the overall experience but of no great intrinsic value beyond their volunteering activity.

Overall, it seems undeniable that there is probably a degree of over-optimism amongst volunteer managers about the extent and range of benefits that volunteers derive from their volunteering beyond the social contact and physical exertion that it brings with it. However, the picture painted by the volunteers themselves is such a positive one, and the contribution that committed managers must make to it is so great, that some element of over-enthusiasm is surely forgivable.

(iii) Reward and recognition

There was a widespread appreciation amongst volunteer co-ordinators of the need to take active steps to maintain the morale and commitment of volunteers, especially those who regularly give of their time. Almost two thirds of them reported that they sought to reward long or otherwise outstanding service in one way or another. The means chosen to provide this encouragement vary widely, ranging from the everyday "thank you" and acknowledgement of a job well done, through annual letters of appreciation at Christmas time, to more formal certificates of attainment and gifts to mark milestone periods of service, most frequently after 10 and 25 years. From the evidence of both the questionnaire responses and the interviews conducted, EUROPARC Deutschland would appear to have particularly valuable experience to offer in this field.

Some protected areas organise special "Volunteer of the Year" awards, whilst others seek out suitable opportunities either to put forward their volunteers for award schemes run by others or to nominate them to attend other relevant and attractive events outside the park. In some cases giving a particularly deserving volunteer priority in the allocation of places for especially popular volunteering activities was regarded by the beneficiary as a reward in itself.

From the data available it was impossible to judge just how successful such initiatives were and how far they correlated with volunteer satisfaction. It was clear, however, that volunteer co-ordinators recognise just how important it is to show volunteers that their efforts are valued and to maintain the enthusiasm of long-term volunteers.

Some tried to do this by increasing the level of responsibility given to them as they accumulated experience. Several of the co-ordinators interviewed were, for example, keen to train up some of their longer-serving volunteers to manage others, with a view to reducing the time that staff had to spend on to the task and also to motivate and provide greater satisfaction for the selected volunteers themselves. In many cases, however, volunteers proved reluctant to take on these extra duties, on the grounds that such a degree of responsibility would erode the pleasure of the volunteering experience itself.

Sharing good practice… how to:

Express appreciation and reward long or outstanding service.

(iv) Input to park policy

There is a far wider divergence in the extent to which protected-area managers seek to capitalise on volunteer interest by giving them an opportunity to influence park policies and priorities. Here the responses from volunteer co-ordinators were divided almost exactly 50/50 between those who made such an effort and those who did not.

Again the character of the protected area was a factor here: parks with regular volunteers are understandably more likely to invite them to have a say about park management – for example at an annual gathering – than those whose volunteering is predominantly of a more one-off variety. There were nonetheless some noticeable differences between countries which were not immediately traceable to such differences. Thus, for instance, 70% of Spanish and 60% of British respondents indicated that they give volunteers such opportunities, as against only a third of German ones.

Sharing good practice... how to:

Effectively give regular volunteers an opportunity to contribute to thinking about the future policies and priorities of the protected area in which they volunteer.

(v) Feedback and follow-up

A very high proportion (87%) of volunteer co-ordinators has some system for obtaining feedback from their volunteers at the end of their assignment. A majority also tries to maintain contact with them – a necessary step, of course, if the aim is to encourage a substantial number of them to become regular volunteers. In the

UK particularly, a good deal of effort is being put into developing and implementing IT-based systems for both keeping in touch with volunteers (through electronic newsletters and the like) and for deploying them efficiently, in line with their availability, interests and skills, through some form of interactive database.

More and more protected areas are also seeking in-depth feedback from their volunteers through systematic surveys repeated at regular intervals of one or more years. Such surveys are designed to ascertain not only what volunteers feel about the use that the park makes of them and how that might be improved but also to assess the impact that volunteering has upon the volunteers' own lives. The data gathered is compared with feedback from staff, very much in the way that the present study seeks to do.

Despite a widespread interest in feedback mechanisms of this kind, only a quarter of the volunteer co-ordinators who completed the questionnaire were aware of the framework for assessing the impact of volunteering that has been developed by EUROPARC Germany. Only a small minority (13%) said that they were planning to introduce a similar system themselves, although ignorance of the exact nature of the system may have deterred some from responding positively to this question. This reluctance to embrace a ready-made system seems odd, given the general recognition that more needs to be known about volunteers and their motivation to ensure that both protected areas and those volunteering in them extract maximum benefit from the time and effort involved.

Time constraints are clearly a factor in discouraging many protected areas from embarking on formal initiatives of this kind. There would certainly appear to be a place – and some appetite – for a model feedback methodology which could help all those involved in managing volunteers in protected areas to monitor the satisfaction of their volunteers and to demonstrate to wider society the benefits that such environmental volunteering can bring to the individuals who participate.

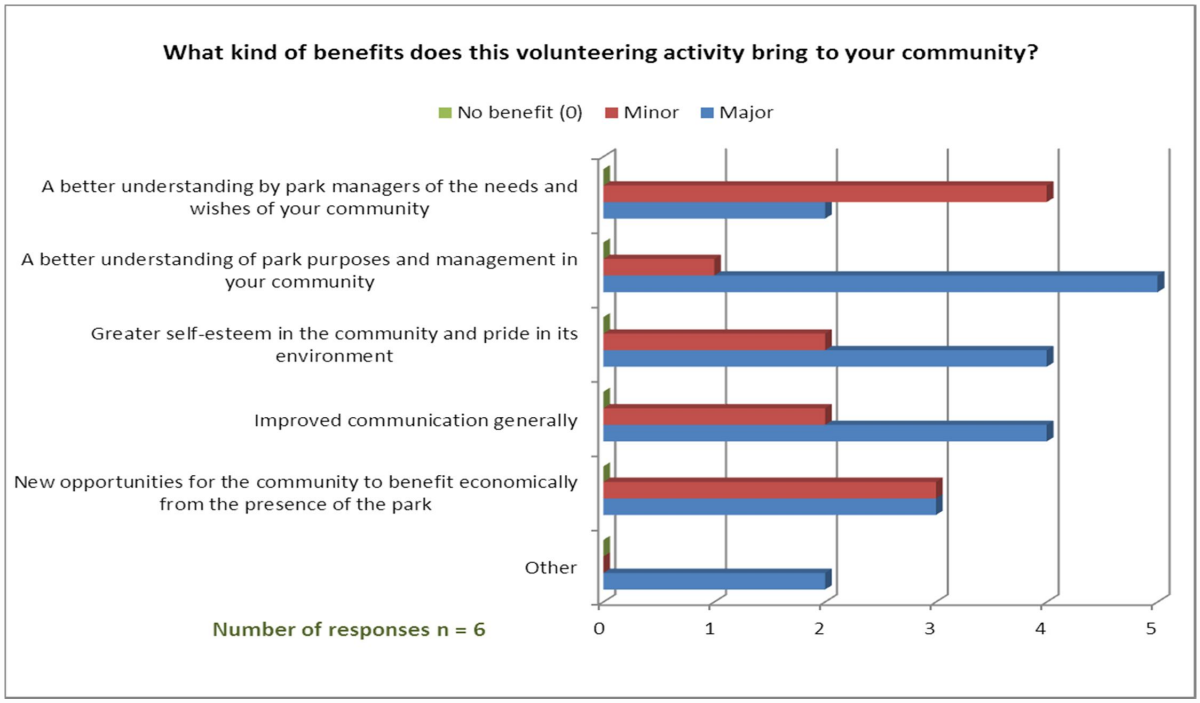
Sharing good practice… how to:

Secure volunteer feedback and maintain contact with those who have volunteered previously.

(vi) Community attitudes and engagement

The extent to which volunteering helped protected areas to forge better relations with local communities proved, perhaps predictably, to be one of the more difficult issues on which to reach a firm, well-founded conclusion. Community feedback was extremely hard to come by, with only 6 "community representatives" completing the questionnaire designed specifically for their use (2 each from England and Scotland and one each from Ireland and Latvia). Some volunteer co-ordinators observed, reasonably, that it was very hard to

identify people who could be regarded as truly representative of their communities and who would have a grasp of the extent of volunteering within them. Even when suitable individuals or organisations were identified and approached, however, most proved reluctant to respond. This suggests that there remains a need to strengthen links between park staff and their local communities, and in particular to alert the latter to the existence of volunteering programmes and to the opportunities and benefits that these have to offer.



The few who did complete the questionnaire all felt that volunteering in the protected area had brought benefits to their communities. They highlighted above all the better understanding that it gave to the community of park purposes and management (five of the six rated this as a major benefit). Two thirds also saw major benefits in improved communications between the park and the community more generally and in greater community self-esteem and pride in its environment. Half believed that the engagement brought substantial new opportunities for the community to benefit economically from the presence of the protected area. Although they scored the benefits in terms of park managers' understanding of the needs and wishes of the community less highly, even in this area all judged there to be at least some gain. Indeed, none of the possible areas of benefit listed attracted a zero rating.

Five of the six thought that the volunteers had influenced attitudes towards the park in their communities and all of these assessed the impact as positive. Two respondents noted that their volunteers acted as "ambassadors" or "champions" for the park. All but one of the respondents also felt that the volunteers had helped the community to influence park policies and priorities, although the point was made that the

grassroots nature of volunteering means that volunteers have relatively little contact with those charged with thinking more strategically about the future of their protected area.

Volunteer co-ordinators overwhelmingly viewed volunteering as contributing positively to views of their park within the volunteer's own community, with over 85% saying that volunteers influenced community attitudes and all of these judging this effect to be positive. Fewer than a quarter had, however, sought to formalise this aspect of volunteers' role by designating park "ambassadors" or "champions". This practice appeared to be better developed in Germany than in other countries, although several UK respondents noted that identifying such representatives had formed part of the "Mosaic" project designed to attract more interest in national parks amongst ethnic and other minorities. Although this project had now ended many of those who had assumed a role in it continued to play it.

(vii) Economic impact

Volunteering in parks contributes to the economy in two rather different ways. First, the volunteers themselves can spend money that they have earned elsewhere, thus generating an income for people living in or near the park. Second, the work that they undertake for free effectively increases the natural capital of the area, benefiting its residents indirectly by maintaining and enhancing the quality of what is usually their key economic asset.

Harz National Park Volunteers assisting with technical engineering work Photo: Otfried Wüstemann.

The extent to which volunteers in protected areas bring extra money into the communities in and around them is very hard to assess and many of the respondents emphasised this. It is also self-evident that protected

areas which attract volunteers from outside their immediate locality, and who spend significant amounts of time within them, are more likely to benefit economically from their presence than those which draw the bulk of their volunteers from communities in and immediately around them, and where the activities carried out by the volunteers can be completed within a day.

For example, local economies in countries like Iceland and Finland, where much of the volunteering takes the form of work camps and where many of the volunteers come from abroad or from urban centres at a considerable distance from the protected area, could be expected to receive more of a boost than those in places like Germany and the UK, where many of the volunteers are locally based and serve on a regular basis in roles such as volunteer rangering and leading guided walks. Similarly, volunteers who undertake lengthy placements under schemes such as the EU "Youth in Action" programme are likely to contribute substantially to local income through their need for food and accommodation

Against this background it is not surprising that only 27% of volunteer co-ordinators felt that volunteers brought significant amounts of money directly into their protected area and its surrounding communities. Several of them noted, however, that the effort provided by volunteers could be used as match-funding to help attract other funding which would not otherwise have been available to the park. As parks become more reliant on sources of funding that require such matching, as has tended to happen in recent years, this contribution grows in importance.

The use of volunteer effort to match financial contributions from other sources illustrates the second, and more significant, way in which volunteering can benefit the economy of protected areas. This is by strengthening the economic base of a park and its surrounding area through its contribution to the effective management of the park itself. By so doing, it enhances the area's attraction as a tourist destination and, in some cases, as a place to live and work. Indeed, this was the principal reason given by the rather higher proportion of 40% of volunteer co-ordinators who believed that volunteers contributed to the local economy indirectly.

Quantifying this is again not easy. But the 125,000 hours worked by around 2,700 volunteers in German protected areas in 2011 equates to perhaps 2.5 million Euros worth of staff time. It was achieved at the cost of less than 10% of that figure in actual staff time spent on organising the voluntary activity. In Finland 2,000 volunteers worked around 30,000 hours, equivalent to approximately 16 full-time posts or rather over 3% of the total workforce of Metsahällitus.

Another way in which volunteering can boost communities in and around protected areas economically is by making them better known and spreading the word about their attractiveness as places to visit. Over 85% of volunteer co-ordinators judged that their volunteers encouraged other people to come to the area who might not otherwise have done so. Although many qualified this assessment by noting that it was necessarily something of a guess, the consensus was undoubtedly that volunteers did assist in a meaningful way to raise the public profile of the areas in which they worked.

The overall picture that emerged, therefore, was that although volunteers did not in most protected areas make a significant direct contribution to the local economy, they played a valuable role in maintaining these areas' key economic assets and in bringing their attractions to the attention of a wider public.

Volunteers hard at work in the forest, Harz National Park, Germany. Photo: Steffen Küppers.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section attempts to summarise and offer some reflections on overall picture presented by the many data sources drawn upon in this study. Although grounded in the material reviewed and the feedback and opinions gathered, the conclusions drawn inevitably involve an element of generalisation and are to some degree personal to the author. They are, however, put forward in the firm belief that they should further the objective of the project, with its aim of enhancing Lifelong Learning through the improved professional management of conservation volunteering in protected areas across Europe.

History

The history of environmental volunteering in European protected areas is very variable and reflects differing cultures and circumstances at a national level, as well as the widely-varying conditions and needs in individual protected areas. Broadly speaking, volunteer management in protected areas is most developed in western and northern European countries with higher living standards and more urbanised populations, and where good public provision reduces, although it certainly does not eliminate, the need for volunteering in the social sphere, which the public at large tends to regard as a higher priority. Recent years have, however, seen a significant expansion of environmental volunteering elsewhere in Europe, especially amongst the younger age groups. To differing degrees in different countries, many factors have probably played a part in this. They include higher overall levels of education (strongly correlated with the tendency to volunteer – see "Volunteering in the European Union"), increased environmental awareness, reduced confidence in the reliability of public sector action in the wake of economic crises, and the receding of memories of Soviet-era compulsory 'volunteering'.

Volunteer motivation

Many volunteers are powerfully motivated by personal interest in nature and a love of the outdoors and are keen to engage in relevant activities, whether they be land management, visitor engagement or species monitoring. A substantial proportion of volunteers have a strong desire to communicate this enthusiasm and to pass on the knowledge to others.

The physical activity involved in activities such as scrub clearance is also a definite attraction and overall the contribution that volunteering can make to health and mental wellbeing, both through physical exercise and social interaction, emerges clearly as the principal benefit to volunteers, especially those close to or beyond retirement age.

The motivation of the younger age groups differs somewhat, in that (as might be expected) they place rather more emphasis on the extent to which volunteering can contribute to their personal development and help them to demonstrate their value to prospective employers. They thus see volunteering at least in part as a means of equipping themselves with specific skills, including communication skills, and helping them to organise themselves and gain work experience. In a minority of cases it also assists them to make up their minds about the careers that they wish to pursue.

Learning useful skills in the Blackdown Hills AONB, U.K. Photo: TCV.

One of the questions raised by this study is the extent to which these differences in motivation are to be viewed essentially as a function of age (to take the extreme example, few over-60s are likely to be troubled by uncertainties over career choice!) and how far they reflect changing social attitudes.

Some volunteer managers fear that people's willingness to take part in voluntary activity simply because it is a "good thing" – a way in which an individual can return something to society – is diminishing, and that calculations of personal advantage are coming more to the fore. This could, as they see it, erode their ability to recruit new volunteers. Wider cultural shifts towards more individualistic, consumerist societies, with a weaker sense of mutual obligation in working and other relationships, makes this at least a plausible anxiety.

There is in fact nothing in this survey, beyond perhaps the age bias in the responding volunteer population, to suggest that the appetite for contributing to activity which is seen as environmentally and socially worthwhile has significantly declined. Indeed, the desire for reassurance that what is being delivered is viewed by others as beneficial and worthwhile still emerges as a key factor in the successful motivation of volunteers.

Nevertheless it seems prudent, if only as a precaution, to take steps to ensure that the benefits of voluntary activity to the individual, as well as to the receiving organisation, are clearly spelt out. It is hoped that the information provided by this report can be used to help to make that case.

Age profile of volunteers

Whether or not the wider climate of public opinion is becoming less sympathetic to volunteering generally, and environmental volunteering in particular, one issue that worries quite a lot of volunteer managers in countries with a lengthy history of volunteering is whether they will be able to replace the committed, regular volunteers who have served them for many years.

In harder economic times, and with an almost universal expectation that retirement ages will rise and that even after retirement more people may have to work for at least part of their living, there is a concern that the pool of potential volunteers will begin to dry up. The possibility that in at least some countries families and voluntary organisations will have to take on more of the social care responsibilities hitherto assumed by the state only reinforces misgivings on this score.

The fact that, historically, a high proportion of volunteers now in their later years began their volunteering at a significantly younger age suggests that one message to be taken has to be the importance of attracting substantial numbers of younger people into parks, whether as volunteers or not. Even if other preoccupations prevent them from contributing actively to park activities as young and middle-aged adults, such exposure increases the chances of them re-engaging with protected areas, and offering their services as volunteers, when other pressures begin to ease off and they start to look beyond their jobs and immediate families for more of their stimulus and reward.

Sharing good practice… how to:

Attract more young people into parks, both as volunteers and simply for the experience, for example through the use of social media.

Another challenge posed for volunteer managers by the ageing population of existing volunteers is rather different. It is that of how to deal with volunteers who, because of the social benefits that they derive from the activity, wish to continue with it when they are no longer capable of undertaking much useful work.

There are no easy answers to a dilemma such as this, which in itself both illustrates the wider benefits that environmental volunteering can bring and points up the weakness of other social support mechanisms. However, it does serve to highlight two other issues that deserve attention: the demanding nature of volunteer management and the need to expand the range of volunteering activities undertaken.

Volunteer management

Everybody who has been involved in managing volunteers is unequivocal: volunteering is not an easy option for securing extra resources. Although it can bring great rewards for both parties, to be productive and satisfying its management requires time, effort and expertise.

The precise demands vary, with information gathered in this exercise suggesting that the ratio between management time and volunteer time can be as low as 4:1 (as in Finland) and at least as high as 11:1 (as in Germany). Even the lower of these ratios means, however, that even in terms of benefits to the park alone, the input is amply justified by the outputs.

It underlines, though, the fact that organising a volunteer programme is not an undertaking to be embarked upon lightly. It requires both a significant time commitment and thorough advance planning. And indeed, such advance planning should not be confined to the details of individual events or even annual programmes. A protected area contemplating volunteering as a substantial component of its future resourcing needs to address at the outset a wide range of questions, including amongst many others:

- what it wishes to use its volunteers for;
- the kind of people that it needs to recruit to fulfil these ambitions;
- how it is going to organise them; and
- how much say it is going to give them in their choice of work.

Sharing good practice…how to:

Develop a long-term volunteering strategy for an individual protected area or organisation managing a number of protected areas.

One key question is how far this management load can be alleviated by getting volunteers to manage themselves. Given the desire of some volunteers to take on greater responsibilities as they become more familiar with the work, and the experience of management that many of them have gained in other fields, this is at first sight an attractive option. It clearly works successfully in countries with volunteering traditions and practices as diverse as those in Belgium and Iceland. But it is worth noting that many volunteers are reluctant to take on the responsibilities in fields such as health and safety that such management duties involve. To retain their good will as volunteers, it would certainly be unwise to try to pressurise them into doing so.

Stone pitching a path surface, Thirlmere, England. Photo: TCV.

Even when some individuals are prepared to take on these extra responsibilities, a successful outcome is by no means assured. First, they must be trained. Second, as in any management situation, problems of inter-personal relations can arise. Difficult as tensions between individuals can be, such problems can become even more intractable when they extend to whole groups and involve fixed mind-sets and entrenched ways of working that may not only become unacceptable to professional park staff but also discourage new would-be volunteers. In the Belgian Natuurpunt organisation, in which the management of many protected areas is overseen by committees of volunteers, the tendency for these to become impenetrable cliques was cited by many younger potential recruits as a deterrent to their involvement.

Despite these potential drawbacks, the self-management of volunteers does appear to be an obvious way of embedding volunteering further in protected areas where it is already a well-established way of working. The development of such self-management approaches, and the training required to prepare volunteers for the role, could be a fruitful area for co-operation between parks through the EUROPARC network in the future.

Many protected area managers already have it as an aspiration and some experience has already been accumulated in countries such as Belgium and the UK.

Sharing good practice… how to:

Train people for and facilitate more self-management amongst volunteers.

Local community involvement

The self-management of volunteers may be particularly appropriate in protected areas with significant populations either within or close to their boundaries. In places such as these the management of volunteers recruited locally by a manager also drawn from the local community, with the guidance and assistance of park staff, could help to reinforce links between the protected area and the local population. If combined with efforts to involve these volunteers in debates about the future management of the protected area, and priorities for the use of its resources, it could be a potent means of creating greater local appreciation and "ownership" of the environmental asset that the protected area represents.

Sharing good practice… how to:

Involve local communities more in the recruitment and possibly the management of volunteers.

The role of NGOs

Another obvious source of expertise in managing volunteers is NGOs with volunteering either as a central purpose, such as TCV, or as a significant element within their overall programme, as is the case with many nature and landscape protection organisations across Europe (for example Birdlife, Legambiente, NABU and WWF). Co-operation between protected area managers and such bodies is already commonplace: the very origins of volunteering in Iceland, for example, go back to the then BTCV's organisation of summer camps in the country.

In Finland, Spain and the east of Europe, NGOs are an important source of volunteer effort. In the Baltic countries in particular, much of the volunteering that takes place occurs in response to requests for opportunities for voluntary action from such bodies. However, not all NGOs, and especially those with reserves of their own to manage, have been keen to co-operate with protected-area managers over the use of their volunteer resources. This has been so even where there is obvious scope for cost-effective joint activity, such as shared training.

In times of economic stringency, affecting voluntary as well as public bodies, there is a clear-cut case for more co-operation of this kind. The level at which such co-operation is best nurtured and organised – national, regional or local – will differ according to local circumstances. It is, however, another field of potential opportunity that should be pursued over the next few years. In many cases the obvious level at which to initiate the contact and explore the opportunity will be the national one, perhaps with the help of the relevant EUROPARC section, but there may also be a role for the EUROPARC Federation to pave the way by engaging with the major international NGOs.

Sharing good practice… how to:

Strengthen the links between volunteering organised by protected areas themselves and environmental NGOs with volunteering capacity and skills.

Range of voluntary activity

The range of activities judged suitable for volunteering also deserves some thought and exploration. As indicated previously, the bulk of voluntary effort in protected areas currently goes into on-the-ground activity such as habitat management, path maintenance, guiding and species monitoring. Given the interests and motivation of many volunteers, and the needs of the protected areas themselves, these will probably always remain central components of the volunteering programmes of most parks. However, the wide diversity of activities recorded under the "Other" category of the survey responses illustrates the fact that the potential of volunteering is by no means confined to these areas.

Older volunteers, in particular, might be happy to move on to less physically demanding tasks that still offered the sense of satisfaction and the social contact that are for them key benefits of volunteering. More sedentary, desk-based activities might also be appealing to the sort of secondees, often in the later stages of their careers, whom some commercial companies are prepared to make available to deserving organisations as part of their social responsibility programmes. Many of these people have skills in fields such as resource management, IT and fundraising which could be of great value to protected areas.

Sharing good practice… how to:

Take advantage of the volunteer resource potentially available from sources such as industry secondments and student placements.

Once again there is a case for protected areas to give collectively some further thought to the types of work, beyond the traditional fields of activity, with which volunteers could sensibly be entrusted. This could further enhance the contribution that volunteers can make to protected area management. It could also help to broaden the volunteering base and thereby attract yet more interest in and support for the environmental cause.

Sharing good practice… how to:

Expand volunteering activity to cater for a wider range of interests and skills and help broaden the volunteer base.

Community benefits

Volunteers can, and do, benefit from volunteering in protected areas in a wide variety of ways. Volunteers from outside the community bring extra resources into the area, both directly and indirectly. They help to maintain key economic assets for the community and to raise awareness of what the area has to offer. Volunteers from within the community obtain the personal benefits that volunteering brings. But they can also act as a bridge between protected area managers and the communities within and around their park – to mutual advantage.

In recent years most, if not all, park managers have accorded a high priority to building better relations with their local communities. But not all have perhaps appreciated the importance of conveying to them just how much, and in what ways, volunteering can benefit them. They should, where appropriate, take every opportunity to do so, drawing upon the sort of information provided in this report and elsewhere.

Definition of volunteering

The basis on which some of this activity might take place may not fit the customary definition of volunteering. Is the senior manager seconded to an environmental body a volunteer? What about the student on a placement to gather information for a dissertation?

In an important sense the answers to these questions do not seem to matter very much; the vital point is that all these groups represent a potential additional and very valuable resource to assist the work of protected areas. Although it is crucial, as stressed previously, to recognise in advance the costs associated with the management of any such supplementary resources, the potential for net benefit to an organisation

open--minded enough to seize the opportunities is very substantial. Again there would be benefit in an effort to gather information and compare experience on the extent to which protected areas have already explored and exploited the gains to be derived from such sources of additional manpower.

Sharing good practice… how to:

Exploit the potential of non-traditional forms of 'volunteering', such as company secondments and student placements.

A related issue concerns the use of the word "volunteer" itself. It is clear that in many of the countries of central and eastern Europe the term "volunteer" remains distasteful, especially to the older generation. People who may have many relevant skills, and who are in principle very willing to give of their time in a good cause, can be put off from doing so if the activity is labelled as "volunteering".

Every year, dozens of volunteers help with the annual EUROPARC Conference. Photo: EUROPARC.

Although this is a diminishing problem, with younger people having either no experience of the practices that tarnished the image of "volunteering" or indeed positive memories of the "summer camps" of that same era, it is nonsensical to allow mere terminology to stand in the way of mutually beneficial engagement. Whilst there is no obvious, universally applicable, alternative to the word "volunteering", one way forward might be

to try to recruit people initially as “supporters” of a particular protected area. Such “Friends” organisations have existed in some countries for many years, although they have not necessarily seen the provision of an on-the-ground workforce as part of their role. They are currently being established, where the local circumstances are suitable, in countries such as Finland. They may well be appropriate elsewhere.

Overall, however, the best way forward is surely for protected area managers to describe the sort of help they need and to demonstrate, preferably through the testimony of those already undertaking some of the work involved, the benefits that it can bring to park and participant alike.

Sharing good practice…how to:

Overcome the resistance to participation evident in some countries by the use of the word “volunteer”.

Cultural diversity

Such examples of cultural differences graphically illustrate a key conclusion of this study, namely that there is no one approach to volunteering that is suitable to all circumstances. Even within a single country variations in local conditions, including the nature and make-up of the local population, mean that what works in one protected area will not necessarily work in another.

Helping visitor enjoy the park is an important part of some volunteers’ work in the Harz National Park.

Between countries this diversity is even greater. To take but one simple but telling example, attitudes towards prescribed standard clothing can vary hugely between cultures, between generations and even between individuals, with one person's "badge of honour" being another's resented "uniform".

Individual protected areas and volunteer managers have to decide for themselves, preferably in consultation with the volunteers themselves, what approach is best suited to their particular conditions. Their decision-making can, however, benefit greatly from a sharing of information and experience between protected areas, so that they at least have the opportunity to consider what others have done and to decide whether their ideas and ways might be worth investigating and possibly even adopting, perhaps in a modified form.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX ONE

1. **Commission Communication on EU Policies and Volunteering COM(2011)568**

   This document is provided as a separate PDF file.

APPENDIX TWO

Guidelines for Quality Volunteer Management in European Protected Areas

This document is provided as a separate PDF file.

APPENDIX 3

Questionnaire templates

VOLUNTEERS MANAGERS QUESTIONNAIRE

EUROPARC is carrying out a research project into the impact of volunteering in European protected areas, as part of a wider international project which seeks to further the professionalism of volunteer management in European protected areas, ensuring that it is sustainable and supports the Lifelong Learning of volunteers.

Responses to this questionnaire will help to inform the research, which will assess the benefits of work undertaken on a voluntary basis in European national parks and other environmentally protected areas.

Volunteer Profile

1. How much experience do you have of working with volunteers? Have you worked with them for:

Less than a year 1-3 years over 3 years

2. What sort of tasks do you give them? Do your volunteers mainly help with:

Routine management (%) special tasks (%)

3. How long do they usually spend with you?

One day (%) a weekend (%) a week (%) longer than a week (%)

4. Are most of them one-off or repeat volunteers?

One-off Repeat

5. What age groups do they fall into?

Under 20 (%) 20-40 (%) 41-60 (%) over 60 (%)

6. What is the gender balance amongst your volunteers? Male (%) / female (%)

The benefits

7. How does your park benefit from involving volunteers?

For each type of activity please indicate whether there is major, minor or no benefit:

Practical management in park (eg conservation work)

Visitor engagement in the park

Wider awareness-raising and communication

Park administration

Raising money

Other

8. How do you think that the individuals benefit? **Major / Minor / None**

By acquiring specific skills

Broader job experience

Clarifying career choices

Improved self-discipline and organisation

Enhanced self-confidence

Improved communication (including foreign language) skills

Overall motivation

Fitness and mental well-being

Social contact and sense of belonging

Other

Relationship with local communities

9. Do many of your volunteers come from communities in or near the park (please indicate %)?

Local (in or near park) (%) Within 50 kms (%) >50kms (%)

10. How many become regular (at least monthly) helpers?

<10% 10-50% >50%

11. Does their involvement change their attitude towards the park? Yes / No

12. If yes, is it Positive / Negative

13. Do you give them an opportunity to influence park policy and priorities? Yes / No

14. If yes, how?

15. Do they influence the attitude of others in their communities towards the park? Yes / No

16. If yes, is it: Positive / Negative

17. Do you try to formalise the relationship (for example by designating 'park ambassadors' or 'park champions')? Yes / No

18. If yes, how?

Recognition and reward

19. Do you reward long or otherwise outstanding service in some way? Yes / No

20. If yes, how?

21. Do volunteers themselves bring much money into the park and its surrounding communities? Yes / No. How significant is this to the local economy?

22. Do they encourage others to visit the area who might not otherwise have done so? Yes / No Does this have a significant impact on visitor numbers?

23. Are there other ways in which volunteers contribute to the economy? Yes / No If yes, how?

Follow-up and monitoring

24. Do you seek feedback from your volunteers at the end of their involvement or visit? Yes / No

25. Do you try to keep in touch with them afterwards and monitor the long-term impacts of their volunteering experience? Yes / No

26. Are you aware of the framework for assessing the beneficial impacts of volunteering that has been developed by EUROPARC Germany? Yes / No

27. Are you planning to prepare a similar system yourselves? Yes / No

Please add any comments that you wish to make.

Personal information

28. In which country do you work?

29. Are willing to be interviewed to discuss this questionnaire? Yes / No

30. If yes, please give your name, e-mail address and telephone contact details, and suggest a time and date

THANK YOU

Thank you for taking the time and trouble to complete this questionnaire. Your feedback will be very valuable and is much appreciated.

VOLUNTEERS QUESTIONNAIRE

EUROPARC is carrying out a research project into the impact of volunteering in European protected areas, as part of a wider international project which seeks to further the professionalism of volunteer management in European protected areas, ensuring that it is sustainable and supports the Lifelong Learning of volunteers.

Responses to this questionnaire will help to inform the research, which will assess the benefits of work undertaken on a voluntary basis in European national parks and other environmentally protected areas.

Nature of volunteer activity

1. What kind of volunteering have you undertaken in the protected area?

Practical management (eg conservation work)

Visitor engagement

Wider awareness-raising and communication

Administration

Raising money

Other

2. How often have you undertaken it?

Once Occasionally (1-5 times) Frequently (more than 5 times)

3. How much time in total have you spent doing it?

1-9 days 10-25 days >25 days

Personal information

4. Do you live in or near (within 10 kms) the park where you have volunteered? Yes / No

5. If not, how far away from the park do you live?

10-15 kms 26-50 kms >25 kms

6. What age are you now?

Under 20 20-40 41-60 Over 60

7. How old were you when you started volunteering?

Under 20 20-40 41-60 Over 60

8. Are you male or female? Male / Female

Benefits

9. Do you feel that your experience of volunteering in a protected area has benefited you? Yes / No

10. If yes, what sort of benefits do you think that you have gained? Major / Minor / No benefit

Relevant professional/technical skills

General work experience

Clarifying career choices

Improved self-discipline and organisation

Greater self-confidence

Improved communication (including foreign language) skills

Overall motivation

Fitness and mental well-being

Social contact and sense of belonging

Other

11. If no: why do you feel that your experience was not worthwhile?

12. Whether yes or no: in what ways could protected areas make volunteering more appealing?

Further involvement

13. Are you willing to be interviewed to discuss this questionnaire? Yes / No

14. If yes, please give your name, e-mail address and telephone contact details, and suggest a possible date and time

15. Please indicate in which country you live

THANK YOU - Thank you for taking the time and trouble to complete this questionnaire. Your feedback will be very valuable and is much appreciated.

COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES QUESTIONNAIRE

EUROPARC is carrying out a research project into the impact of volunteering in European protected areas, as part of a wider international project which seeks to further the professionalism of volunteer management in European protected areas, ensuring that it is sustainable and supports the Lifelong Learning of volunteers.

Responses to this questionnaire will help to inform the research, which will assess the benefits of work undertaken on a voluntary basis in European national parks and other environmentally protected areas.

A community representative is anyone who can speak with some authority on behalf of a community located in or near to the protected area where the volunteering takes place. This may include (for example) an individual who represents the local public authority on the governing body of the protected area, the leader or other member of such an authority, or the mayor or senior official of the local commune or similar body.

Nature and extent of volunteering

1. Do people from your community take part in volunteering within your local protected area or other environmentally protected area? Yes / No

2. If they do, how many people are involved? If they do, how many people are involved?

5 or fewer 6-20 More than 20

3. How frequently do they participate? Regularly / Occasionally

4. What sort of work do they carry out?

Practical (eg conservation) work

Visitor engagement

Community liaison

Other

5. Which country do you live in?

Benefits

6. Do you think that this volunteering activity brings benefits to your community? Yes / No

7. If it does, what kind of benefits are they? Major / Minor / No benefit

A better understanding by park managers of the needs and wishes of your community

A better understanding of park purposes and management in your community

Improved communication generally

New opportunities for the community to benefit economically from the presence of the park

Greater self-esteem in the community and pride in its environment

Other

If 'other', please explain

Partnership

8. Do volunteers influence the attitude of others in the community towards the park? Yes / No

9. If yes, is that influence Positive / Negative

10. Do any of your volunteers act as 'ambassadors' or 'champions' for the park? Yes / No

11. Has volunteering helped your community to influence park policy and priorities? Yes / No

Further comment and involvement

12. Have you any other comments on the impacts of volunteering in protected areas? If so, please set them out below.

13. Are you willing to be interviewed to discuss this questionnaire? Yes / No

14. If yes, please give your name, e-mail address and telephone contact details, and suggest a possible date and time

15. Please indicate in which country you work

THANK YOU

Thank you for taking the time and trouble to complete this questionnaire. Your feedback will be very valuable and is much appreciated.

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