

# Better nature for all

The Conservation Volunteers  
Strategy 2025-2030





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# We are The Conservation Volunteers

But you can call us TCV. Since 1959, we've been a charity creating opportunities for people to create, improve and care for nature in the green spaces around them across the UK. We think it's one of the most important things people can do, both for the planet and for their mental and physical health, and we're going to show you why.

**Stick some boots on and grab your spade. Let's dig in!**

## Connecting over 100,000 people to nature every year

Our variety of projects cover a bit of everything involving nature. Volunteers muddy their boots in parks, community gardens, woodland, sites of special scientific interest, nature reserves, schools and hospital grounds, helping create a glorious network of protected green space across the UK.

**This work connects people with nature, and that connection delivers powerful results.**

## Restoring the UK's biodiversity

Biodiversity is one of our most powerful allies in the fight against the climate and ecological emergencies. And trust us – they are emergencies. Restoring biodiversity not only encompasses more nature returning to our lands – making for beautiful green spaces for everyone to enjoy – it is also key to the sustainability of the mutually supportive, interconnected web of all living things. By doing this we can strengthen ecosystems, reduce species decline, help prevent flooding, and decrease the risk of wildfires, things we see happening all the time on the news.

Currently the UK ranks in the bottom 10% of countries in the world for biodiversity. Our work is designed to help change that, maximising the potential of people connecting with nature in our rural and urban landscapes. Their connection to and protection of nature, in turn, supports a wider range of plant and animal species, including vital pollinators, to call our nation home.





# Mobilising volunteer power through The Conservation Volunteers

## When nature thrives, we do too

It's not just nature that declines when we stop caring for it - people do too. According to Mind, the mental health charity, 25% of people in the UK struggle with their mental wellbeing, while official health data states that one in six deaths are linked to physical inactivity.

More people are living with chronic disease, obesity and stress, while health inequalities continue to worsen across the UK, with the greatest effects being felt in the more deprived areas. Something needs to change, and we believe that we can play a vital role in that change.

Enabling access to green spaces is a huge step in the right direction. Our own research with the University of Westminster shows it improves mental health and encourages physical activity and is a vital component needed for people to live healthier, happier lives.

This benefits whole communities as well as the wildlife around them.

## A connected solution

Our work gives people the opportunity to take practical, meaningful action for the world they live in, protecting and restoring nature, and connecting individuals and communities to make a positive impact on their health and wellbeing.

We believe local initiatives can inspire national change, and with a range of inclusive, accessible activities on offer, everyone can play their part in shaping a better world for today and tomorrow.

## Bringing nature to everyone, everywhere

Not all of us have the option to live near safe, nature-rich green spaces, which is why we continue to support initiatives in urban areas of high deprivation. We know that our work makes a huge difference to the tens of thousands of people who volunteer and connect with us each year, as well as to the environment, but we're confident that we can do more to help those who need it most. That's an ambition we'll take forward over the next five years - enabling nature and people to thrive in more ways than ever before.





Our vision

Better  
nature  
for all





# Our mission

We will connect people together to protect and restore nature, delivering lasting benefits for both.



# Our values

## Make stuff better

Constantly asking ourselves if we can improve on what we do and how we do it.

## Be the best we can be

We are committed to role modelling the best of ourselves in all that we do and how we do it.

## Crack on and muck in

Coming to work with a mindset as a team, getting the job done, and achieving what we set out to do.

## Make a difference

We have a deep desire to ensure that everything we do leaves a positive and lasting ripple effect.

## Make a positive environmental impact

Our commitment to ensuring that everything we do contributes to building a sustainable planet.

Access to nature where everyone's welcome



# Our goals

- 1 Protect and restore local environments
- 2 Empower others to take action for nature
- 3 Improve people's wellbeing through nature connection
- 4 Develop conservation and green skills





# Protect and restore local environments

We will create, protect and restore local green spaces through volunteer action, improving biodiversity for the benefit of nature and people.



To do this, we will focus on:

## + I Dig Trees

By 2030 **we will plant over two and a half million new trees** to create a network of over 6,000 pocket forests across the UK and establish vital habitats in which nature can thrive.

## + Green spaces for local people

By 2030 **we will look after 1,500 green spaces annually**, restoring and protecting their biodiversity and making them more inviting for people to access, enjoy, and contribute to their protection.

## + Employee Action Days

Over five years, **we will deliver Employee Action Days to over 45,000 corporate partner employees**, enabling their staff to volunteer in conservation to create environmental outcomes, which also develops skills, builds team relationships, boosts their wellbeing and productivity, and inspires future voluntary action.

**We'll work on green spaces in urban settings and in areas of deprivation to turn grey to green in the most nature-depleted environments.**

## Impact statement

- + We will understand TCV's impact on air quality through the pollution absorbed and the carbon sequestration from the trees we plant and the pocket forests we create.
- + We will measure environmental outputs by TCV teams to monitor the impact of biodiversity improvements on the green spaces we support.
- + We will measure the number of volunteer(s) workday(s) given to protecting and restoring green spaces.





## Case Study: Environment

# Engaging the community in native propagation

**Loss of native species is a growing concern, with landscapes that once supported wildlife and promoted clean air becoming less and less biodiverse. For the past 30 years, our volunteers in Northern Ireland have been changing that.**

TCV teams have been working with landowners and conservation bodies in Northern Ireland to identify and plant native tree and shrub species such as the currently under threat Spindle tree. The bulk of the propagation has been carried out by our volunteers, who we've engaged in the collection of tree seeds, propagation of seeds into saplings, and planting of saplings that we hope will become future pocket forests for generations to come.

Based on a dedicated site at the Ulster Folk Museum in Cultra, County Down, our volunteers have propagated over 1.5 million native trees through a programme of conservation, education and engagement. This work is delivered in two parts: across autumn and winter, we train, support and mobilise volunteers to collect native seed stock; in spring and summer, our focus shifts to propagation and growth, before distributing bare root and potted trees.

We bolster native species and protect them for the future, we establish species in areas where they've long been lost, and we enable species to adapt to regional climate changes so they can survive and thrive for generations to come.





# Empower others to take action for nature

We will inspire people to connect with nature and understand the practical action we can ALL take to protect and restore it.

To do this, we will focus on:

## + Community groups

**By 2030 we will coordinate and support a network of over 4,000 community groups** who promote conservation, including being members of TCV's Community Network and active partners in the I Dig Trees programme, resulting in restored green spaces for nature and for local people to enjoy.

## + Biodiversity action by individuals

Every year we will motivate thousands of people to take part in volunteering by providing opportunities to connect with nature and empowering them to take action to protect it.

## + Citizen Science

We will launch our new app that demonstrates the impact of our work on biodiversity and promote its use and significance, inspiring more people to become Citizen Science volunteers.

**We commit to supporting more diverse audiences to connect with green spaces to broaden our reach and impact.**

## Impact statement

- + We will monitor and collate the stories of community groups and individuals who have benefitted from our support, showing how this has helped them take practical action for nature on their doorsteps.
- + We will monitor and report on the impact of our I Dig Trees programme on nature via our newly developed app that collects data from Citizen Scientists.





## Case Study: Empowering others **Working side by side with wildlife**

**Wild Wisdom Community Farm is a small community collective based in Stourbridge. By working in harmony with local nature, they grow healthy food while creating and supporting habitats that enable wildlife to flourish.**

To help enable them to do this, they needed to plant a brand-new hedgerow that ran along the length of their field, also creating a woodland belt area to provide spaces for picnics and social gatherings. By empowering community-based volunteers through our 'I Dig Trees' and community network programme, WWCF were able to plant an incredible 950 native British trees in just one wonderful weekend, totally transforming their space and bringing new nature to the local environment.

TCV's 'I Dig Trees' community network programme enables groups like WWCF to secure free trees, transforming local communities. Over the course of the weekend, 60 local volunteers turned up to help, picking up shovels, digging holes and providing new homes for the trees TCV provided. **It was a fantastic example of a community joining forces to give nature a helping hand, and together they created a vibrant, nature-rich green space that will aid the local environment and people for decades to come.** Not only this, but they also created a new space for people to come and learn all about WWCF's regenerative agricultural methods, ensuring native species and curious minds can continue to thrive in this corner of Stourbridge.





# Improve people's wellbeing through nature connection

We will bring people together with nature, equipping them with the skills and confidence to improve their mental health and physical wellbeing.

To do this, we will focus on:

## + Green Gyms

**Every year we will deliver Green Gyms in 100 locations**, growing to 150 by 2030, allowing people to be physically active in nature through simple, group-based conservation action, which improves physical and mental wellbeing.

## + I Can Grow

**By 2030, we will help 5,000 people** who experience hardship to grow food and plants, in a nature-friendly way, increasing people's understanding and experience of how to improve their health.

## + Conservation volunteers of the future

Over five years, **we will inspire 125,000 children and young people**, who face barriers in accessing quality green spaces, to connect with nature and learn how to protect it.

**We'll work on green spaces in urban settings and areas of deprivation, and with communities who face multiple barriers to inclusion, to have the greatest societal impact.**

## Impact statement

- + We will measure the improvement in the wellbeing and health of our volunteers through baseline and follow up surveys.
- + We will measure the enhanced wellbeing from recreational visits to nature by assessing the number of visits to our publicly accessible green spaces.
- + We will collect the stories of the children, young people, and other people who join us, to understand the positive difference our sessions have made to them.







## Case Study: Health and wellbeing Reigniting outdoor passions

In North Lanarkshire, we run two health-focused programmes: Wild Ways Well and Green Gym. Both are designed to connect people to their local green space through activities such as arts and crafts, geocaching, citizen science surveys and wildlife identification training. The goal of these sessions is to improve mental and physical health and wellbeing by spending time together with others in nature.

One programme beneficiary was Lizzie. She openly admitted that she didn't feel in touch with nature when she first volunteered, but during her time with us, we saw a transformation. Lizzie is autistic, which she explained can make getting out into nature challenging. However, she found that through our programmes, she was able to take part in environmental activities at her own pace, learning new skills and making new connections that reignited her passion for being outdoors.

Through the new skills she gained, she developed a deeper interest and understanding of the environment around her, including how to spot rocks and bugs when she's out and about. She got to experience wildlife conservation and found a particular fondness for the waterways in her local area. **Lizzie fed back that TCV sessions made her fitter, healthier and more social, helping her evolve her interpersonal skills as well as those that could benefit nature.** They also provided her with a much-needed routine, getting her out of her house and encouraging her to have meaningful conversations with new people.

*"TCV's projects became a lifeline, because they got me out into the environment where I could balance myself." Lizzie*







# Develop conservation and green skills

We will help strengthen the green skills economy, inspiring the next generation of conservationists by delivering transformative volunteering opportunities and traineeships.



To do this, we will focus on:

## + Green Skills

Every year we will offer opportunities to learn new practical conservation and community leadership skills, helping volunteers and trainees progress into training or employment through Volunteer Officer placements or Green Skills traineeships delivered by TCV.

## + Volunteering

Over five years, **we will support 500,000 people** to connect with nature, through volunteering, learning conservation skills and contributing to their local green spaces.

We'll maintain year on year improvements in the diversity of our volunteers and trainees to ensure volunteering opportunities and access to nature is available to all.

## Impact statement

- + We will measure the skills improvement of our volunteers and trainees, including recording their qualifications and progression.
- + We will measure the number of people connecting with nature and giving time to conservation volunteering.





## Case Study: Skills and education

# An introduction to conservation

Life doesn't always follow a linear path, and for some 16-30 year olds who aren't in work, education or training, their path has thrown up more challenges than most, meaning engaging with nature is often one of the last things on their minds.

We joined forces with The King's Trust to introduce conservation to a group of young people in Leeds. Our team delivered a series of 5-day programmes of practical sessions including woodworking, coppicing, willow weaving, species ID and habitat surveying.

The training was carried out throughout the year, meaning different groups of participants got to see nature at its warmest and wildest, helping them develop a diverse range of skills that could be applied across a variety of environments. It was designed to build capabilities, increase confidence levels and create new connections between everyone taking part, helping them to uncover new opportunities for volunteering, working and personal growth. **By the end of the programme, we'd seen incredible retention and attendance rates, as well as witnessing a significant impact on many of the young people who'd taken part. Some even went on to work or volunteer further at TCV.**

Training like this is vitally important to connect young people with nature. Not only does it provide access to opportunities they may not have encountered otherwise, but it also empowers anyone from any background to enjoy creating nature-rich, biodiverse green spaces.





# Looking to the future

## Our plan to deliver this ambition

Investing in the environment needs to be measured in the longer term, but we know that based on TCV's outputs and the associated physical, environmental and social outcomes over a 30-year period, **each £1 invested gives at least a £10 return.**<sup>1</sup> We also know from the Cross Government Green Social Prescribing Report that the return on investment for green social prescribing is £2.42 for every £1 invested by central Treasury, meaning our work to connect people with nature has a significant positive impact on individuals and society.

## Giving everyone access to nature

**In the UK, 82% of people live in towns and cities, and one in six live in poverty.** This leads to people missing out on access to green space, something we're committed to addressing. We'll do this by working on green spaces in urban settings and in areas of deprivation, with communities who face multiple barriers to inclusion and through working in partnerships.

## Volunteering and community engagement are always at the heart of our work.

We truly believe we will only achieve our goals through the engagement, commitment and expertise of volunteers and local communities. TCV has been mobilising significant numbers of volunteers, who join us from a few hours to a regular commitment every week, and it's their outputs that allow us to create the social and environmental impacts we see.

However, we understand volunteering isn't accessible to everyone, and many of the communities who would benefit most from it face barriers in accessing our activities. That's why we will continue to focus on making green space volunteering an option for as many people as possible. To support this ambition, we will work closely with a wide range of mutually supportive partners and community groups to open doors to the opportunities.

<sup>1</sup>TCV Impact Framework and Assessment Report 2023/24 by 3Adapt Report





## What does successful delivery look like?

- + We are committed to **volunteer-led** green space conservation and volunteering is at our heart
- + We put **access and inclusion** at our core
- + We focus on **people and communities** that have the most to gain from our work
- + We deliver our work through **community engagement**
- + We work in **partnership** locally and nationally
- + We focus on **raising our profile** so more volunteers join us and more partners and funders support us
- + We **demonstrate impact**
- + We believe **local action can inspire national change**
- + We have the right infrastructure and processes to be **effective and efficient**
- + We are **sustainable** and have financial reserves





# Our transformative ambition

**As a charity we have effective governance in place to deliver our work, overseen by the Board of Trustees. This includes maintaining good structures around risk, audit, finance, IT, GDPR, fundraising, impact reporting, planning, and relevancy, and continuing to monitor our efficiency to ensure we are value for money.**

However, in order for TCV to further thrive and increase our impact, we must continue to transform the charity positively so that we are effective, sustainable and fit for purpose.

TCV will have an annual plan on how to deliver this strategy, which will include annual targets and impact reporting frameworks to measure and monitor success.

**Our staff, alongside our volunteers, are our biggest assets, and we must ensure that we continue to support and inspire their success.** We will continue to develop our People, EDI and Volunteer plans, have effective people policies and procedures in place, and continue our commitment as an accredited Living Wage employer.

TCV has been here for people and nature since 1959. Our ambition to transform will continue to bring them together for generations to come, ensuring that we remain in the strongest position to protect, restore and provide for people and nature.

**There's no doubt that people  
need nature, and nature needs us.  
The Conservation Volunteers can  
be the solution.**

**Let's crack on and muck in!**





*“I volunteer with TCV because it just seemed such a brilliant idea: get fit; be sociable; do good for the countryside; learn new skills; have fun – all in one.”*

**Jennifer – TCV Volunteer**

*“No one will protect what they do not care about, and no one will care about what they have never experienced.”*

**Sir David Attenborough CBE,  
TCV Vice President**



**The Conservation Volunteers**

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The Conservation Volunteers is a Registered Charity in England (261009) and in Scotland (SCO39302)

\*Green Gym™ is an internationally registered trade mark of TCV.

