



# Countryside Jobs Service

## Focus on Countryside Management

In association with the Countryside Management Association



23 September 2019

### Some things change, some stay the same – reflections on the countryside profession in 2019



Ted Talbot

Ted Talbot – Countryside Manager for the National Trust in the Peak District.

There is a scene in the film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* where King Arthur is challenged by the Black Knight. It does not go well for the Black Knight and, in a darkly humorous exchange, he is finally left on the ground limbless, but still trying to fight on.

And perhaps that's the problem and the joy of being a ranger at the moment that, despite having chunks lopped off our collective profession in the UK over the last 10 years, we can't help but fight on. Our cause remains a most noble one: one that some rangers in more challenging parts of the world lay down their lives for and that we remember each year on World Ranger Day at the end of July.

So, when asked to think about what has changed in the 30 years that I have spent in this vocation I am mindful to look both backwards and forwards over a timescale that is more significant than the current UK age of austerity.

To begin at the beginning is to recognise that this is still a young profession, perhaps only 70 years old in the UK – when the first National Park, the Peak District, appointed Tommy Tomlinson as a Warden. So it is no surprise that we are still not well understood as a sector. Rangering in the UK may well have been influenced by the creation of the US National Parks which celebrated their 100th year anniversary in 2017 and had the famous John Muir as one of the first Park Rangers at Yellowstone – although a nice chap called Galen Clarke was actually in post before him. What they shared with Tommy was a clear focus on people, encouraging and promoting a love of the outdoors and care for special places, landscapes and nature.

It is an achievement that this is now a global profession, celebrated by the cartoon hero of 'Ranger Smith' with Lego and Playmobile Ranger models now available. It is recognized by the IUCN and supported by a clear set of internationally agreed competences for front line 'protected area staff' working in parks all around the world. These core skills broadly focus on the two themes of people management and the management of special places – usually of natural or cultural significance, protected by a legal designation.

In the UK, with our 15 national parks, almost 400 local authorities, conservation charities, some water companies and private estates employing rangers and countryside officers, it has been hard to get accurate workforce figures. An estimate of 4000 – 5000 may be reasonable with, historically, the public sector being the biggest employer of rangers and countryside staff.



Area Ranger Chris Milner checking livestock at Longshaw (Ted Talbot, National Trust)

However, public sector cuts of 35 – 40% in real terms since 2010 have impacted on many public Parks and Countryside Services with volunteers being asked to step in and rangers joining the list of endangered public professions. At the same time the employment of people on the land in general has changed dramatically and we could add small-scale rural farmers to this list of disappearing jobs as the supermarket stranglehold on cheap food from across the world has bitten.



**Helicopter bringing gully blocking materials onto the Kinder Scout area to stop erosion and slow the flow of water** (Ted Talbot, National Trust)

But, perhaps the biggest recent blow to our profession came quietly when the statutory body that nationally represented what we do, the Countryside Agency, was dissolved in 2006. With it we lost our national champion and political advocate. Along with an understanding of the value paid professional rangers can add to local community-based nature conservation work and how countryside projects can act as a catalyst for positive environmental and social development in both rural and urban settings. Dr Ian Rotherham from Sheffield Hallam University charts this era in his paper – the rise and fall of countryside management, presented at the Countryside Management Association conference in 2016. (read Dr Rotherham's thoughts on the piece in CMA Ranger magazine<sup>1</sup>)

Personally, I just miss the Country Code and that helpful plasticine sheepdog on the telly that the Countryside Agency championed. With their McDonalds in one hand and mobile phone in the other, on some days it feels like a small percentage of British people really have lost the plot when they visit the great outdoors on a Bank Holiday Monday and Mountain Rescue incident stats for the Peak District often conclude "unprepared for the uplands/bad weather". There is division and change afoot in the nation and the countryside is part of this. But perhaps our biggest challenge is the same as it ever was, connecting people to outdoor places and helping them to understand why our natural heritage really matters and how best to prepare for and enjoy their visit.

And yet everywhere I look there is still cause for great optimism. Countryfile is a national favourite and the Princes Trust has launched a Survival Guide for Rural Communities. No one expected the new leaders of the Green Revolution to be the nation's favourite TV wildlife granddad and a schoolgirl from Sweden, but these are desperate times. In the vacuum of the current national politics, David and Greta are giants to be celebrated and supported. Extinction Rebellion and a summer heat wave with added floods once again reminding us that Brexit is barely relevant in our list of priorities.

People are still employed in the urban fringes and countryside – from Forest School workers to professional dog walkers, many of us still want our loved ones to experience the benefits of nature and fresh air. It's the age of the 'experience economy'! Local tourism is stronger than ever, and lycra-clad visitors run, swim, walk and cycle for charity, whilst taking a selfie in a tabard and eating local plant based burgers. Suddenly, we are also interested in releasing beavers, lynx, storks, black grouse and wildcats across the land, replacing what we have lost and rewilding our parks and farmland – with exceptional results at places like the Knepp Estate in Sussex. Recognising everything this does to help wildlife, store carbon, cleanse our water, our air and our soil as well as our own increasingly urbanised souls.

Surprisingly many of these ideas have been referenced in the Government's new 25 year Environment Plan<sup>2</sup> as well as the draft Agriculture Bill<sup>3</sup> published last year and on hold – like everything else. As a nation we are way behind (70%, in fact) our target for planting 11 million trees, but everyone is talking about tree planting again -



**Ranger Kate Bradshaw sharpening her chainsaw at Ilam** (Ted Talbot, National Trust)

all of which would suggest there is plenty of work for new rangers and countryside workers to do again very soon if we can only just get on with it.

So, what skills do modern rangers need to adapt to these trying times? The commodification of education has not helped us and there is no clear workforce planning for our sector so “oversupply” of trained people for fewer jobs is a reality. Much has changed in our workplaces and it is not all for the better. There is no doubt that the technology available to us can be both a curse and a boon. Using drones and trail-cams for ecological surveys can be quick and less disturbing for both rangers and wildlife alike, especially in treetops, marshes or cliff ledges. Perhaps practical tasks are being contracted out, or maybe they are coming back in as heritage crafts with a group of community volunteers to help improve physical and mental wellbeing: you can fix the fence properly later – just go with it! The services that are currently surviving by selling guided walks and doing children’s wildlife parties may well just have to recognise that this is a commercial means to an end at present and hope for better times, whilst keeping hold of as much good conservation and nature engagement work as they can. We have yet to find a way to replace the tax revenue we have taken from this sector with other types of hard cash but studies and news feeds show how important and valued our countryside remains to the nation. We don’t want to charge people to enter our parks and countryside sites either so we fall back on public support, volunteers and community engagement again – whilst lobbying for better policy and funds. Managing people, communities and volunteers is and always has been a key skill for rangers and people are always the key to maintaining support for your countryside services.

Without a national advocate in the government funding arena (it was supposed to be Natural England), we need to get smarter. It is high time to make the case to Sport England and the NHS that good access to the countryside and great path infrastructure is as important and costly as a flat football pitch, netball court or swimming pool. Rangers were at the front of Health Walks delivery 20 years ago, and many are still going on without funding support, alongside other health related initiatives. Locally, many countryside activity groups are realising this gap in resource, and helping out to raise funds or volunteer for countryside teams - but we need to make a stronger national case for funding access infrastructure and our staff at a basic sustainable level.



Looking across Burbage moor (Ted Talbot, National Trust)

In 1986, I started as a volunteer ranger in Sheffield, alongside other unemployed students and a couple of ex-miners. There were not many jobs then either, but we all enjoyed what we did, learned new skills and hoped for better times. The Pretenders’ song with the line ‘some things change and some stay the same’ was a hit at the time and was our anthem for a short while. I got my first job in 1989 – after the ranger I had volunteered for left having got good experience on a Manpower Services Commission scheme. There was no gig economy then and things are different today, more competitive at entry level for sure and there are less permanent posts and not many

solid apprenticeships yet - but I think an element of luck, being in the right place at the right time with the right skills, and having a good network are still key to getting a job in this sector. Interview skills can be learnt and being resilient if you want a job as a ranger is just how it is at present. I also think that ‘sideways entry’ from an allied profession, especially gardening, farming, horticulture or forestry is equally possible these days and there is increasing overlap within many land based skills that we should all be aware of, so allied experience can be very relevant. We should also keep learning to adapt.

Finally, I think that optimism and rangering go hand in hand, and as we enter a climate emergency our skills are needed now more than ever, the public seem to think so - imagining we have “the best job in the world” – so let’s be ready for the next Green Revolution, try and lead it even; and if - after we have tried our very best - it does not happen, then I guarantee that ranger skills are really quite close to survival skills and will be needed in whatever brave new world we all end up in!

Links:

- 1 <https://c-js.co.uk/2kMB03K>
- 2 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>
- 3 <https://c-js.co.uk/2kjGKSh>

**Royal Forestry Society’s 2nd National Student Conference** - 04 October - Shuttleworth College, Bedfordshire. A full day conference, lunch and exhibitor event focused on skills, open to full, part time and recent students in the Forestry, Arb and Countryside sectors. For more information visit <https://c-js.co.uk/2IPiAzs> or call RFS HQ on 01295 678588.

**Created in 1969 to represent fisheries professionals** across all sectors, we have 10 regional branches in the UK and Ireland. We are one of the largest providers of specialist fisheries training in the UK and have developed our own training system. We organise many events through the year, from major international symposia to small branch visits and talks.  
www.ifm.org.uk info@ifm.org.uk

**Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)** empowers farmers and communities to work together to transform local food systems. CSAs produce good food using agroecological methods, keep waste and food miles to a minimum, are low-carbon, care for the land and build local communities. Find out more at [www.communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk](http://www.communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk) or email [csanetworkuk@gmail.com](mailto:csanetworkuk@gmail.com).

**Training and advice related to dragonfly identification**, surveying and habitat management, for beginners to professionals. In addition, visit the BDS website of information on upcoming dragonfly-related events, news and volunteer opportunities. [british-dragonflies.org.uk](http://british-dragonflies.org.uk)

## Conservation Grazing – the right animal in the right place at the right density

“Conservation grazing” is the term given to the use of livestock to restore or maintain rare habitats, and was for many years seen by some as “not quite farming”. The emphasis is indeed very much on the land management side, with sustainable food production and the benefits to human health and the wider environment only now gaining the recognition they deserve. In recent years, we have seen growing uptake of grazing options in agri-environment schemes and a recognition of the importance of soil and pasture management. This has resulted in an increase in pasture-based and low-input farming methods which has blurred the lines between farming and conservation grazing, with an encouraging number of people seeing that the two are complementary and overlapping practices.



**Exmoor pony at North Berwick Law feasting on gorse**  
(Sylvia Beaumont)

Some conservation organisations own and manage their own flocks and herds for the sole purpose of grazing, some work in partnership with graziers who provide livestock. “Conventional” farmers may include conservation grazing animals as part of their farm enterprise under government agri-environment schemes which encourage good stewardship of the land.

Conservation habitat management broadly aims to maintain or increase biodiversity on a given site, using soil type, altitude, geology, climate and historical factors to guide the site objectives. The equipment available to today’s conservation land manager includes a range of fast, effective machines, driven by fossil-fuels. Although there is undoubtedly a place for these, the benefits of domestic livestock as a more sustainable alternative are increasingly being realised.

### Impact of grazing animals

The main impacts of grazing animals are threefold: the removal of plant material through the actual grazing or browsing process; the nutrient enrichment of the soil through dunging and urination; and disturbance of the ground by trampling hooves. Finding the right level of grazing is dependent on a host of variables, from numbers and types of animals used to weather conditions, ground conditions and historical land use. Undergrazing can result in the dominance of a few coarse species that are usually kept in check by grazing and the growth of unwanted scrub. Overgrazing can lead to desirable plant species being eliminated and so-called weed species increasing, often through the introduction of too many animals or the use of the wrong type of livestock.



**Boreray sheep conservation grazing on Orkney**  
(Ruth Dalton)

### Sheep, cattle or ponies?

Sheep are smaller, cheaper and are generally considered easier to manage in a conservation grazing context, but they have limited habitat benefits. Sheep are not native to Britain, having been introduced by man around 5,000 years ago. They are highly selective grazers, with small mouths able to pick the sweetest and most nutritious plant species from a sward. Their hooves are small and relatively light, compacting the ground. Evolved for a mountainous environment, they can suffer from foot problems and from the effects of flies in a lowland setting. However, appropriately managed, sheep can be useful animals, for example in heathland restoration where they can be summer grazed to reduce the expansion of scrub and promote heather growth, which they tend to eat only in winter.

Native to Britain, the ancestor of today's domestic cattle was the aurochs, a wild horned ox that stood 2m at the shoulder and roamed a largely forested landscape. Cattle are perhaps more useful animals than sheep in terms of their impacts on vegetation - although they will avoid certain species, their large mouths make it harder for them to discriminate between preferred plants and less palatable ones. Well equipped to graze longer grasses and herbs, they create a variable sward structure benefiting a host of species. Their dung is also valuable for invertebrates and their heavy feet can break up compacted ground to provide seeding opportunities for plants. However, if grazed on wet ground or at high densities, cattle will poach the land and create bare patches that encourage weed growth.

Native ponies are hardy and exempt from much of the regulation that accompanies the keeping of farmed livestock. They have many of the benefits of cattle grazing when used at a similarly low stocking density and are naturally resistant to parasites and disease. They tend to create "latrine" areas which may cause localised enrichment of the soil so they are best used on large sites or for shorter periods of time. Like cattle, they will browse as well as graze and will not preferentially eat flowering heads of plants as sheep do.

### There is a tendency to use native breeds in conservation grazing

Before the 1950s, and the onset of the Common Agricultural Policy pushing farmers to produce maximum yields, livestock had been bred to grow and reproduce on relatively low inputs. A lack of affordable "concentrate" feed or artificial fertilizers meant that animals had to be thrifty and hardy and these attributes



**Shetland cattle strip-grazing a species rich hay meadow** (Ruth Dalton)

work in favour of the conservation land manager. Many of these traditional breeds are now classified as rare, so the opportunity to prove their usefulness as conservation grazers also secures their valuable genetics for future need.

There is also increasing interest in returning land to a more natural state, encouraging the growth of scrub and a mosaic of more diverse habitats. Large herbivores are an important part of these projects, especially cattle, ponies and pigs, which can encourage a varied sward and the seeding of previously outcompeted plants and their associated fauna. This chimes well with a growing interest in quality food, produced in a sustainable way, for the benefit of wildlife and the environment - an exciting new chapter for conservation grazing.

For more info take a look at the Rare Breeds Survival Trust new Grazing Animals Project resources, including detailed guidance on handling systems and starting a grazing scheme [www.rbst.org.uk](http://www.rbst.org.uk) There is also an

excellent on-line conservation grazing forum – "Nibblers" – run as a GoogleGroup, if you would like to join, please email me – [ruth@rbst.org.uk](mailto:ruth@rbst.org.uk)

**The DPHT specialises in advising** on using equines for conservation grazing and has sourced hundreds of hardy Dartmoor-bred Dartmoor ponies to go all over the UK into a variety of habitats. We also offer site inspections and bespoke warden/volunteer/looker training. We are a charity created in 2005 to help ensure a future for the Dartmoor-bred true Native Dartmoor pony. Call 01626 833234 or email [admin@dpht.co.uk](mailto:admin@dpht.co.uk) for further information and advice.

**We have two online self-study courses** available to study in your own time at home - Habitat Management and Habitat Restoration. Written by experienced ecologists and giving you essential knowledge, examples and insights into the topics. Go to <https://ecologytraining.co.uk> and click on Online Courses.



## The Green Halo

### Where nature, people and business flourish



All around the world the benefits that come from living landscapes – the ecosystem services they provide – are being measured and quantified. Greater appreciation of these benefits to society has led to calls to make nature more prominent in decision-making and place-shaping. Last year the government put the concept of “natural capital” at the heart of the UK’s 25 Year Environment Plan.



**Green Halo Partnership** (New Forest National Park Authority)

The value that ecosystems services delivered by landscapes such as our National Parks bring to the economy, the environment and local quality of life are being taken much more seriously. However, protecting and enhancing that natural capital is not the job of one body. It requires shared vision and leadership. It means organisations from across the public and private sectors must work together. It depends on those organisations’ acknowledging the contribution of natural capital in their planning, budgeting and decision-making.

There are not many better examples where effective partnership working is

needed than the New Forest. It is one of Europe’s best sanctuaries for nature, situated in the busy south east of England and surrounded by urban settlements. The natural environment beyond the National Park’s boundaries - from Cranbourne Chase to Purbeck, the South Downs to the Solent - internationally valued because of the quality of the natural environment. That natural environment is an intrinsic part of the identity of central south of England. But the central South is also an area of high economic growth with an additional 200,000 houses anticipated to be built in the region over the next 10 years (the equivalent of two more Southamptons). And it is administered by over 20 different councils and LEAs – along with two National Parks.

In 2016 the New Forest National Park Authority (NFNPA) decided to involve many of the Park’s influential neighbours in promoting the benefits of the ecosystem services. A conference at Ordnance Survey in July 2016 brought together businesses, NGOs and public sector organisations to develop the idea of a “Green Halo”, anchored in the New Forest National Park. A suite of ecosystem service maps previously commissioned by the NFNPA, were presented, showing the significance of the services provided by the land in and around the National Park, particularly to the populations of the coastal towns. These included the role of land in holding water and so preventing flooding, the potential of the land to influence water quality, and its value for recreation. The maps reinforced the importance of the National Park as a hotspot for biodiversity but also showed the high contribution the Park makes in reducing the risk of soil erosion and sequestering carbon.



**Green Halo Partnership Conference delegates**  
(New Forest National Park Authority)

The findings of a pilot study to quantify and value the flow of ecosystem services provided by the National Park was also presented to the conference. The study highlighted the importance of woodland which was calculated to represent 90% of the monetary flows associated with the National Park reflecting the importance of woodland as an asset for maintaining air quality, climate regulation and recreation as well as a commercial timber crop.

This fresh perspective on the natural environment encouraged the audience of local businesses, local authorities, environmental non-government organisations, health professionals, developers and others to discuss practical ways in which our environment can help us to tackle many of the challenges our society faces today: from improving public health or creating sustainable business, to making better use of renewable resources or addressing atmospheric pollution and climate change.

That led to formation of a cross-sector steering group to develop a collective response to the challenge of protecting and enhancing our natural capital. The steering group and its discussions with other potential partners have revealed there is widespread recognition of the benefits of a healthy environment.

The Green Halo Partnership now has over 70 members and is open to all public, private and third sector organisations which are ready and willing to commit time, energy and resources to protecting and enhancing natural capital in and around the National Park. There is no geographic limit to membership.

Membership comes at no cost, but those joining acknowledge their responsibilities to our environment by signing up to the vision of the Partnership: to be a global exemplar of how our most precious landscapes can work in harmony with a thriving, economically successful community.

The Green Halo is an aspiration: to make protecting our natural world part and parcel of planning for our future. As such it has received the endorsement of Professor Dieter Helm who described it as “one of the great natural capital projects”. The Partnership aims to:

- explore innovative projects and ideas about how we can protect and enhance our natural capital
- encourage its members to collaborate on projects and programmes which protect and enhance natural capital
- promote practical projects and actions
- help to obtain funding to support collaborative projects
- support research and innovation on natural capital and ecosystem services



**Green Halo Partnership webpage**  
(New Forest National Park Authority)

Put simply, we wanted to turn the national discussions on the theory of natural capital into local practical action. As public policy develops, so we hope to harness this fresh approach to make the case for protecting and enhancing our valued natural environment across the central South. The Green Halo Partnership is proving a successful networking and influencing group; shaping the content of the Local Industrial Plans of the four Local Enterprise Partnerships and plans to redevelop the local marine and maritime economy.

Paul Walton

Head of Environment and Rural Economy, New Forest National Park

paul.walton@newforestnpa.gov.uk

Website <https://www.greenhalo.org.uk/>

**We sell plants and seeds sourced** from British growers and harvesters. We sell woodland trees, hedging and hedge plants, wildflowers, garden "trees for bees", pond plants, heritage fruit tree varieties, wildflower seed and bulbs. We also make donations to small science based UK conservation charities. [www.habitataid.co.uk](http://www.habitataid.co.uk)

**The UK's only specialist in minimising** adverse impacts on wildlife, livestock and other access users arising from dog walking, while also supporting the human and canine health benefits of dog ownership. Clients include Natural England, Forestry Commission, Scottish Natural Heritage, national parks, wildlife charities and private landowners. 08456 439435 [steve@sjacm.co.uk](mailto:steve@sjacm.co.uk)

**A registered charity dedicated to improving** broadleaved trees by selective breeding, to improve their disease resilience, growth rate, form, CO2 sequestration and timber yield. Making trees more economically viable (they'll live longer and produce more timber) means more people will plant them! [www.futuretrees.org](http://www.futuretrees.org) or call CEO Tim Rowland on 07896 834518

**Scottish Botanists' Conference on 2 November 2019** with Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland, BSS & RBGE at Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. A great mix of botanical talks, ID workshops, exhibits & posters. Our main speaker is Professor Robert Crawford, who will give a talk on "Plants at the Margin in a Changing Climate". 0791 7152580, [jim.mcintosh@bsbi.org](mailto:jim.mcintosh@bsbi.org) <https://c-js.co.uk/2ke9mMI>

## Fit for the Future



When I joined Rewilding Britain as Director in Jan 2017 after 34 years in public service, having started as the first Conservation Officer for the Thames Water Authority and finishing as the EA's national Head of Conservation, I knew I was embarking on a really exciting new chapter in my career, but I had no idea just how rapidly the interest in rewilding was about to escalate. I put this down to the perfect storm of:

- I. societal realisation that we really do have both a climate emergency and a biodiversity emergency - not the same, but connected in many ways
- II. the government's commitment to a move away from basic payments for farmers to the public money for public goods approach
- III. the publication of the superb "Wilding" by my good friend Isabella Tree which tells the inspirational story of the Knepp rewilding project and
- IV. the increasing influence of Rewilding Britain - or so I am told!



Birding at Ynys Hir (Ben Porter)

Rewilding Britain itself is actually a tiny organisation with just a handful of staff and a few supporting specialists. We were founded about 5 years ago, inspired by George Monbiot's seminal publication "Feral" and set up by Rebecca Wrigley and Hannah Scrase. Rebecca is now our CEO, I act as Director. There's also a team led by Project Director Melanie Newton, running the on-the-ground project Summit to Sea in mid-west Wales on behalf of the ten partner organisations involved. It is our intention to remain small and agile and to act as a catalyst for "mainstreaming" rewilding. I always say our measure of success should be to do ourselves out of a job – i.e. to get us to the point where all eNGOs, government agencies and landowners etc.

"get" rewilding to such an extent that our 1 million hectares in Britain target has been achieved. That's approx 5% of Britain, but we're a long way off that yet with less than 1% rewilding so far, so I and my colleagues have still got plenty of work to do!

No-one owns the term "rewilding" and you'll see many definitions out there, but we at Rewilding Britain summarise it as "The large scale restoration of ecosystems to the point where nature is allowed to take care of itself". I should emphasise here that rewilding is a long-term process – and will involve a spectrum of activity from, for example, my tiny garden wildlife pond through to 100,000 ha blocks of completely unmanaged countryside - which of course we don't yet have in the UK. In other words it is an activity to which we can all contribute, but we must be bold enough to move along that spectrum significantly further than we have yet done, both in terms of scale and in terms of reduction in management. In mainland Britain to do this effectively, we believe we need to rewild blocks of at least 10,000 ha in England and Wales and 100,000 ha in Scotland.

Having said that, the definition alone is not enough to understand exactly what rewilding is and how it can work. The principles are equally important and as far as Rewilding Britain is concerned these are as follows:

- I. People communities and livelihoods are key
- II. Natural processes drive outcomes
- III. Working at nature's scale is essential
- IV. Benefits are secured for the long term



RSPB Dove Stone Nature Reserve (Rewilding Britain)

Above all, we believe that there doesn't need to be an "either / or" choice between rural culture and livelihoods and nature's wellbeing. With new approaches and support from government it should be possible to restore nature and give people who rely on the land for their livelihoods new avenues of opportunity.

We are now pursuing a mix of rewilding initiatives from really large scale 50,000-100,000 ha vision areas, mainly in the uplands, within which there will be core areas of rewilding, buffered by large areas of sustainable farming, and at the other end of the spectrum, large estates or “farm clusters” where part of the land is given over to rewilding (usually over an area of 500-2000 ha) - broadly similar to that at Knepp. We are now seeking to develop the large-scale vision initiatives in the Peak District and Northumbria and we are partners in two similar projects in the Renfrewshire Hills and Southern Uplands in Scotland. As for the estate-scale initiatives, well the list is growing on a weekly basis. Two years ago we were seeking ways in to speak to potentially supportive landowners and now we can't keep up with the demand. A nice problem to have!



Looking at lichen (Ben Porter)

I have worked in UK conservation for 40 years now and I know many eNGOs, landowners and government agencies have done amazing work to conserve our natural heritage for many decades, and goodness knows what state our biodiversity would be in if they hadn't, but the simple harsh truth is that traditional nature reserve and protected site conservation on its own is not enough to reverse the decline in biodiversity. We need something significantly larger in scale and less intensive in management, to sit alongside the ongoing conservation of our nature reserve hotspots. That something is, in my view, “rewilding” but in a crowded country like ours, it needs people to make it happen.

And so for all those considering a career in environmental conservation or moving around within the sector, these are very exciting times. As I say, rewilding is gathering momentum fast now and a growing number of landowners are going to need expert help and advice. Yes, policy needs to catch up with reality – and that is something I am working on – but we also need experts out there to get on and help to make it happen – and indeed to make sure that rewilding doesn't end up just being traditional nature conservation. So my advice to those who are interested is: if you haven't already, read books like *Feral*, *Wilding* and *Rebirthing* and get out there and visit places like Knepp, Ennerdale, RSPB Haweswater, Dove Stone, Eastern Moors, Alladale etc. This planet needs people like you and it needs you right now, if it is to be fit for the future.



RSPB Dove Stone Nature Reserve (Rewilding Britain)

Find out more at [www.rewildingbritain.org.uk](http://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk)

Prof Alastair Driver  
Director, Rewilding Britain

**The RSPB Habitat Management Handbooks** have been a popular read among land managers over the years. It's been a while since any new titles have been published or old titles revised but those that remain in stock (accepting some content such as grant schemes that have changed) are still current in terms of management and invaluable for college / university courses. There are no immediate plans to revise the books, but they are selling at just £5 each (plus postage and packaging) while stocks last. For more information, visit: <https://rspb-discounted-handbooks> or email [conservation-advice@rspb.org.uk](mailto:conservation-advice@rspb.org.uk)



## Changes to Local Authority management – opinion piece

At my interview, I had enquired about funding for the post (and department), and was advised that it was adequately funded by the Local Authority. Little was I to know what was on the horizon.

On taking up my post (as part of a team of 5 f/t staff) for a city local authority some 20 years ago, I was contracted to work 2 weekends in 4, and Bank Holidays, for which I would receive enhanced pay (to balance the antisocial hours). Overtime was also payable at the discretion of the manager, so high intensity tasks – e.g. haymaking, would be carried out whenever the weather was suitable, so didn't have to be fitted in around the 'working week'. Not only did the department manage around 170 Ha of open countryside (spread over 2 main and 3 smaller sites around the city), but we also managed a City Farm in a deprived area of the city, and a spin off Rare-Breeds farm on our main site. Part of my weekend function was management of the livestock at weekends. The manager was also keen on attending agricultural shows to raise the profile of the farms (as a public attraction) so it was not unusual for staff to be called upon to help transport livestock to and from the shows, and to man the stand there. Within my first year, the 'Grounds Maintenance' Ranger took early retirement, and we recruited a less specific ranger with more of a conservation background.

Other than 'our' sites, the urban parks and open spaces were maintained by a City Services organisation (also part of the authority). City Services also serviced and repaired our plant and machinery, provided tree surgery, fabrication and welding services, and supplied fuel (all effectively at cost price).

It was quite obvious that the countryside sites had had limited management for some years (almost to the point of neglect), with the funding and labour resource being demanded by, or diverted into, the livestock and farms, although we had started building a conservation grazing herd of cattle. This became immensely frustrating to the 'conservation' staff, as we never really managed to get stuck in to larger projects, despite committing to them under Countryside Stewardship funding that we had been awarded. I was also concerned that at some point the funding would be reclaimed as the proposed projects were not really completed as planned.

When the cuts in LA funding started to bite (10 years ago or more?), the authority decided to outsource the City Services function, but our requirements weren't factored in, so suddenly we had to pay commercial rates for machinery maintenance – it was also not easy (and time consuming) procuring suppliers that were willing or able to carry out the lost services. Similarly, fuel costs went up, and obtaining red diesel was more time consuming.

As the cuts bit deeper, outsourcing our function to the service provider was considered, as part of which we developed a detailed report of basic functions. Based on the cost of our path management alone (some 30km all in!), it rapidly became apparent that the service provider would be more expensive. In addition, we contended that their operatives didn't have the expertise to manage nature conservation sites (could they identify rarer plants while mowing?), and that we could get Stewardship, and agricultural grants (haymaking and livestock), which they couldn't. Our 'Friends of' group, which had previously campaigned successfully against City Services management of the main site under CCT (Compulsory Competitive Tendering), made representations to Councillors, who decided that they didn't want to lose the public goodwill gained from the sites. I understand that various NGOs were approached, but there were no worthwhile income streams to make it attractive.

The next round of belt tightening saw the loss of weekend enhancements and overtime – so although we committed to maintaining weekend cover, there was no incentive to provide more than basic cover for Bank Holidays (Easter always being particularly challenging for lone-working). Working long days for haymaking, suddenly became very unattractive. Although Time off in Lieu was given, taking it was difficult, as it meant that other work was not completed – so effectively we had less time available to complete the required work programme.

At this time (or shortly afterwards) the Councillors decided that the farms would be closed, and our manager would be made redundant. The farmhouse (our office), and yard would be sold for housing, and we would relocate. To this day, I don't understand the rationale for this, as the value of the site has to have been less than the cost of relocation, as well as making the operation less efficient through the storage of materials and equipment off site. We also had cuts to our budget, so our grants are now used to plug that hole (effectively paying one salary) rather than the luxury of providing 'over and above' for the operation.

Although we have lost the attraction of the farms, which undeniably brought in visitors, the amount of time we have gained through not having to feed, foot-trim, dag (and lamb) some 50+ sheep, as well as pigs, and goats, has given us more time to carry out countryside and habitat management. We have brought more (neglected) land back into restoration, and regular management. We also have more time to run work parties with our various Friends groups, so making further progress towards our aims. Indeed, from

complaints every time we cut a small tree 20 years ago, we now find that we have significant support for the meadow restoration, and woodland management we are now undertaking on a regular basis.

**Burleys, The Royal Warrant holding** grounds maintenance specialist has become one of the few contractors nationwide to use an award-winning system, Foamstream, on a commercial basis for Lewes District Council. The system uses a combination of hot water and foam to 'cook' weeds on contact. The thermal energy penetrates the weeds' waxy outer leaf layer, rupturing the cells, killing them quickly. Some die within minutes, with others taking a day or two. A second application can eliminate taproots. It also sterilises seeds and spores – helping to reduce future weed growth.



The organic, biodegradable foam mixture is safe to use on sensitive sites such as nature reserves, heritage buildings, watercourses, children's playgrounds and is made from a blend of natural plant oils and sugars including maize, wheat, potatoes, olive and coconut oils.

<https://www.tclgrp.co.uk/group-brands/burleys/foamstream/>

**We offer a range of services including** habitat creation, moorland restoration and maintenance, and invasive species control. We cater for a wide range of land management needs ranging from large multi-site projects to smaller individual pieces of work. For further information and to contact us; [www.wildscapes.co.uk](http://www.wildscapes.co.uk)

**Nature Conservation Contracting Company.** Established 1992. Please visit [www.green-mantle.co.uk/services](http://www.green-mantle.co.uk/services) for a comprehensive list of what we offer, and indeed, further information regarding the ethical dimensions which cover every aspect of our work. South-West England.

**Ecological Land Management Ltd**, based in N.E. Wales, provides a range of practical services: wildlife protection fencing, woodland work, pond creation & management, non-native invasive species control, scrub & meadow management, and movement of flora & fauna. We specialise in working in protected habitats. Contact: [admin@elm.uk.net](mailto:admin@elm.uk.net) or visit: [www.elm.uk.net](http://www.elm.uk.net)

**Woodland management and conservation**, making small woodlands work economically, coppicing, tree surgery & felling, living willow, basketry and willow husbandry, continuous weave fencing, hurdles and all kinds of green woodwork. Courses in willow work, hurdle making, hedgelaying, fruit tree management, charcoal making and green woodwork. [www.underwoodsman.co.uk](http://www.underwoodsman.co.uk) 07788 748618

**Traditional hedgelayers** (South of England style and Midland Bullock style). Coppice management. Woodland management. Based in Hampshire call Adam 07922 170034

## A day in the life of a Countryside Ranger

Cheshire East Council's Countryside Ranger Service manages a suite of parks, trails and open spaces on behalf of the Council and its partners.



At the forefront of the Ranger Service are 12 Countryside Rangers



**Interpretive display Dane in Shaw Pasture SSSI**  
(Cheshire East Council Countryside Ranger Service)

operating in two teams, each

supported by a Countryside Officer. Their roles are as diverse as the land that they look after, from upland parks on the edge of the Peak District through to urban fringe greenways on the outskirts of south Manchester. Working alongside the Countryside Rangers are an array of volunteers, including work experience students, retired enthusiasts and mental health support groups.

Carolyn Sherratt works within the southern Ranger team, responsible for the management of a number of sites in the countryside around Congleton. No two days are ever the same; however the following is an account of what might happen on a 'typical' early autumn day.....

Cal starts her day with a site check of Dane in Shaw Pasture SSSI<sup>1</sup>. The previous weekend had been unseasonably warm and past experience would suggest that, while the vast majority of visitors respect the facilities on their doorstep, there is still a minority causing a disproportionately amount of extra work.

Fortunately today is not as bad as she had feared – only minimal litter plus the remnants of a small fire to deal with. It is important to address these problems as soon as possible as this site (Cheshire's only Coronation Meadow<sup>2</sup>) is home to a seasonal herd of conservation cattle. Cal takes the opportunity for a quick head count and visual health check of the cattle, texting her findings through to the local farmer.

Then it is back to the Landrover, which is parked on the adjacent Biddulph Valley Way (BVW)<sup>3</sup> – a disused railway recreational trail linking Congleton with Stoke on Trent. The BVW is also the route for a gas mains pipe which runs alongside. Detailed negotiations have been ongoing over recent days with contractors, who need access to the trail to deal with a suspected gas leak.

Whilst such works are an obvious priority, Cal needs to ensure that the contractors are clear about the environmental sensitivity of the site and the importance of both ensuring public safety and maintaining visitor access.

Agreement is eventually reached for the trail to remain open whilst works are in progress and for additional signage to be posted advising visitors of potential delays. A quick call to the local Sustrans<sup>4</sup> representative reassures him that potential diversions will not adversely affect this national cycle route.

Cal is then joined by one of the team's long-standing regular volunteers, Karl, whose experience enables Cal to fast-track some of the minor repair and maintenance tasks that are an ongoing part of keeping her sites at a high standard. Their first task is to replace a couple of worn steps that lead from the trail on to adjacent public footpaths.



**Step construction Biddulph Valley Way**  
(Cheshire East Council Countryside Ranger Service)

was also obvious that this particular pond was getting regularly disturbed, probably by dogs jumping in – a problem now easily resolved with their cuttings used to create an effective dead hedge around the exposed pond perimeter.

Chainsaws cleaned and sharpened, there is just one last task to complete on site. Cal has organised a guided walk to be held the following week, part of which will utilise the BVW and neighbouring Macclesfield



**Contractor negotiation Biddulph Valley Way**  
(Cheshire East Council Countryside Ranger Service)

Encouraging visitors to explore the wider countryside is an inherent part of her role and, as the task progresses, a group of ramblers stop to comment on their work. Their conversation soon gravitates to include the recurring theme of dogs in the countryside. As a dog owner herself, Cal is able to talk confidently about the responsibilities and expectations that both the Council and local farmers will have of dog owners and of the various promotional activities that she has been involved with to encourage appropriate behaviours. With the ramblers on their way Cal and Karl are able to finish off the step renovations, before stopping for a well-earned lunch break.

The afternoon has been earmarked for commencing the winter's conservation tasks; starting a first phase of re-coppicing alongside the BVW. Having undertaken similar work for many years, the wildlife benefits have been remarkable.

With Karl helping as a second trained chainsaw operator, a small area of hazel is soon cleared. The coupe is next to a small pond, dug out some years to support the local great crested newt population. As a licensed 'handler', Cal had surveyed this pond earlier in the year and while she had found evidence of newts it

Canal. The full route will be checked another day but this section of the walk is always a useful point to explain to participants about the history, management and challenges of managing the local landscape.

It's also a great spot to share her knowledge about the local flora and fauna and Cal takes the opportunity to identify suitable trees, nuts, berries and fungi, which she'll be able to show to people on the walk.

Last job for the day is of a more sedate nature as Cal calls into her office to deal with the many emails and telephone messages; an assortment relating to site management, general public enquiries, plus ongoing administration. There's just time to update the management plan records to incorporate the work she's completed today and to check the diary to see what the rest of the week holds – an ever evolving assortment of work that needs to be planned and implemented.

Matthew Axford  
Countryside Ranger, Cheshire East Council

#### Links

- 1 <https://c-js.co.uk/2IWzxYG>
- 2 <https://c-js.co.uk/2kLTIOg>
- 3 <https://c-js.co.uk/2mbLcTE>
- 4 <https://c-js.co.uk/2mhwaMc>



Visitor engagement Dane in Shaw Pasture SSSI  
(Cheshire East Council Countryside Ranger Service)

**The UK's Local Environmental Records Centres** provide data services to those making countryside land management decisions for biodiversity. They can also provide volunteering opportunities for people wanting to gain experience in data management, digital cartography and much more. Visit [www.alerc.org.uk](http://www.alerc.org.uk) for more information.

**Join the community woodland network** for Wales as an Associate Member to receive news, advice and opinion and details of events, activities and training across Wales. We empower people to manage woodlands for the benefit of their communities. Contact: [info@laisygoedwig.org.uk](mailto:info@laisygoedwig.org.uk) 01654 700061 website: [laisygoedwig.org.uk](http://laisygoedwig.org.uk)

## Changing nature of fly-tipping

**Country Land and Business Association (CLA) President Tim Breitmeyer on the rise of criminal scale fly-tipping.**



Those working in the countryside will be all too aware of anti-social behaviour such as fly-tipping. In the last year of recorded statistics there were more than one million reported incidents across the country. Affecting nearly two-thirds of landowners every year, it's a crime which has a huge detrimental impact across rural communities.



Image: CLA

Our members are tired of not only clearing up other people's rubbish, but paying for the privilege of doing so. Estimates suggest it costs on average £1,000 to clean up each incident. With many farmers suffering multiple and repeated incidents this can affect the bottom line. However, more than that, in a job where long hours are the norm, adds an additional unnecessary stress and workload.

Over the years at the CLA we have supported our members and rural communities. Our regional offices have spearheaded local campaigns while at a national level we've raised the issue through

the media. Local authorities, MPs from all parties and rural police forces have also played their part in these campaigns and sentences have been toughened. However, this collective action clearly hasn't been enough – last year the total number of incidents were broadly static, down 1% year-on-year.

So despite this action why are fly-tipping figures stubbornly holding? To my mind the ill-thought through introduction of charges to remove waste at a council level has cancelled any gains which could have been made.

The total cost of clean-up for fly-tipping is estimated to be between £86 million and £186 million a year with most of this falling on the shoulders of landowners and farmers. Local authorities are estimated to have only spent £12.2 million on clean-up over the same period. It's probably still too early to see how much they are raising from fees for the disposal of waste, but I would argue that this figure will pale in comparison to the total cost to society for clean-up.

In response to the introduction of fees, we're seeing the emergence of organised criminal fly-tipping activity. One of the most high-profile recent prosecutions was over three fly-tippers who deposited 40 individual van loads on a single site near Havant in Hampshire. All of them were paid by businesses and members of the public to disposal of rubbish legally, but the waste was instead dumped at this site. The total clean-up cost for the mess was £100,000. The most recent figures show that multi-load fly-tipping incidents of this nature were up 43% year-on-year.



Image: CLA

Many will hold the traditional view that fly-tipping is predominately small scale and opportunistic, but in my opinion we're in fact seeing the opposite emerge. It's vital that rural police forces recognise the changing nature of this crime and respond accordingly. This is now organised, repeated and on a large scale. I hope that next year's Independent Police Commissioner elections will see rural crime rise up the policing agenda, with discussions around the changing nature of fly-tipping at its core.

However, we should not lay all the blame at the police's door. More important is ensuring there is a broad coalition of rural stakeholders backing a common sense approach towards waste. We need to pressurise local authorities to think in a joined up manner – increasing fees at local rubbish tips and recycling centres will only impact on fly-tipping levels locally and the costs associated for its clean-up.



Image: CLA

Finally, we would like to see some changes to the law. At the moment landowners are legally liable when waste is fly-tipped on their land which hinders clean-up and ensures the true levels of the crime remains under-reported. This should also be coupled with financial and logistical support for victims to clean up waste which, after all, has nothing to do with them.

Like other forms of rural crime, fly-tipping is a complex problem with no silver bullet. Local authorities, politicians and police

forces all like to talk tough on this issue, but until these words are matched with a common sensical and joined up approach on waste, we're likely to continue to face an uphill struggle.

The Country Land and Business Association (CLA) which represents around 30,000 rural businesses across England and Wales. Find out more at [www.cla.org.uk](http://www.cla.org.uk)

**Botany and Ecology for nature conservation** in the North East/West. We provide support in ecological surveying, give management advice and deliver training courses. We believe in giving back and sharing all the experience that we have gained through our professional career. Contact: 07875 544635 or [julia@verde-ecologyconsultancy.com](mailto:julia@verde-ecologyconsultancy.com)  
[www.verde-ecologyconsultancy.com](http://www.verde-ecologyconsultancy.com)



## Designated Sites – A site Managers Perspective



Cornwall Wildlife Trust recently went through the process of having some of our land designated as a SSSI. Here is our perspective as a nature conservation charity.

Cornwall Wildlife Trust (CWT) is one of 46 Wildlife Trusts in the UK, each operating as independent charities and collectively as The Wildlife Trust movement. We are responsible for the management of 58 Nature Reserves in the county, ranging from sand dunes, woodlands, heathland, fen, reed bed and our very own island.

In common with most Wildlife Trusts many of these sites have statutory designations such as Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Scheduled Monuments (SM). Many of the other reserves are non-statutory designated sites, in our case County Wildlife Sites. Most other counties have equivalent non-statutory designations, which must be considered in planning but are otherwise unprotected.



Marsh Fritillary nectaring on Helman Tor Nature Reserve (Ben Watkins)

In 2017 the Mid Cornwall Moors SSSI was notified. This amalgamated numerous existing individual SSSI's including three sites owned by CWT, removed some land from SSSI status and added more land parcels – increasing overall land covered by SSSI by two square miles. The Lawton approach – bigger, better, more joined up – was embodied in this landscape scale designation. The Mid Cornwall Moors landscape would now be thought of as a whole, rather than pockets of good habitat in isolation. The marsh fritillary butterfly (*Euphydryas aurinia*), a significant species in the area, was one of the drivers for this approach as it requires a network of suitable sites to function as a meta-population, allowing for extinction from, and re-population of sites. The designation was a very long process. We were involved in discussions and were consultees, but the designation happened as for any other landowner; had we any concerns they would have been considered, but we supported the designation and we didn't have any.

For CWT there was some change. Several sites formerly designated County Wildlife Sites were now SSSI; also, the citation for whole SSSI changed. There were a lot of common elements with the previous individual SSSI citations, but overall the key features were re-considered, re surveyed in some instances and updated – for the first time since 1986.

On considering how it is different managing a site which is now SSSI, there are pros and cons.

### Pros:

- Being a SSSI guarantees that whilst SSSI's exist in their current form the sites will always be prioritised for any funding available. The current mechanism for this is through the Countryside Stewardship scheme, under the Higher Tier. This provides land area based payments according to the relevant options, supplements for activities like cattle grazing and capital payments for the installation and replacement of fences, for example. It's fair to say we have received higher payments for the management of our SSSI's than under the previous Reserves Enhancement Scheme.
- In the Mid Cornwall Moors area, the citation is now up to date and fit for purpose. In some cases on the previous individual SSSIs we were trying to achieve targets which were no longer relevant. The new citations should help us to have clearer, more achievable aims. It can be the case that despite all your hard work and 'doing the right thing' a SSSI can still be poorly performing against criteria derived from the citation. Natural England's (NE) Biodiversity 2020 target is to have 95% of SSSI's in Favourable or Recovering status by 2020 - this been a strong driver to get sites into agri-environment schemes and means that NE will target SSSIs for support.
- Owning or managing a SSSI does, in theory, mean that management advice and support from NE should be readily available. Where getting it right can be difficult this can be a valuable resource.
- SSSI's are protected from development or activities causing harm and come with a list of activities requiring NE consent. In practice our sites are nature reserves anyway so there are unlikely to be conflicts between our activities and NE's requirements. An example however is when Red Moor, a site designated in the 1980's (and now part of the new SSSI) was going through the progress of designation, neighbouring landowners wanted to drain land to prevent the designation. After

designation this became an offence with the potential for unlimited fines. However, media has now reported 'lawlessness' in the countryside because government agencies are so stretched that they can't afford to prosecute – see below.

### Cons:

- A SSSI site could be failing on a condition assessment which is potentially not good PR for a wildlife trust. Having said that, a failing SSSI would be first in line for additional resources if they were required to turn it around!
- Being a SSSI can be a barrier to even well intentioned projects leading to additional paperwork and staff time. For example, on one of the newly designated sites we want to put down chippings in the entrance to a stock pen to prevent vehicles getting stuck. Now as an SSSI it will need consent which, in all likelihood, we will get but rather than just getting in a load of 803, we haven't got around to it yet as we need the time to fill in the forms.
- The current Countryside Stewardship (CS) scheme is unwieldy and hard to work with. The RPA are now responsible for administering the schemes and they take a very black and white inflexible approach. In the past there was a human interface with NE staff, where judgement and an understanding of the general direction of travel were applied to support our work. Now this has gone, once the agreement is signed off after development with an NE officer there is no space for interpretation or discretion. This presents an organisation like ours, or a landowner trying to do the right thing with a much higher risk of clawback and fines. The inflexibility can also lead to withdrawal of funds. On a recent scheme involving 6500m of fencing, an oversight meant that 450m of this should have been stock netting not three strands of barb, as the rest of it was. On such a big agreement this was missed at the time – there is no option to change it, claim it and make up the shortfall or any other way of getting what the site needs. The money is lost and the work is not done.
- One criticism of SSSI's is that there are no penalties for inaction, so a SSSI can slip into unfavourable condition through inaction with no comeback on the landowner.

As a general discussion of these points: Where sites are SSSI's, in the past we have built close working relationships with NE staff. You would know who the relevant staff member was for a particular site, and they would know the sites and what you were trying to achieve. It is currently hard to identify who is responsible for which site and difficult to get advice and support. Colleagues at NE are having a hard time because of endless cuts to their budget meaning they have to make difficult choices. These cuts are a political decision seemingly at odds with the words coming from the politicians. In general support for management varies, CWT are probably allowed to get on with it as our aims align with NE's and those of the SSSI citation. It is hard to imagine how this works out with a private landowner of a SSSI without a specialist interest in conservation of habitats and species. I imagine it could devalue the property, though it would mean that funding for its management was available. The landowner would also have the additional paperwork burden without the luxury of staff time to fill it in. However, as a conservationist, I would support the continual imposition of SSSI's as if it were only carried out with full consent of all parties, much of our most prized habitat would remain unprotected.



**Helman Tor Nature Reserve - part of the Mid Cornwall Moors SSSI (Ben Watkins)**

In conclusion, the CS / NE / SSSI / RPA relationship is convoluted and can be difficult to work with – but it is our main source of funding so we have to get on with it. SSSI's could become the highest designation in the land once Brexit settles in as the SAC designation may no longer be applicable. The outlook for nature conservation in England will be, to a large extent, guided by the contents of the Agriculture and Environment Bills, and the success of Nature Recovery Networks. SSSI's would surely form the backbone of these networks, and it would be unthinkable for a government to undermine their protection in law, but the unthinkable does seem to make a habit of happening, so it's good to have many SSSI's in the safe hands of The Wildlife Trusts.

[www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk)

Seán O'Hea, Deputy Head of Nature Reserves  
Cornwall Wildlife Trust

**Groundwork Training is passionate** about providing top quality and cost effective training. We deliver convenient, accredited, high quality training tailored to your needs delivered at our training centre or at your premises. Outdoor First Aid and Forestry First Aid +F course available contact 01978 757524 / training@groundworknorthwales.org.uk

**Bridgwater & Taunton College offer** a range of land-based education at the Cannington Campus, which consists of 500 acres of dedicated resource for Countryside Management, Horticulture, Arboriculture and Agriculture curriculums. We offer a range of courses including full and part-time study, apprenticeships and short courses including chainsaw, brushcutter and pesticides. www.btc.ac.uk

**A secluded woodland providing workshops** and study days for young people not currently in mainstream education with a focus on conservation, biodiversity and good practice in the management of land as a working environment. Coppicing, greenwood furniture, campfire cooking. More information at www.wrongscovert.com or call 07748 870907

### **PgCert/PgDip/MSc in Geographic Information Systems** at Ulster University

We offer a fully online distance learning Masters-level programme in GIS. With over 20 years' experience in teaching GIS and 15 years via e-learning, we have a significant track record in GIS education and receive excellent feedback from both students and employers. <https://c-js.info/2rroRDv> s.cook@ulster.ac.uk

**Derbyshire Eco Centre offers courses** in landscape management, ecology and heritage building skills. This year we are delivering Dry Stone Walling Lantra qualifications plus informal woodland management courses. See our brochure at [www.derbyshire.gov.uk/ecocentre](http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/ecocentre). For more information or to book a course, ring us on 01629 533038 or email [ecocentre@derbyshire.gov.uk](mailto:ecocentre@derbyshire.gov.uk).

**Forest School and Outdoor Learning training**, Level 1/2/3. High quality accredited training, Trainer of the Year Award 2018. Beautiful location in the National Forest. Also range of bushcraft, practical skills and outdoor first aid training, get in touch for a full list. Contact [kate@holmsdalemanor.co.uk](mailto:kate@holmsdalemanor.co.uk) for dates and details, or call 01530 262434 / 07775 857222.

## **The resurgence of traditional countryside management methods, reasons and benefits**

### **Hay-making**

The landscape of today is very different to that of the recent past. Bags of black-polythene silage are commonplace across the farms in the spring. This was not



**Learning to use the scythe**  
© C. Smillie 2018

always the case, haystacks and haylofts were once widespread. Unlike silage, the hay cutting regime takes place in the autumn, thus allowing plants to set seed, ensuring a new crop, with wild flowers, for the next season. Ground-nesting birds are also able to fledge their young before the thresher reaches them.

Use of the traditional scythe to cut the hay avoids compaction of soils by heavy machinery, which could also be alleviated by strimmers, but these use fuel, sending greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

### **Conservation grazing**

To promote wildflower grasslands, wetlands, moorland and coastal grasslands, some manner of vegetation removal is required. Conservation grazing has been utilised in recent years, such as the Scottish Wildlife Trust's mobile 'flying flock' of sheep.

Grazing animals do not begin at point A and chew the vegetation down until reaching point Z. Quite what they will graze depends on a number of aspects; for example, which plants you actually want chopped depends on what animal finds them palatable. So, when sheep were introduced to Traprain Law in East Lothian, they head to the succulent grass at the hilltop, leaving the tough rank species that were causing the problem. Enter the ponies!

Food palatability is not the only aspect that drives movement and grazing behaviour. Animals also require drinking water, shelter and shade. Although many may emphasize the environmental part of agri-

environment, such as keeping woodland copses and protecting hedgerows, these also serve to nurture livestock for agricultural benefit.

Even with the right species and ancillary features, your livestock may still not graze where you desire. This can be remedied by the ancient practice of (conservation) shepherding. Rather than letting loose the organic



lawnmowers, this time the shepherd uses his crook and dog to direct the sheep towards certain areas of the site and away from the more sensitive.

### Nature and Farming

Pesticides have been a health concern for some time prompting many consumers to switch to organic food. Pesticides also have environmental effects. Killing off bugs indiscriminately gets rid of predators, such as ladybirds, if you are not careful. And when the pests return, there is inevitably a lag for the predators to return, resulting in even heavier damage. As an example, the boll weevil was a major pest of cotton; when this was sprayed off, it was found that it was actually keeping down another three pests. Double the dosage and these disappear but five more pests appeared. This continued until unsustainable amounts of pesticide were required.



Ponies grazing on Traprain Law © C. Smillie 2017

The answer, then, is to increase areas for predators. Forward-thinking agriculturalists have tried to use nature by providing small areas for these beneficial organisms in the shape of beetle banks (in reality, spider-dominated) and conservation headlands. However, we can go further by invoking the past and using minimum-till systems. Just like the landscapes of old, we can have a return to the arable weeds hosting breeding grounds for birds, moths and other predators.



Constructing a willowweave fence © C. Smillie 2019

Minimum-till has added soil benefits too. Regular turning of soil destroys structure so important for soil moisture penetration, as well as promoting microbes to release greenhouse gases. Nutrients are also released, whilst erosion has been deemed as a factor for the UK government to suggest there are only around 30 years left of harvest without conservation. By keeping the soil intact, structure remains, as well as giving a home for agricultural predators. Not only do we keep the nutrients within the soil but by intercropping leguminous plants, we can actually add in extra nitrogen for less effort.

### Nature-connectedness

One aspect is to consider why people undertake voluntary conservation. For some it may be to gain skills to enter the job market.

For others, it's a long-term commitment. It would seem apparent then that the more someone works in voluntary conservation, the more connected they became with nature. Research at SRUC by McCallum (2018) says the opposite. A desire to help wildlife may bring volunteers in but what keeps them is the sense of community. Compare the isolation of strimming in a helmet with ear-protection against building a hedgerow as part of a team. Far more rewarding.

### Cultural heritage and health

It may seem as though the UK sees less importance in natural capital. Actually, conservation is becoming more valued, if not better funded. The Scottish government has set green targets to promote health and well-being. Local authorities have a duty to encourage understanding of the environment through recreation, such as green gyms. Using traditional duties, such as coppicing, willow-weaving and creating hedgerows, participants are able to understand their place in our landscape. Communities can appreciate cultural heritage by recognising that bogs and machair are there, not through simple abiotic processes, but because they are following in the footsteps of their ancestors.

By linking to our past, we can invoke techniques that protect our countryside, whilst enhancing our connection with history and creating a community for our volunteers.

Dr Chris Smillie: Programme Leader: MSc Countryside Management  
Email: [chris.smillie@sruc.ac.uk](mailto:chris.smillie@sruc.ac.uk)  
Website: [www.sruc.ac.uk](http://www.sruc.ac.uk)

**Wide range of day and residential courses** covering all aspects of the natural world including habitat management. Expert tuition and a choice of UK centres. Details via [www.field-studies-council.org/naturalhistory](http://www.field-studies-council.org/naturalhistory) or call 01743 852100.

**Nature Course: 1 day Hedge Laying** at Blue House Farm Nature Reserve, Essex Wildlife Trust, on the 12 October. For more information, please see our website: <https://c-js.co.uk/2mhjkhf>

**Low Maintenance in Settle** North Yorkshire offer high-quality courses at affordable prices within Forestry and Landbased sectors, covering: Arboriculture and Forestry Chainsaw related qualifications; Pesticides; ATV's; Brushcutter; Hedge-cutter; Leaf blower; Chipper; ROLO; Rat poison; Aluminium Phosphides; refresher units. Leading to recognised qualifications (e.g. City and Guilds).  
[info@lowe-maintenance.co.uk](mailto:info@lowe-maintenance.co.uk) 01729 825132  
[www.lowe-maintenance.co.uk](http://www.lowe-maintenance.co.uk)



**15th & 16th October Bat Mitigation: Principles & Designs** - A comprehensive course over 2 days for all ecologists involved in bat mitigation. Learn how to characterise bat roosts in order to design effective mitigation for all bat species. Location in Lancashire, Cost £250+VAT, email [info@ecologyservice.co.uk](mailto:info@ecologyservice.co.uk) Also 28th and 29th April 2020

**PgDip/MSc Environmental Management at Ulster University.** This course has been taught for 18 years by a leading provider of distance learning in the UK. This part-time course is offered by distance learning and consists of core modules in Environmental Impact Assessment, Biodiversity Management, Pollution Monitoring and Environmental Data Analysis. For full details see website <https://c-js.info/2rTswqG> [w.hunter@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:w.hunter@ulster.ac.uk)

**If you're interested in practical land management,** habitat conservation and ecology, our Countryside Management course is perfect for you! Our courses have a practical focus, combining theory with hands-on experience on a wide range of sites, including our 850 acre Brooksby Campus. Telephone: 01664 855444 Email: [courseenquiries@brooksbymelton.ac.uk](mailto:courseenquiries@brooksbymelton.ac.uk) Website: [www.brooksbymelton.ac.uk](http://www.brooksbymelton.ac.uk)

**University-based 2-day professional GIS training** courses in ArcGIS, QGIS (Open Source software) and MapInfo using environmental applications and data. Bespoke courses tailored to your needs and desk-side training also available. Discounts for unemployed, staff from charities and multiple delegates from same organisation. [training@geodata.soton.ac.uk](mailto:training@geodata.soton.ac.uk); tel: 023 80592719 [www.geodata.soton.ac.uk/geodata/training](http://www.geodata.soton.ac.uk/geodata/training)

**We provide courses in green woodworking** and bushcraft skills. The green woodworking courses focus on traditional rural skills. Whilst our bushcraft courses introduce the learners to very basic self-sufficiency skills. For more information take a look at our website - [explorethegreatoutdoors.co.uk](http://explorethegreatoutdoors.co.uk).

**Plumpton College offers a range of Countryside Management** courses at school and college level, including Countryside Management City and Guilds, level 2 and 3, that focus on land-based work and fish husbandry. For more information visit [plumpton.ac.uk](http://plumpton.ac.uk) or email [enquiries@plumpton.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@plumpton.ac.uk) to start your career in countryside management today!

**Emergency First Aid at Work.** Friday 27th September 2019. 1 day training course at Beech Hill Farm, Ellerbeck, DL6 2TD. £85+VAT per candidate includes certification. Forestry option may be added. 01609 882408 Email: [office@va-training.co.uk](mailto:office@va-training.co.uk)

**PgDip/MSc Environmental Toxicology & Pollution Monitoring** at Ulster University. The course is ideal if you already work in the environmental field or wish to pursue a career in this area as it fulfils demand for trained personnel in the environmental regulatory agencies, in companies subject to regulation, and companies involved in providing support services such as monitoring and consultancy. <https://c-js.info/2rroRDv> [rw.douglas@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:rw.douglas@ulster.ac.uk)

**We do a range of training courses,** including pesticides, chainsaws, brushcutters, hedgecutters, mowers and woodchippers. We can also arrange ROLO, first aid and other safety courses. Call David, Horticultural Landscape Solutions on 07769 359545 to discuss your requirements.

**19th & 20th November Bats and Trees** - A course suitable for all beginner and intermediate ecologists, woodland managers and arborists looking at how bats use trees and how and when to undertake professional bat surveys of trees. Location in Lancashire. Cost £250+VAT, email [info@ecologyservice.co.uk](mailto:info@ecologyservice.co.uk) This course is also running on 3rd & 4th March 2020

**Kacey are specialists in the supply** of recycled plastic for boardwalks, dipping platforms etc. A cost effective, no rot, long lasting alternative to wood, Kacey materials are used extensively in NNRs and SSSIs across the UK. See examples on [www.kaceyplastics.co.uk](http://www.kaceyplastics.co.uk) or contact us for an informal chat on 01764 671165.



**The RSPB runs a programme of habitat management** training courses. Based on our research and land management experience, they also draw on external expertise and best practice and include fieldwork to ensure they remain practical and applied.



The following course is still available this year; An introduction to managing woodland for wildlife. Places are limited to 25 people. The course costs £120 plus VAT unless otherwise stated which includes refreshments, lunch and course materials.

To find out more and book your place visit: <https://rsqb-advice-training-courses> or email [conservation-advice@rsqb.org.uk](mailto:conservation-advice@rsqb.org.uk). Please note, bespoke courses are also available.

## The perfect Countryside Ranger applicant – is there one?

### What an intriguing question!

Even after 33 years as a Countryside Ranger, recruiting annually for 28 of these, I'm like a fly in a field full of cowpats trying to pin down my thoughts.

You, the perfect applicant will have studied the recruitment pack. All of it. Carefully.

Your application form will allow the recruitment panel to tick off the essential and desirable requirements in fairly short order. Occasionally, an applicant will succeed with the very challenging task of understanding and articulating concisely the value of the experience they do have, without claiming "extensive knowledge" after six weeks of a work experience placement.

This is so important; your interview panel, by and large, have "seen it, done it, T-shirt, book and film rights". They understand that you need to piece together a cohesive case based on the experience you do have. Be aware you are only a question or two away from your "extensive knowledge" being completely unravelled. You, the perfect applicant, understand that and present a case where you can speak comfortably about all the experience you bring.

Have you applied for "a job" or have you applied for "THE job"? There is an important difference which can tip the outcome of the interview in your favour.

Always apply for "THE Job". You, the perfect applicant, are so excited by the prospect of working at this location, and, in a sentence or two, say what you feel it will add to your c.v. At interview make the opportunity to highlight the projects or events run by your prospective employer that you find interesting. All this information is but a few clicks away, it would be negligent not to have done so. The perfect applicant does not say "I've never even thought about visiting (your location) until I arrived for the interview today."

Spelling, punctuation, grammar. The tools of an able communicator. The perfect applicant uses the facilities of modern computing to avoid embarrassing errors.

Double check your application for errors, and seek advice if it is not your strong point.

(I can scarce continue knowing that a deliberate typo is lurking...but I must. )

You, the perfect applicant, also possess a talent or specialist interest not immediately related to your job function. From chainsaw carving to flower arranging, you can bring a new dimension to the role and one that has great potential to add to the service delivery of your employer.

Most of all, you, the perfect applicant, can demonstrate the soft skills that so many struggle with. Soft skills are often overlooked, even at interview, where pressures of time and a formulaic approach can depersonalise candidates to their detriment.

### What are soft skills?

For me they are the ability to engage with people from all walks of life, an open and friendly personality which is valid whether these people are colleagues or customers, Lords or layabouts. Soft skills help you appreciate and meet the expectations of both your employer and your customers. This can be acquired - retail work, hospitality industry, community projects, care homes and volunteering, all provide opportunities for you to develop and hone these skills.



Your role as a Countryside Ranger may be somewhere from the mountain tops, to the seashore; from remote and isolated, to urban and populous. Wherever you work the quality of your soft skills are a universal essential in the success of your role. Neglect them at your peril.

As a recruiter it is incumbent on you to provide the opportunity for the applicant to shine. Your own soft skills are essential in achieving that. We've all heard of hostile interviewers, cases where point scoring between colleagues relegates the candidate to an unwitting pawn. I can recall an interview I had many years ago where one of the interview panel was doodling on his notepad. I watched as he drew an elaborate gravestone inscribed with "R.I.P." I didn't get the job.

Lead by example, set the standard you expect, the perfect applicant will emerge and the challenge of getting through the recruitment process will reward you both handsomely.

George Potts.

Chair, Scottish Countryside Rangers Association, [www.scra-online.co.uk](http://www.scra-online.co.uk)

*George Potts retired from the post of Senior Countryside Ranger with Dundee City Council in 2016. Throughout his career he recruited Countryside Ranger staff with an annual seasonal intake and for a number of Urban Ranger projects with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund for a historic park restoration and European funding for community regeneration. George always provided support for staff in these temporary positions to submit successful applications for other jobs. He believes he may have read more than 2000 application forms!!*



George Potts (SCRA)

**Nationally recognised Lowland Leader** and Hill & Moorland Leader training and assessment courses, plus National Navigation Award Scheme courses delivered in a clear, sensitive and fun manner from our base in Stirling, or at a location near you (for groups). Established 1984 and still committed to sharing expertise. [www.cndoscotland.com](http://www.cndoscotland.com)

## Applicant vs employer – the difference of opinion

Through our work CJS perceives the problems that applicants face as well as the issues met by employers during recruitment. To try and highlight some of the problems CJS asked a few employers along with some applicants to give their opinions on the countryside recruitment process.

A number of our social media followers were happy to provide details of their experiences whilst trying to secure that elusive job in the countryside sector. It is clear that employers and candidates have differing perspectives.

### The application process

#### Applications

Good applications take time and effort, many candidates feel this is not always appreciated by employers.

Katrina Dick says: *"My first encounter with job application forms was for a seasonal ranger position. I really wanted the post and having read the job description and needs for it I simply wrote a whole essay about my love for nature and how I fitted in with all the essential and desirable criteria."* She says she can spend "a good average 5-6 hours on an application to make sure it was succinct, answered the criteria for the job, included the organisation's objectives and values and how I fitted into this and which of course was grammatically correct". Steve Luckett agrees and says: *"If employers could remember candidates have invested a lot of time researching roles, completing applications (usually more than just the one they are advertising) and preparing, if selected, for interview before they get to meet them that would be appreciated."* The variation in type and length of application required can be off putting with questions asking everything from what you do in your spare time to demonstrations of leadership skills. Katrina says her longest to date was 16 pages running to over 6,000 words once complete.

#### Inconsistencies in job descriptions and essential and desirable criteria

Mollie Taylor says: *"I believe that the level of experience labelled 'necessary' or 'essential' within current job roles are inconsistent with the career paths that current job seekers are aligned with."* and believes *"more support should be given to job seekers; and employers should become more flexible on what criteria really is 'essential'."*

## Experience

Everyone who commented mentioned the perpetual problem of "experience required" even for entry level posts.

Debs Trewick-Carter says: *"I have been vigorous & tireless in my job applications, applying for anything remotely connected to ranger or countryside management tasks. Roles that are advertised as temporary, part time, fixed contract and seasonal. Some positions are advertised as entry level or assistant Ranger and even trainee!"* and on asking for feedback has been told: *"on occasion I gave a fantastic interview BUT was always beaten (and sometimes only just) whatever that means .....by someone with more EXPERIENCE! Hey ...hold on a minute, I applied for trainee or entry level, at best an assistant to a qualified ranger!"* This despite having 500+ hours volunteering under her belt, mostly achieved during her "intense" L3 Advanced Technicals in Land and Wildlife Management, City and Guilds course at Plumpton College.

Which brings us to the next problem.

## Feedback

How are candidates to improve their applications if they don't receive feedback? Steve Lockett comments: *"Feedback is often generic and often it's down to me to chase it, couldn't everyone get a personal call - is 5 minutes too much to ask?"* Mollie Taylor agrees and highlights another issue: *"My personal experience has resulted in a number of lengthy application processes, with no feedback or courtesy email when unsuccessful."* Katrina Dick adds: *"It used to drive me crazy with worry, had they got [my application] or had they not? Although this is something I have seen a marked improvement on in the last year, with automatic emails being sent out as a receipt."*

## Interviews

Having successfully navigated the complexities of the application process for a select few comes the interview.

Steve Lockett says: *"I understand the recruitment process can be costly and time consuming for employers, but I found it very stressful trying to arrange time off, travel and sometimes accommodation to attend interviews."*

Katrina Dick, who is based in Scotland, agrees: *"If I am then invited to an interview I am more often than not expected to cover my own expenses, and of course as jobs in the countryside sector are scarce I am having to be incredibly flexible in terms of where I apply which has given me job interviews from Sutherland in the north of Scotland to Manchester in the north of England."* This flexibility is not an issue for Katrina as she herself says: *"As a single, career woman with no ties this has not presented itself as an issue to me but I am aware of many skilled people having to give up the dream of becoming a ranger due to ties such as family and mortgages."*

Occasionally candidates feel they are "making up the numbers" as other applicants are obviously known by the panel and/or other staff. Steve recalls a second meeting with a fellow candidate at interview: *"after we both were unsuccessful for a previous position and he told me he wasn't offered it because he didn't have tractor experience - but that was clear from his application so what was the point of interviewing him?"* He also wonders: *"if for our industry a traditional interview panel is appropriate – 45 minutes talking across a desk is not what I'm good at but I have practical skills and knowledge to show people. I've always performed better in written exercises when I have a little more time to consider problems and situations - isn't this more reflective of real life and work?"*

## Is it worth it?

Despite all of these grumbles, some of which are not limited to the countryside management sector and I'm sure many of us have encountered similar situations (I know I have), everyone agrees it's worth the herculean effort required. Katrina says: *"it's a hard sector to get into. Is it worth it? Yes! Would I change [the sector] for the world? No way!"*

tl;dr

### Take home points for recruiters

1. Be honest in your description, if you need experience say so and don't term your low paid post as graduate / trainee / entry level.
2. Keep your application form and process short and simple.
3. Acknowledge application receipt, an automatic email is better than nothing.
4. Try to be flexible in your essential / desirable qualifications and skills.
5. Include an interview date in your advert (or job pack) even it's still to be confirmed.
6. Consider your interview process. Would a practical task be more appropriate? Or if it's to be a more theoretical discussion could it be held digitally, via Skype?
7. And finally, here's the big one: give personalised feedback.

## Now the turn of the employers, our thanks to all the people who contributed to this piece.

I've interviewed for jobs, probably the last one was last year. I'm also involved in shortlisting for some posts although HR do the actual recruitment side of things. I work for a County Council's Countryside Service doing a ranger type role I think the job roles are changing more in some organisations. Rather than being a practical hands on role, it's turning into more of a contract management, office based role. (Not the case with my role but anecdotal evidence suggests this is happening more and more in local government posts as more stuff gets put out to private contracts!)

Certainly we advertise more posts now as being part time, with some anti-social hours, but with no pay enhancements to cover it. I have also noticed the last few jobs we advertised we had very few applicants for. This may be due to the part time nature of the role plus needing to do weekends on a flat rate. The part time roles therefore seem to only attract semi-retired professionals as younger people need a full wage coming in. When we do get applications from younger people some have no practical experience at all to back up their application. They may have a degree but can't actually put a fence up. When we've had people on work experience and I talk to them about what they're planning to do when they leave uni, they tend to want to do more consultancy type roles and they're better paid. We did try advertising an apprenticeship at one stage but we had barely any applications so it didn't work out.

I've been in post for 15 years. When I applied for the job (there were three ranger posts up for grabs at the time) there were over 100 applications and we used to get 40 or 50 applications for a single job. Now we're lucky to get a dozen and I know my colleagues in the Public Rights of Way Team really have issues with this for certain posts.

My personal opinion on the situation is that university degrees are far too expensive now (it was free when I studied). It's putting young people in too much debt. And you're not going to take on that kind of debt to then enter a poorly paid career, often on temporary contracts, where you are also required to do a lot of voluntary work to pad out your practical skills. But that is just a personal opinion!

It is a view from the public sector and obviously we all struggle with our finances at the moment, so you may find the charitable sector view a bit different!

---

Working for Warwickshire's Country Parks offers a varied and interesting opportunity for anyone starting out in a countryside career. We manage a range of reclaimed habitats including gravel pits, landfill sites and disused railway lines for the benefit of people and wildlife and each year we look for additional seasonal staff to help cover the sites during the busier summer months when visitor services are the priority. We have seen a steady decline in the number of applicants over the years and lately we are finding a lack of candidates interested in working directly with the public. There appears to be a desire from recent graduates to go straight in to pure conservation roles where they can work on a specific habitat or species and the conservation charities and trusts offer that opportunity far more than we, as a council service, can offer.



The application forms we do receive are varied in their quality; some are too vague and are too difficult to read! Candidates need to ensure they fill out all of the application form, and provide us with full address details, for themselves and any referees. They need to write or type clearly any email addresses and use the job description and person specification to provide headings and cover everything with an example under each. It is most important to look at every line under the essential criteria, and explain on the application how they meet it. We are looking to find how they match up to these through the application form. Make it easy for the shortlisting team by listing out the items and putting their match against each one. The lengthy descriptions of how they have always loved nature and being outdoors are interesting, but will not help them stand out from the crowd, what we need is examples which relate back to the person and job specification. Understandably, starting out, candidates may have gaps but they need to think of anything which is transferable to a country park situation. If it's not written down, we cannot guess if they have the essential criteria we are asking for.

When we have sifted through the applications and finally get to meet the candidates we start again and this is their opportunity to shine. Some fantastic forms have provided some difficult interviews. An interview should not be an unpleasant experience, so we try to be friendly and relaxed, we want candidates to open up and talk to us. What we have found is some people struggle to speak to us and they don't provide full answers explaining their experiences and how they could relate to our roles.



**Kingsbury Water Park Pine Pool**  
(Warwickshire County Council)

Something that we look for in our applicants is the ability to use their own initiative, be proactive, take decisions and have some common sense; these are crucial attributes for countryside rangers in a busy semi-urban country park. Something we hear regularly when questioned on initiative is 'I've worked on my own as part of my dissertation doing surveys'. Working on your own initiative is not the same as working alone. Initiative is the ability to assess a situation or problem and fix it, to take action and get it resolved and some candidates can struggle to provide a full example of how they demonstrate this ability.

We also need seasonal staff who are confident with talking to the public, and are willing to, or have had experience of leading and instructing children as this is a fundamental part of the ranger role during the summer season.

We have had apprenticeships within the service over the last few years. It gives them the opportunity to learn on the job, be practical and develop the skills required under the guidance and instruction of more knowledgeable staff. This has been successful for both the apprentice and for ourselves in so far as the majority have gone on to gain successful employment in this field. Unfortunately it's often not within our own service, as the permanent positions don't come up very often. Rangers do tend to enjoy their roles and stay put therefore creating a lack of opportunity for candidates trying to break into the industry and land a more permanent position.



Authors: Rachel Hextal (Ranger) Tracy Jones (Education Ranger) Paula Cheesman (Parks Manager)  
[www.warwickshire.gov.uk/parks](http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/parks)

## How did you get into that? Questions Rangers get asked

Matt North, Lead Ranger, Dark Peak, National Trust

"How do you get to be a ranger then?"

This isn't an uncommon question and doesn't come as a surprise. When I am at work I do have RANGER written in big white letters several centimetres high on my back.



**Matthew North**

But it's really hard to answer in a quick sentence without a throwaway line like, "find a partner who gets a good wage".

Lots of people want to get a job in helping look after the environment for as many reasons as there are different jobs. There are many different job titles for those roles; estate workers, ecologists, visitor experience managers, countryside officers, wardens, project officers, nature reserve managers, arborists, environmental educators and of course rangers. Rangers usually have to do a bit of everything.

It's a very competitive field; lots of people want to get countryside management jobs and they are not common. Austerity over the last few years has contracted the field further as the current political climate does not appear to place a value on helping people access green places while protecting and enhancing natural and cultural heritage. This has resulted in countryside services and projects, frequently in local authorities, being cut to the bone or completely done away with.

This is despite lots of people jumping up and down saying this sort of thing is really, REALLY, important for things like biodiversity, mental and physical health, social cohesion, the economy – locally, regionally and nationally - education, child development, reducing crime, agriculture, climate change and flood mitigation. There are many more but I don't have much room to include them all so I suggest you do a bit of research.

Now we also have the uncertainty of Brexit. Regardless of political opinions, this will have a long lasting impact on the environmental management field for years to come. Whether this is positive or negative will be borne out in time.

It's not impossible to break into this job market though. I have led and supported much recruitment for countryside management/ranger posts.

I've also managed to make my career in the industry since my first full time post in 1992 so I know what it's like to apply for jobs and be interviewed for jobs I desperately wanted! So here's a brief summary of my points and thoughts.

**First of all:** Do you really want this career? It's not all driving about in a 4x4 with a new chainsaw in the back whilst looking to the horizon with a furrowed, if suntanned brow.

It can be hard, physical work, for not much money that may require you moving around the country for the jobs. Contracts may be short term due to funding or project lifetime. Most posts also involve working with visitors, volunteers, local communities and your team so it's handy if you like people and can get on with them.

This still you? Now you have to see how you can get on that job ladder!

**Volunteering:** There are lots of reasons why people volunteer, they may be looking to start or change to a career as a ranger, gain some experience, pick up and practice new skills as well as the social aspect and feel they are doing something useful.



Dramatic landscape across Kinder, Edale and the Dark Peak (National Trust images)

A good volunteer is worth their weight in gold; Providing hands, eyes and ears for places that are frequently under resourced. Volunteers may be unpaid but they should be respected and managed accordingly. They should not be there to pick up litter day in, day out, (unless that's what they signed up for!) or be a cheap alternative to employing someone. It's a difficult balancing act but don't forget you may be managing volunteers in the future so it's all practice, even if you may have some challenging experiences initially.

If you are looking for voluntary work, check out what's available and be clear about your motivations when applying for such work. What are you offering and what does the organisation you are giving your time to offer in terms of opportunities, training and support? Be aware that volunteers can take up a lot of time for staff who have plenty of other things they need to do so don't expect them to be at your beck and call.

When you have a bit of time under your belt could you ask for more responsibility? Do you want to concentrate on one aspect or try and get a broad a range of experiences in, for example; education, writing management plans, health and safety, practical work on habitats, boundaries and countryside access provision. How about recruiting volunteers from different backgrounds to those currently coming in? Want to lead groups or tasks?

Remember what you have achieved and why. It's all useful for that application and interview.

The people you work with can also provide references. As well as formal requests for references, I like to ring referees up to get some background from them on you when shortlisting or considering offering jobs.

It's worth noting that I have recruited ex volunteers. They still had to go through the application process but the advantage was I knew them and what they were capable of and they knew the team and job.

**Academic study:** Job descriptions and profiles will say what qualifications and/or experience is expected. Do some research on what these are so you can see what is the industry standard for the career you're looking for.

An academic qualification based in the environmental field will give you a good grounding in principles and knowledge that you can use on the job.

However, studying these days is expensive. You wouldn't buy a car or house without doing some research first so I would suggest the same when choosing a course. Does this qualification point you in any particular career path? Has anyone who's done the course gone on to get a job in what you are hoping to do? Do you know someone in the countryside management industry who can look at the syllabus and say if they think it would be useful?

I would recommend looking for those courses that have work experience placements incorporated. This really helps applicants stand out from the crowd of recent graduates applying and in my personal experience found these opportunities invaluable in my career development.

Does the university/college course you're considering talk to the countryside and conservation industry regularly to check what they are offering on courses is what the employers want? For example I was a bit flabbergasted when I found out a local university has stopped offering a module on GIS/Mapping for its environmental courses!



**Dramatic landscape across Kinder, Edale and the Dark Peak**  
(National Trust images)

**Training:** Not got an environmental graduate qualification? Not the end of the world. I have worked with people with degrees as diverse as music and maths. You do need to get some knowledge and experience under your belt. NVQs or similar can be useful ways to get up to speed.

Such training is frequently part of apprenticeships and similar offers. These are a really good way for organisations to obtain the skills base they need for their staff. Keep your eyes peeled and check if organisations such as the National Trust have any programmes planned. If so, is there a time of year they recruit and what are they looking for? Again applying for

these posts is competitive so use the time to prepare yourself to stand out from the crowd.

**Applications:** If you have found your dream job on the Countryside Jobs Service, chances are so have a lot of other people.

The first hurdle to get over is the initial sifting of the applications. When recruiting I have regularly had a pile of more than a hundred applications to go through to shortlist for the next stage. Normally I use a score sheet based on the main points in the job profile and description and judge each applicant accordingly and give the ones with the most points an interview.

Who makes it through this time consuming and will sapping process? Those people who bother to read the information provided and make it very easy for me and my colleagues to put ticks or scores against those points that we feel are important. So if you see words like 'experience', 'teamwork' or 'customer service' it's worthwhile going through your application thinking "Have I covered all these points and succinctly demonstrated that I can do this?" Think about how easy it is for us poor recruiters to see what you can do.

How can you stand out? I've given some tips above but I would suggest the following:

- Do you show you want to work for us? Don't knock off a standard CV and covering letter that reads like you have inserted the name of the organisation on to a pro forma. If I read your application, I want to know why you want to work for the organisation I represent and the places you are looking to work. Do some research! If you know about the values of the organisation you are applying to, you can represent these to the public and generate support and understanding.
- How committed are you? I once offered a traineeship to a candidate who wanted to get into the profession. She didn't have a broad range of experience but she spent a weekend a month digging ditches all winter with a local group of volunteers because that was all that was available where she lived. This wasn't the only reason for my decision but it tipped the balance for me.
- You may not have examples of specific experience to demonstrate why you are the best applicant but can you give examples of similar situations or demonstrate transferable skills?
- Be honest! Don't make stuff up or over embellish. If my spider sense starts tingling in the application or interview process, I will investigate and check it out. I want to be able to trust you if you come and work for me.

- What other values and behaviours do you think are important? Do you like teams? Do you stop learning when you get a job? How do you approach difficult situations? Give examples so I don't have to read a standard response of "I am a team worker but enjoy working on my own initiative to solve problems..." for the umpteenth time.

**Interviews:** Recruiting is expensive. It takes a lot of time and effort and is a very big decision for the manager and team as well as the applicants, so we invest time and money to find the right person.

As such, don't be put out if you think it's rather an involved recruitment process rather than a simple sit down interview. We don't sit around coming up with daft things to do because it's fun!

We want to see what you can do, how you behave and see how you fit with the team. For example as part of the interview I have regularly asked for portfolios or presentations demonstrating why you are a good applicant for the job, sent candidates out for a walk and a chat with a team member or put interviewees together on a job. All this is to get to know you, help you relax and see what you can do. We aren't there to catch you out!

Good luck in your job hunting. The only advice I can give is, if you want to do this as a career, you will get there in the end. It is worth it.

<http://bit.ly/KinderEdaleDarkPeak>

<http://bit.ly/IlamDovedaleWhitePeak>

<http://bit.ly/Longshaw>

**Scotland's Rural College (SRUC)** was formed when in 2012, SAC (the Scottish Agricultural College) merged with three other prestigious land-based colleges - Oatridge, Elmwood and Barony - to become one of the largest institutions of its kind in Europe. SRUC is a University-level College offering education and training in environmental conservation from further education certificates, Higher National Certificates and Diplomas, degrees, Masters and PhDs across six regional campuses in Scotland; Aberdeen, Ayr, Barony (Dumfries), Edinburgh, Elmwood (Fife) and Oatridge (West Lothian), with a growing suite of online courses at various levels. SRUC also offers CPD events and professional short courses in various aspects of land management and conservation science. All vocationally-led. [www.sruc.ac.uk](http://www.sruc.ac.uk)



**Join the Outdoor Recreation Network** for their upcoming 'Outdoor Recreation 2030: Future Trends and Insights' Conference on 22nd & 23rd October 2019.

This two-day conference will look at what past and current trends tell us about how to prepare for the future, what determines the next "big thing" and the role the outdoors play in contributing to good health and wellbeing. Given the pace of change in the sector this is a timely

occasion to gather leaders across the outdoor recreation industry and consider how to plan for and manage future challenges and opportunities. Please book early as tickets are limited and expected to fill up fast. Visit [outdoorrecreation.org.uk](http://outdoorrecreation.org.uk) for the full programme and booking details.



**We provide high quality training courses** to assist with countryside management at our extensive facilities in Holmfirth. Countryside Management courses include: All-Terrain Vehicles and 4X4 training; Tractor Driving; Mowers; Brushcutter/trimmer; Clearing Saw; Chainsaw; Fencing; Hedge Laying; Hedge Trimming; Basic Tree Survey & Inspection

More information and booking at <https://c-js.co.uk/2kOTrov>



**If you've never seen biodiversity** (there is none in the UK), come with me to our 'secret corner' of Poland where wolves, lynx, beavers, wild boar, wildcats & pine martens roam and discover what a functioning ecosystem looks and sounds like. Check out <https://secure.wildlifeservices.co.uk/poland-wildlife-trips> or call 03339 000927.



The CJS Team would like to thank everyone who has contributed adverts, articles and information for this CJS Focus publication.  
Next edition will feature the Next Generation, published 11 November 2019

A4 sides this CJS Focus: 28 - Details believed correct but given without prejudice, Ends.