

# 14. Taking action for the natural environment

**Type:** Response indicator

## Indicator Description

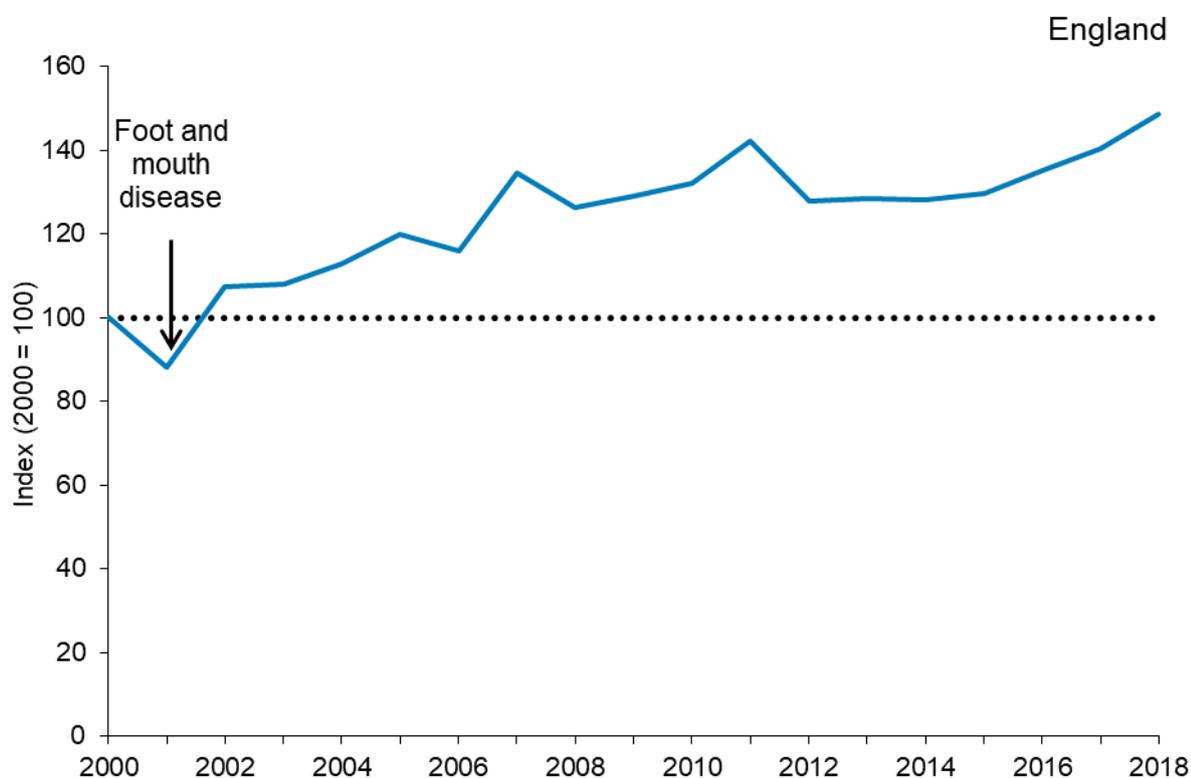
The first part of this indicator shows the amount of volunteer time spent undertaking conservation activities for 10 organisations across the environmental sector in England (including National Parks England which represents all the English National Parks – see background section for a full list). The work undertaken by conservation volunteers includes assisting with countryside management, carrying out surveys and inputting data, assisting with administrative tasks, and fundraising. The second part of this indicator provides an estimate for the number of households in England that encourage wildlife in their garden.

### 14a. Conservation volunteering

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

Between 2000 and 2018, the amount of time volunteers contributed to conservation activities in England increased by 49% (Figure 14.1). It also increased by 16% in the 5 years to 2018 and by 6% in the most recent year for which data are available.

**Figure 14.1: Index of volunteer time spent on conservation activities with selected environmental organisations in England, 2000 to 2018**



#### Notes:

1. The index is calculated using a non-weighted aggregation across organisations. It is therefore strongly dependent on which organisations are included and on the trends reported by the organisations recording large amounts for total volunteer hours.

2. Historical data were not available for all organisations in all years. To make best use of available data and to allow a combined index to be compiled, interpolation estimates have been used to fill any gaps. Further details are given in the background section.
3. Data provided by The Conservation Volunteers, Canal & River Trust (formerly British Waterways), National Parks England, Natural England, RSPB and The Wildlife Trusts were for financial years rather than calendar years. Financial year data have been assigned to the first calendar year (e.g. 2018/19 data were allocated to 2018).
4. Data for the Canal & River Trust (formerly British Waterways) include volunteering carried out in Wales.
5. The data series was revised in 2018 due to some organisations, most notably The Wildlife Trusts, providing updated figures for previous years (see background section for further details). The methodology used to calculate the interpolated estimates was also revised in 2018. This chart is therefore not comparable to those presented in publications prior to 2018.

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

A decrease in time spent volunteering between 2000 and 2001 can be attributed to a decline in all conservation activity due to controls on countryside access during the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak. The small peak in volunteer time in 2007 is largely driven by an increase in volunteer numbers at The Conservation Volunteers which initiated a number of large youth programmes in that year. The 2011 high point, however, was driven by increases in the volunteer hours reported by 6 of the 10 organisations in the indicator and the subsequent decrease in 2012 was due to a drop in the number of volunteers across 7 of the organisations, most notably: the British Trust for Ornithology, The Wildlife Trusts, The Conservation Volunteers and the RSPB. The high point in 2018 is due to all organisations except one recording an increase in volunteer time. These changes reflect: (i) the cyclical nature of some projects undertaken, such as tree planting and work on specific nature reserves and (ii) the revised methodologies used to survey and record the number of volunteer hours.

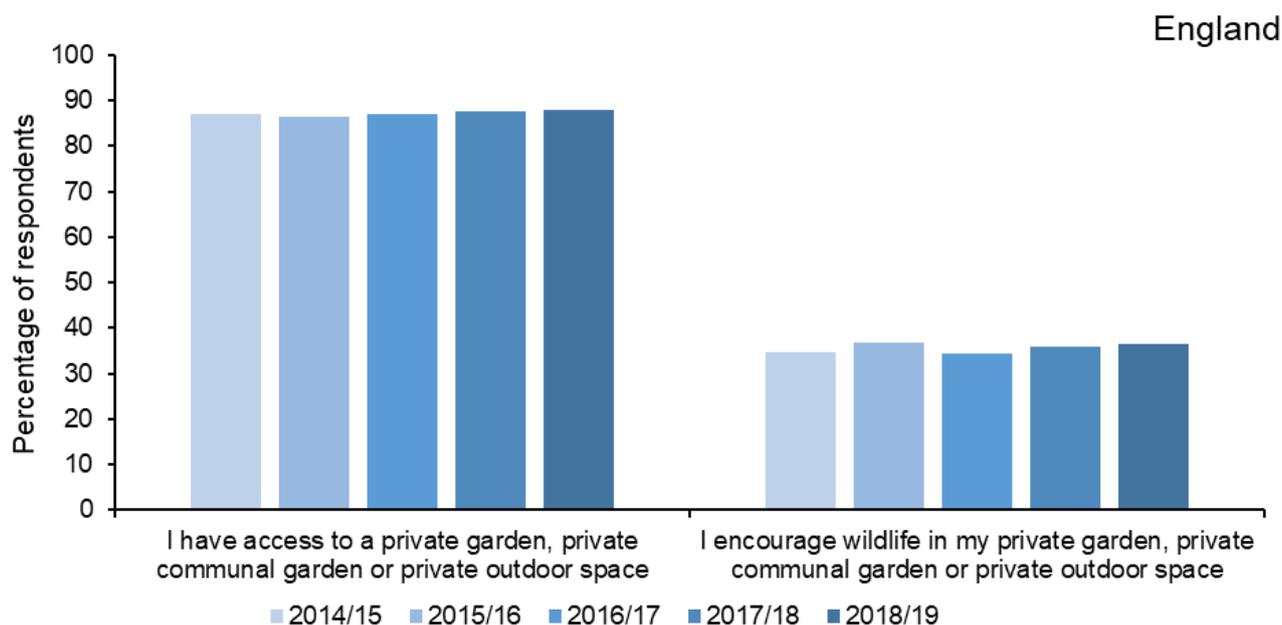
More recently, the indicator remained relatively stable between 2012 and 2015 and showed a gradual increase in 2016 through to 2018. Although the indicator has increased by almost 16% in the 5 years since 2013, the trends reported by the individual organisations vary considerably, from an increase of over 87% for the Canal & River Trust (formerly known as British Waterways) that have been actively recruiting additional volunteers since 2011, to a decrease of almost 25% for The Conservation Volunteers.

#### **14b. Households encouraging wildlife in their garden in England**

In March 2009, Natural England, Defra and the Forestry Commission jointly initiated a survey called [\*Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment\*](#) (MENE) to provide baseline and trend data on how people use the natural environment in England. This indicator uses data sourced from the MENE survey to provide estimates of the number of households encouraging wildlife in their garden in England.

In 2014/15, 87% of MENE respondents said they owned a garden, shared a garden with others or had access to a private outdoor space (e.g. balcony, yard or patio area); this increased slightly to 88% of respondents in 2018/19 (Figure 14.2). Of those with access to a garden or outdoor space, in 2014/15 35% agreed that 'they encouraged wildlife' in these areas (e.g. through feeding areas or planting). This figure also increased slightly in 2018/19 to 37% of respondents with access to a garden or outdoor space.

**Figure 14.2: Percentage of the population with access to a private garden, private communal garden or private outdoor space and the percentage of those people who encourage wildlife in that garden or outdoor space, 2014/15 to 2018/19**



**Notes:**

1. Data from questions E7 (I have access to a private garden, private communal garden or private outdoor space) and E8 (I encourage wildlife in my private garden, communal garden or outdoor space). Base: All respondents, quarterly questions (2014/15 n = 3,419; 2015/16 n = 3,488; 2016/17 n = 3,588; 2017/18 n = 3,666; 2018/19 n = 3,498).
2. Data for 2013/14 have no longer been included in this measure due to quality issues with questions E7 and E8.

**Source:** Natural England – Monitor of Engagement with Natural Environment (MENE) survey.

**Indicator assessment**

**Assessment of change in conservation volunteering and wildlife gardening.**

**Conservation volunteering: Long term (2000 to 2018): Improving; Short term (2013 to 2018): Improving; Latest year (2018): Increased.**

**Wildlife gardening: Long term: Insufficient data; Short term: Insufficient data; Latest year (2018): Increased.**

**Note:** Long and short-term assessments for the conservation volunteering measure are based on a 3% rule of thumb. Where possible, the base years for these assessments use a 3-year average. See [Assessing Indicators](#).

**Relevance**

Volunteer time is one way of assessing the level of public engagement with biodiversity. Volunteering for conservation charities is critical to the successful delivery of many of the objectives of Biodiversity 2020 – for example, volunteers collect much of the data used for monitoring the status of species and also work to conserve threatened habitats.

Gardens offer a good case study on the benefits and impacts that individual, everyday decisions can have on the natural environment. It is estimated that 22.7 million households in the UK have

access to a garden. Gardens cover up to a quarter of the land surface in our towns and cities (a total area of 432,924 hectares) and they contain about 3 million ponds and almost a quarter of all trees outside woodlands (Owen, 2010). They also support a wide range of plants and animals, one study identified 2,673 different species in a medium-sized garden (Davies *et al.*, 2009).

Biodiversity 2020 recognises that people have a critical role in conserving biodiversity and geodiversity. To this end, 'putting people at the heart of biodiversity policy' is a priority in the strategy. The indicator is relevant to outcome 4 in [Biodiversity 2020, A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services](#) (see Annex A of the publication). The indicator is also relevant to international goals and targets (see Annex B of the publication).

## Background

The first measure in this indicator is based on data on volunteer hours supplied by 10 conservation charities and public bodies operating in England:

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

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

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

Data are not available for all organisations in all years. For the current indicator, missing values have been estimated by Defra statisticians. In the historical dataset estimates have been used in the index calculations for Canal & River Trust (2000 to 2009), The Conservation Volunteers (2000 to 2005), Natural England (2000 and 2002), National Parks England (2000 to 2008), Plantlife (2000 to 2006), British Trust for Ornithology (2000 to 2011), and The Wildlife Trusts (2000 to 2003, 2006). The estimates were based on (a) the trend in the data provided by the organisation, and (b) the trend in the data provided by other organisations for the missing years. The number of volunteer hours has been converted to an index (set to 2000 = 100).

Some larger organisations are unable to report volunteering effort for England separately and report only for Great Britain or the UK. Such organisations have been excluded from the England index, which affects the trend in volunteering in England compared with the UK as a whole.

The methodology used by conservation charities can change from year to year. This can cause fluctuations in the data, particularly where there are revised methods used by charities that have previously recorded large amounts for total volunteer hours. While none of the charities reported any changes to their methodologies during the 2020 update, data were revised in 2018 to account for earlier methodological improvements made by The Wildlife Trusts. The charts and assessments presented here together with the accompanying [dataset](#) are therefore not comparable to those published prior to the 2018 update of this indicator.

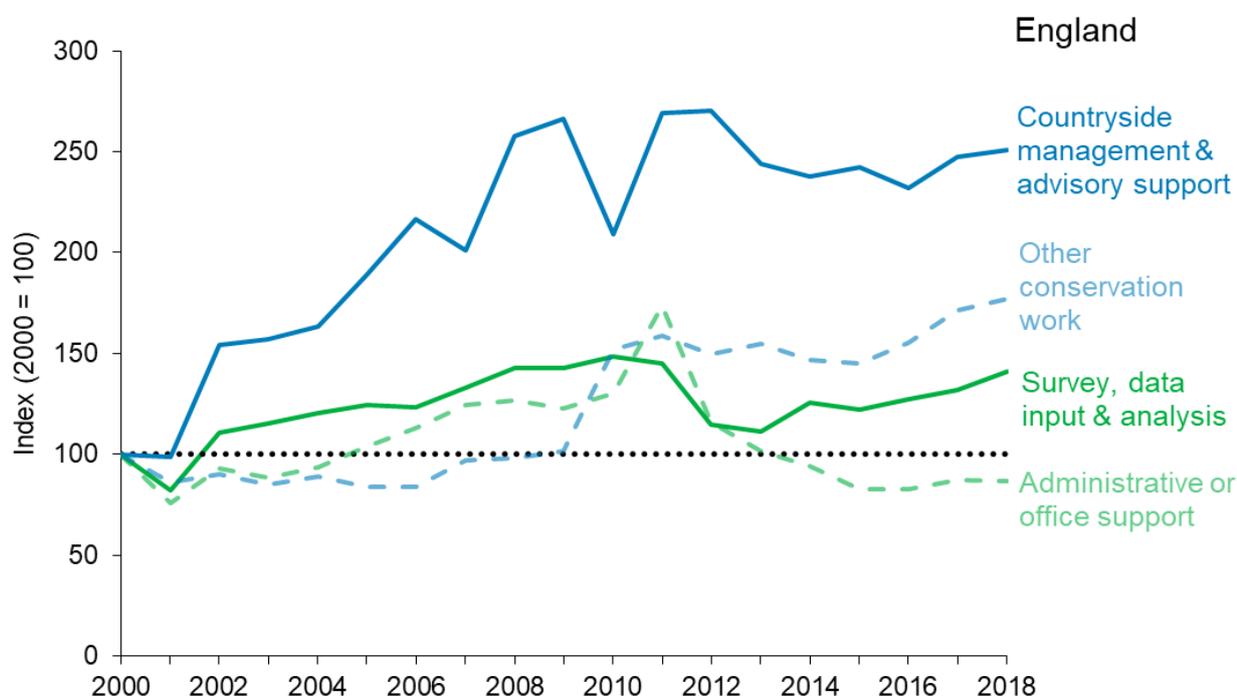
In broad terms, the type of work undertaken by volunteers falls into 4 categories:

1. Countryside management & advisory support;
2. Surveys, data input & analysis;
3. Administrative or office support; and

4. 'Other conservation work', which includes activities such as fundraising, training and educational events.

Not every organisation provides the breakdown of volunteering hours shown in Figure 14.3, and therefore the trends shown in this figure are different from the overall assessment in Figure 14.1.

**Figure 14.3: Index of volunteer time spent on conservation activities with selected environmental organisations in England by category of work, 2000 to 2018**



**Notes:**

1. Interpolated estimates have been used to fill missing years for the British Trust for Ornithology (2000-2011), Natural England (2000 and 2002) and Plantlife (2000-2006).
2. The data series was revised in 2018, due to some organisations providing updated figures for previous years (see background section for further details). The methodology used to calculate the interpolated estimates was also revised in 2018. This chart is therefore not comparable to those presented in publications prior to 2018.

**Source:** Bat Conservation Trust, British Trust for Ornithology, Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland (formerly Botanical Society of the British Isles), Canal & River Trust (formerly British Waterways), The Conservation Volunteers, National Parks England, Natural England, Plantlife, RSPB.

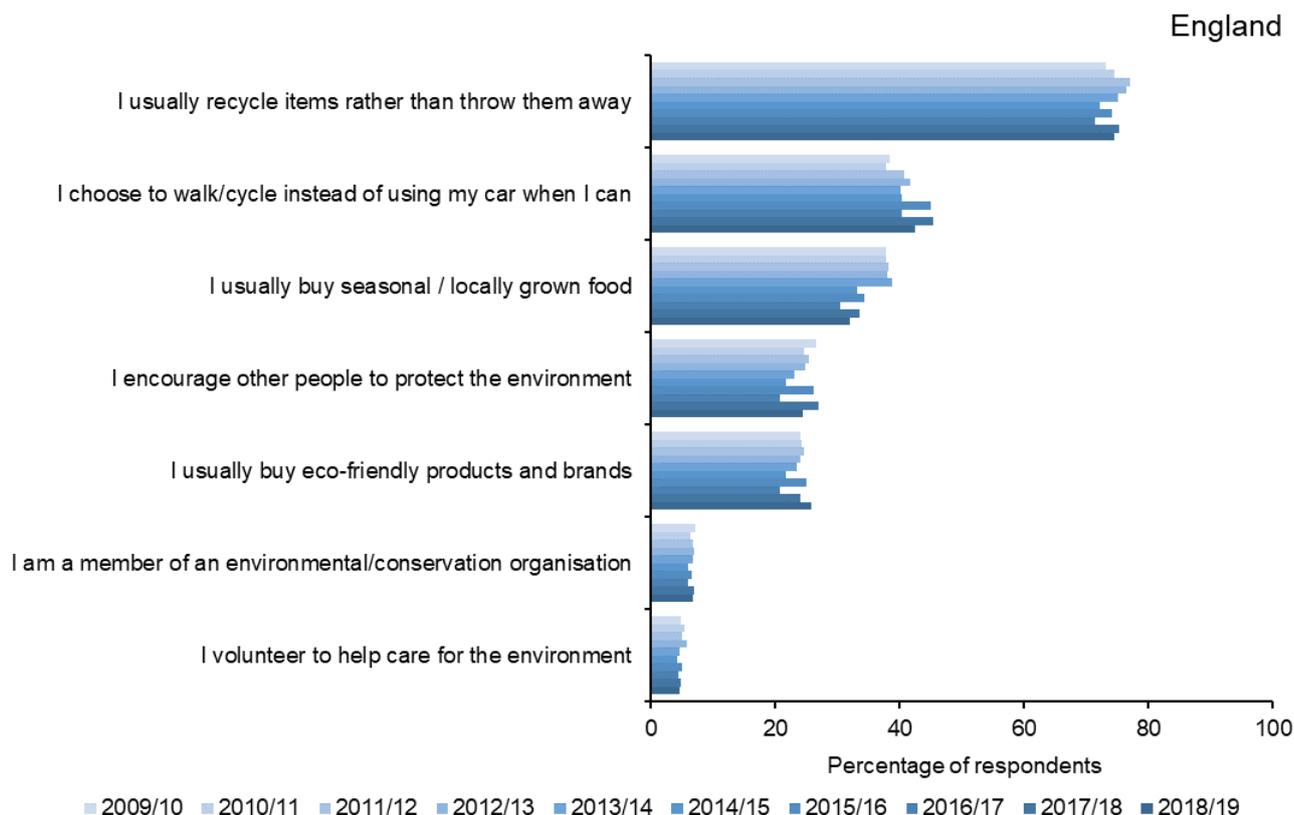
Volunteer hours relating to 3 of the categories of conservation work (countryside management & advisory support; surveys, data input & analysis; and 'other conservation work') increased in 2018, whilst the administrative or office support category remained the same. The surveys, data input & analysis and 'other conservation work' categories have shown the greatest increases, whereas the Countryside management & advisory support category has shown a smaller increase (Figure 14.3). The sharp fall in 'countryside management & advisory support' in 2010 was mainly driven by the RSPB reporting a lower than average number of volunteer hours for this category. Finally, the 2011 peak in volunteer hours relating to 'administrative or office support' was driven by the RSPB reporting an increased number of volunteers in this category and the British Trust for Ornithology reporting a sharp fall in numbers the following year when the 'Bird Atlas Project' ended. Historically, organisations have reported that some changes are due to shifts in strategic focus that result in significant adjustments to projects such as tree planting. They have also cited the need to consider changes to volunteer numbers in order to comply with health and safety regulations.

The second measure in this indicator uses data sourced from the MENE survey to provide estimates of the number of households encouraging wildlife in their garden in England. This survey has been replaced by the new People and Nature Survey for England which began collecting data in April 2020 and has produced interim results.

### Other engagement with the natural environment

The MENE survey also records respondents' engagement with pro-environmental behaviours such as recycling and preferring to buy seasonal or locally grown food (Figure 14.4).

**Figure 14.4: Percentage of respondents engaging with pro-environmental behaviours, 2009/10 to 2018/19**



#### Notes:

1. Data from question E4: Which of the following environment related activities do you do?
2. Base: All respondents, quarterly questions (2009/10 n = 3,549; 2010/11 n = 3,568; 2011/12 n = 3544; 2012/13 n = 3,528; 2013/14 n = 3,535; 2014/15 n = 3,419; 2015/16 n = 3,488; 2016/17 n = 3,588; 2017/18 n = 3,666; 2018/19 n=3,498).

**Source:** Natural England – Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE).

In 2018/19, of those reporting that they undertook one or more of the pro-environmental behaviours specified in Figure 14.4, 74% indicated that they usually recycled items rather than throwing them away, 42% reported that they chose to walk or cycle instead of using their car and 32% stated that they usually bought seasonal or locally grown food. Far fewer reported that they were a member of an environmental/conservation organisation and/or that they volunteered to help care for the environment (7% and 5% respectively).

## Web links for further information

Bat Conservation Trust (Home page): <http://www.bats.org.uk/>

Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland (Home page): <https://bsbi.org/>

British Trust for Ornithology (Home page): <http://www.bto.org/>

Canal & River Trust (Home page): <http://canalrivertrust.org.uk/>

National Parks England (Home page): <http://www.nationalparksengland.org.uk/>

Natural England (Home page): <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england>

Natural England: MENE publications <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/monitor-of-engagement-with-the-natural-environment-survey-purpose-and-results>

Plantlife (Home page) <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk>

RSPB (Home page): <http://www.rspb.org.uk/>

The Conservation Volunteers (Home page): <http://www.tcv.org.uk/>

The Wildlife Trusts (Home page): <http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/>

Woodland Trust (Home page): <http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/>

## References

Davies, Z. G., Fuller, R. A., Loram, A., Irvine, K. N., Sims, V. and Gaston, K. J. (2009). A national scale inventory of resource provision for biodiversity within domestic gardens. *Biological Conservation*, Vol. 142 No. 4 pp. 761-771.

Owen, J. (2010). *Wildlife of a garden: a thirty year study*. Royal Horticultural Society, London.

**Last updated:** October 2020

**Latest data available:**

14a volunteering 2018 (and financial year 2018/19);

14b wildlife gardening 2018/19