

Finding our way back to nature

We have lost our roots in nature. Generations are not passing on the local folklore, and the different uses and names of local wildlife. Chris Rose calls this 'nature blindness' and he explains how we might tackle the problem in this issue. He challenges wildlife groups to look beyond the converted audience. Encouraging people to engage with the natural world must start from where they are at, he suggests. Activities and messages must be tailored to their values and interests – we should not expect one type of communication and one set of activities to have impact across the board.

This is all daunting, surely? Yes, but at least different bodies are on the case. Many organisations are devising ways of tempting people to take action to survey, learn about, or care for wildlife on their doorstep. Chris Rose himself describes Ecoteering, which provides wildlife information as participants go about their orienteering-type of challenge. Elsewhere in this edition, Kay Haw looks at the range of Citizen Science activities on offer, from studying tree health, to bird counts, and checking on hedgehog hibernation. These can directly inform volunteers about wildlife topics, and show the value of record keeping, mapping and data quality. Likewise, Matt Postles explains how people can be plunged into a BioBlitz day, helping survey all types of wildlife present in a greenspace such as a garden, park or cemetery. BioBlitz and Citizen Science surveys are meaningful ways for people to watch wildlife close up, experience different species, use systematic methods, handle wildlife keys, and learn with specialists. Some of these participants, of whatever age, might get the bug and come back for more.

While we want people to study, care for and defend wildlife, there is a growing body of evidence to show the striking social benefits of closer contact with nature. Helen Bovey summarises achievements of the Access to Nature grants offered by Natural England in recent years, and Justin Dillon looks at wider examples and the evidence-base for the community cohesion, family togetherness, self confidence, and learning skills which nature experience, such as Forest Schools, bushcraft activities, and field trips can provide. Finally, what of digital technology, that great distraction to the fresh air and puddles of the real world? Gina Maffey and colleagues categorise the basics of 'Digital Conservation' in this edition. The different tools, apps, software and blogs can offer virtual representations of nature, tools for public engagement, information and monitoring systems, networking tools, and more. The authors suggest conservationists are trained in the uses of digital conservation, to exploit it wisely. As we slowly cure ourselves of nature blindness, becoming rooted in nature will take many forms.