

## Feature

# You, you and you!

Charles Nodder, the NGO's Political Consultant, explains the importance of volunteering to assist the NGO.

THE RSPB HAS WELL OVER 1,000 PAID STAFF, BASC and the Countryside Alliance each have over 100. How many do you think the NGO has? Two, plus two other part-timers and a couple of consultants, like me, providing a day or so a week.

It's not much in the way of human resources, is it, to run an organisation that packs a punch comparable to others and which now services over 12,000 members.

Sometimes, when members ring me up – perhaps for advice on the law – I get the distinct impression that they think the NGO has a sophisticated office, with a legal department, an accounts department, a membership records division and all the other trappings common to larger organisations. It doesn't. It manages, mostly out of people's back rooms, to provide all these functions, but frankly with a skeleton paid staff.

So how does the NGO do it? How has it come to be considered in some

way comparable to the other countryside organisations? Hard work is part of the answer; volunteers are the rest.

The NGO's by line, 'Run by gamekeepers, for gamekeepers' is entirely true. When I attend your National Committee meetings, always held on a Sunday because that is as close as a keeper gets to a day off, I am always amazed that your Regional Chairman have made the effort to get up, some in the early hours after a week of nights out lamping or chasing poachers, to drive in some cases several hundred miles and to be ready at 10am to discuss the affairs of the NGO. If they are lucky, they will get away at 4pm to drive home and do a day's work in the half-light.

In the intervening time, they will have made decisions that affect the future of gamekeeping, deciding for example what policy line to take on proposed changes to legislation, and – because they know

their business – those decisions will have been the right ones. They will have reported on any number of local initiatives to help gamekeepers, to raise funds for the NGO, to work with gamekeeper training colleges, to put on educational and entertaining events for members and on many other activities. These men are all volunteers. They are the essence of what makes the NGO what it is, and they contribute selflessly to the future of the gamekeeping profession.

But there are many other volunteers within the NGO family too. Other keepers, supporters, their families and their friends who all make the NGO what it is. They might help with a schools visit to a shoot; they might just barbecue the sausages for the local NGO clay shoot; they might lend a piece of equipment or provide a venue for an event. They might accompany me to represent an aspect of gamekeeping at some important meeting in London, or help by doing an interview for the local press. So many talents, with some devoting a lot of time, some a little but in total many, many people, all doing something. That's how the NGO gets through.

When the NGO did a survey of members a few years ago, one result leapt out at me. 51% of members said they would be happy to volunteer to do something to help the NGO. Now, I have been involved over the years with many membership organisations and I can tell you that is a staggeringly high figure.

It hasn't yet happened, of course. The NGO has a lot of active volunteers, but not 6,000 – half the membership. Just think what it could do if it did! But the survey tells us that the goodwill is there. It just needs to be converted into action.

So please, if you value what the NGO does and you think you can help, don't wait for the NGO to come to you and ask. Just call your Regional Chairman for a chat. There is bound to be something going on locally for which a spare pair of hands would make all the difference. Thank you.



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