

You feel passionately about wildlife and conservation. You want to help. But how? Here Mark offers a few suggestions.

The short answer is to pick a wildlife or conservation charity working on something you feel strongly about – whether it's whales or rhinos, rainforests or coral reefs - and then do everything you possibly can to support its work. You could help by doing anything from fund-raising to supporting their campaigns, or you could lend your time and expertise for anything from envelope stuffing to web design.

Personally, I prefer to support smaller, specialist organisations – because they tend to be more focused, particularly well informed, truly dedicated and generally more efficient. There is a list of some of the conservation groups I would recommend on the links page on this website, to give you a few ideas.

Beyond that, here are some specific suggestions:

Volunteer

Most conservation groups – large and small – couldn't survive without the invaluable help of dedicated volunteers.

If you have some spare time, there are many ways to lend your support. You could help with local, national or international fieldwork – everything from participating in population surveys to digging ditches or building fences – by giving a day, a weekend, a week or longer. Or you could offer half a day, a day or even several days a week to work in your favourite conservation charity's office. Whether you're photocopying, helping to answer letters from enthusiastic children or using your skills as an electrician to re-wire the office for free, you'll be helping enormously.

Depending on your main areas of interest, there are lots of specific ways of helping, too. For example, if you're keen on whales, dolphins and porpoises, you could train to become a Marine Mammal Medic and join the excellent British Divers Marine Life Rescue teams throughout the UK (you do not even need to be a diver).

Finally, have a look at the separate section on careers advice (www.markcarwardine.com/career_advice1.php), which goes into some detail about volunteering for wildlife and conservation.

Raise urgently needed funds

Every single conservation group I know is short of funds. Quite simply, if they have more money they can do more to protect wildlife.

You can raise funds to go into the general money pot (known as 'free funds') or for one particular species, place or project that you feel passionately about – it's entirely up to you.

Here are a few ideas for fund-raising: auctions (for unwanted items or for donated skills and services), quiz nights, bring-and-buy sales, car-boot sales, dog-walking, selling unwanted stuff on eBay, coffee mornings, raffles, sponsored anything (swimming, running, cycling, walking, giving up alcohol,

shaving off your beard, etc). There are many more possibilities, of course. Then ask your employer to match any funds you raise (you never know – they might say yes!).

Perhaps you could offer to approach local businesses for sponsorship (speak to the charity you are fund-raising for first, just in case they have already made similar approaches). How about placing a collection box in your office, or in a local shop? Or, if you have the nerve, you could even stand outside a supermarket with a collection bucket.

Alternatively, if you don't have the time to organise fund-raising events, why not consider adopting an animal – lots of charities have excellent adoption schemes these days – or making a regular monthly donation by standing order. At the very least, become a fully paid-up member of at least one conservation group, if you're not already.

Campaign

Another great way to help is to support conservation campaigns. Your favourite charities will be able to give you some specific ideas about current campaigns – their websites are a good starting point. They might ask you to write a letter or sign a petition, for example.

Alternatively, you could take action about any other issue that is close to your heart. For example, I feel very strongly that Iceland should not be allowed to join the EU unless it stops whaling – so I try to persuade almost everyone I meet to write to their local MP and MEP about it.

Raise awareness

The more people who are aware of conservation issues – and, ultimately, care about them – the better. It only takes one individual to educate hundreds of people and to affect the way they see the world.

Here are a few ideas: write letters to the national press about environmental stories and issues you feel strongly about, write an article for your local newspaper, offer yourself for an interview on local radio, or give talks or lectures to local clubs (museum societies, Probus clubs, Women's Institutes etc).

Live a green life

There are many relatively easy ways to reduce your impact on the environment. A huge number of books and articles have been written on the subject, of course, but here are some suggestions:

- Make your garden more wildlife-friendly. Plan on the basis that all animals have four main requirements: safety, a place to sleep, food and water. You can make nest-boxes for birds and bats, put out food and water, provide a pond for frogs, newts and insects, plant flowers for bees and butterflies, leave dead wood and wild areas untouched, plant native flowers, and do so many other good things.
- Reduce your usage (eg print and photocopy on both sides of the paper and avoid using disposable objects such as polystyrene cups

or plastic shopping bags); re-use as much as possible (take a bag with you when shopping, re-use envelopes by crossing the address out, repair worn or damaged items rather than automatically buying new ones); and, of course, recycle.

- Save energy. Don't leave electrical goods such as televisions on standby, turn down your heating, switch off lights when they're not needed, use energy-efficient light bulbs etc.
- Walk or use public transport whenever possible – don't automatically jump in the car.
- Choose who you do business with – don't buy goods that are over-packaged, don't invest in companies that fund palm oil plantations, buy your electricity from companies using renewable energy sources, buy organic food, and so on.

Whatever you are able to do, it all helps.