

Research Report

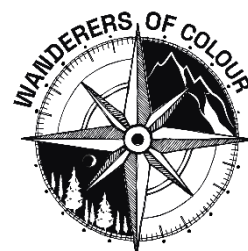
Seeding Change: Exploring barriers to nature conservation volunteering for young women and non-binary people of colour



November 2022 – March 2023

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'Seeding Change' was a research project led by London Wildlife Trust with partners, Wanderers of Colour, and funded by Natural England.



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Executive Summary

With the support of Natural England, 'Seeding Change' was a cross-sector research project led by London Wildlife Trust. Together with partners, Wanderers of Colour, the project aimed to explore the specific barriers to inclusion in volunteering within the nature conservation sector, that are experienced by people of colour who identify as being women or non-binary (primarily aged 18-25).

Between November 2022 and March 2023, through the Seeding Change research project, London Wildlife Trust staff engaged with young women and non-binary people of colour through 4 in-person consultation workshops, an online survey, two one-to-one semi-structured interviews and two pilot volunteering sessions. In total, **142** young women and non-binary people of colour were engaged.

Based on feedback from participants and survey respondents, the report explores barriers to inclusion across three main themes – **safety, relevancy, and accessibility** – and offers recommendations for organisations aiming to increase engagement with young women and non-binary people of colour.

'What does nature conservation mean to you?'

This was a question asked to everyone who engaged with the Seeding Change project, whether through the survey or during discussions held at in-person sessions. The various responses to this question demonstrate the complicated relationship that communities of colour have with the environmental sector, and in particular nature conservation, that is shaped by wider experiences of exclusion.

Themes of colonialism, extraction and elitism emerged from these discussions and it is clear that there is a significant amount of trust-building that must be done to ensure that people of colour – and particularly those also experiencing gender marginalisation – feel safe and welcome within the nature conservation sector. These are larger and more meaningful conversations and concerns that already exist within marginalised communities and creating spaces and platforms for them to be spoken about openly will demonstrate that large organisations are willing to listen and respond to the needs of marginalised communities.

As the findings from the Seeding Change research project have demonstrated, there is still work to be done to extend this outreach to include underrepresented communities within the nature conservation sector, including women and non-binary people of colour. Programmes aiming to engage with women and non-binary people of colour should be tailored towards their own distinct needs and desires, with a particular emphasis on safety, relevancy and accessibility when delivering new programmes.

Safety

Safety is a significant concern for young women and non-binary people of colour, particularly as they are often visibly located at the intersection of multiple racialised and gender-based systems of violence. From our survey respondents, 77% of the total respondents stated that previous experiences of feeling unsafe whilst in a green space has now made them less likely to engage in opportunities and nature conservation volunteering in the future. Whilst the following recommendations represent some of the first steps that can be taken, there is still much work to be done to ensure that women and non-binary people of colour feel safe enough in green spaces to engage in long-term opportunities.

Recommendations:

- Designated spaces and programmes for underrepresented communities
- Privacy whilst engaging in practical nature conservation activities
- Clean and accessible facilities

Relevancy

Young women and non-binary people of colour engage with nature for a variety of reasons that reflect their own existing interests, and recognising and incorporating this into the planning and delivery of sessions is essential to long-term engagement with nature conservation. In order to ensure that opportunities are relevant, organisers should commit to understanding and responding to the needs and desires of relevant communities to create opportunities that are tailored to their audiences.

Recommendations:

- Varied content of activities, with opportunities for co-design
- Community connections and partnerships
- Representative staff and workshop leads.
- Diversified media engagement
- Transparency regarding site activities (detailed pre-event information)

Accessibility

The inaccessibility of existing programmes and events is a central limiting factor to engagement with young women and non-binary people. Existing accessibility concerns are exacerbated when working with communities that are underrepresented within the environmental and conservation sector as there is often a lack of existing knowledge of or perceived interest in 'nature conservation' work, despite communities perhaps being otherwise engaged in green spaces in various ways.

Recommendations:

- Accessible language and no jargon
- Reimbursement of volunteer expenses and refreshment/lunch provision
- Varied times/days for activities (combination of weekdays, evenings, weekends)

Introduction

Background

With the support of Natural England, 'Seeding Change' was a cross-sector research project led by London Wildlife Trust. Together with partners, Wanderers of Colour, the project aimed to explore the specific barriers to inclusion in volunteering within the nature conservation sector, that are experienced by people of colour who identify as being women or non-binary (primarily aged 18-25).

Despite London Wildlife Trust possessing a breadth of experience of delivering youth programmes that effectively engage under-represented young people in their nature reserves (for example, *Keeping it Wild* and *Nature Nurtures*), there can be a tendency in some mixed groups for female voices to be drowned out or activities to begin separating into stereotyped gender-based roles. Similarly, people of colour can often experience marginalisation and isolation within the conservation sector as it continues to be dominated by an older, white and middle-class group of individuals.

There are also additional safety and accessibility concerns that can limit engagement with green spaces amongst young women and non-binary people of colour. Women's safety concerns are significantly greater than men (ONS, 2021) with those who experience gender marginalisation often feeling uncomfortable or unsafe whilst present in public spaces (World Bank, 2020). This inequity is further exacerbated amongst communities of colour, with the COVID-19 pandemic making the disparity in access to green spaces starkly clear. Nearly all of the UK's Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities live in urban areas, with many living in areas that have deficiency of access to open green spaces with wildlife value (Collier, 2020). Previous experiences of hostility and racism also lead to people of colour being less likely to seek out engagement with green spaces (Collier, 2019), with just 25.7 percent of Asian, 26.2 percent of Black and 38.8 percent of mixed-race people spending time in nature, compared to 44.2 percent of white people (Natural England, 2019).

Despite this, young women and non-binary people of colour are keenly interested in engaging with conservation and green spaces but may be limited in their involvement due to perceived barriers and the inaccessibility of particular spaces.

Aim of Seeding Change

This project represents a research phase that will feed into a pilot programme of supported outdoor volunteering activities, that are safe, culturally sensitive and most importantly fun. The project focussed on young women and non-binary people aged 18-25, who identify as being 'people of colour', with some who may also be part of a faith group. These are young people who we know are less likely to be accessing green spaces and who may not currently be taking part in practical nature conservation activities.

The aim was to enable young women and non-binary people of colour to discover, explore and enjoy the wild spaces on their doorstep. Girls and young women were supported to:

- Overcome negative perceptions of who wild spaces are for
- Gain confidence in using the outdoors and improve self-esteem
- Foster a deeper sense of place and belonging
- By physically active in and for their local natural environment

- Become ready for pathway opportunities into the conservation sector
- Develop a love of nature that will support strong mental health for a lifetime

Partnership with Wanderers of Colour

London Wildlife Trust delivered the project in partnership with [Wanderers of Colour](#), a people of colour-led grassroots collective based in the UK with members across the globe. The collective runs a range of activities with the aim of increasing access and participation within the outdoors and travelling, and an increased understanding of the systematic issues within these.

Wanderers of Colour supported delivery of the project through helping build the project framework, mapping outcomes, co-designing and delivering workshops and disseminating the survey, as well as feeding into the overall research report.

Between November 2022 to March 2023, the project engaged with a total of 142 people who identify as being women or non-binary people of colour, through a public survey and six consultation sessions. Insights that have been gained throughout the course of this project have been used to create a series of recommendations that will inform a long-term pilot programme of outdoor volunteering activities that are tailored to women and non-binary people of colour.

Delivery

Over the course of five months, through the Seeding Change research project, London Wildlife Trust staff engaged with young women and non-binary people of colour through 4 in-person consultation workshops, an online survey, two one-to-one semi-structured interviews and two pilot volunteering sessions. In total, **142** young women and non-binary people of colour were engaged.

In-person sessions

What was delivered?

From January 2023 to March 2023, a total of **65** young women and non-binary people of colour attended one or more Seeding Change in-person sessions:

- Consultation sessions:
 - 15th January 2023, Walthamstow Wetlands
 - 28th January 2023, Walthamstow Wetlands
 - 29th January 2023, Walthamstow Wetlands
 - 16th February 2023, Camley Street Natural Park
- Pilot volunteering sessions:
 - 5th March 2023, Walthamstow Wetlands
 - 11th March 2023, Sydenham Hill Wood

The consultation sessions aimed to provide young women and non-binary people of colour with a short experience of practical nature conservation to then allow us to discuss their thoughts on both the task itself and the wider conservation sector. Creative workshops were also included in order to encourage engagement from people who may otherwise not have attended a practical nature conservation day, due to a perceived lack of awareness, interest or knowledge. The consultation sessions were structured as follows:

Consultation Session

Welcome and Introductions (15 mins)

Sessions began with an introduction to London Wildlife Trust, Wanderers of Colour and the site. Each participant would also introduce themselves, where they had travelled from and what motivated them to participate in the session.

Wildlife Walk (30 mins)

This activity was added into the sessions following feedback from the first session requesting more information about the site and its wildlife and habitats. It would include a short walk through the site whilst learning about some of the generalised nature conservation activities, as well as information that would specifically relate to the wildlife and habitats that we would be working with that day.

Practical Conservation (1 hour)

Seasonal tasks were completed on the site, including scything, deadhedging and mulching. This would begin with an introduction to the task and the impact it has on local wildlife, as well as demonstrations on best practice. There would typically be at least two separate tasks that people could choose to take part in, with an opportunity to swap and try different tools halfway through the session.

The consultation session held on the evening of 16th February 2023 at Camley Street Natural Park did not include a practical conservation session due to safety concerns related to limited visibility after sunset. Instead, people learnt about various local plants and trees and were able to use these to create nature crowns.

Creative Workshop (1 hour)

The creative workshops were delivered by our project partners, Wanderers of Colour, and included activities such as zine making, balm making and blackout poetry. They provided an alternative way of engaging with nature as each activity would be themed around either the experiences of the day or around people's relationship with nature more generally.

Lunch was also provided during this time, which created an informal and relaxed environment that allowed people to become comfortable and creative with each other, and begin reflecting on their experiences ahead of the discussion session.

Discussion (45 mins)

Facilitated by London Wildlife Trust, the group would take part in a semi-structured discussion exploring their thoughts on the nature conservation sector. The discussion would begin with each participant sharing what they enjoyed about the practical nature conservation task that had been completed during the afternoon, as well as what could be improved next time.

Then, the group would be led to discuss various themes relating to representation and accessibility within the nature conservation sector. The main question asked was '*What does nature conservation mean to you?*', with the direction of the discussion then being shaped by the group's own priorities and responses to this question.

With the consent of participants, these discussions were audio recorded and have provided much of the material that has informed this report.



The pilot nature conservation volunteering sessions differed from the consultation sessions as – based on feedback from the consultation sessions – they prioritised trialling a feasible and accessible structure that can be replicated within the context of a long-term conservation volunteering programme. As such, almost double the amount of time was spent on taking part in practical nature conservation tasks during the pilot volunteering programme.

The decision to omit creative workshops from the pilot volunteering sessions was due to the recognition that it may not be feasible for organisations and site staff to design and deliver new and engaging creative workshops on a weekly and fortnightly basis. Within the context of the Seeding Change project, this was possible due to our partnership with Wanderers of Colour, who took the lead in delivering the creative workshops. Nevertheless, creative activities were an important reason that young people engaged with the Seeding Change project and so rather than being excluded entirely, creative elements were instead incorporated into the wildlife walk.

The pilot volunteering sessions were structured as follows:

Pilot volunteering session

Welcome and Introductions (15 mins)

Each session began with an introduction to London Wildlife Trust, Wanderers of Colour and the site. Each participant would also introduce themselves, where they had travelled from and what motivated them to participate in the session.

Wildlife Walk (45 mins – 1 hour)

Following on from the consultation session, this part of the day was expanded to incorporate creative elements. Whilst people were still taken on a walk through the site to learn about and identify local wildlife and habitats, they were now also given the opportunity to engage with this knowledge as they walked in a variety of ways including through nature journaling, sketching and photography.

The wildlife walk was an essential aspect of engagement both on the day and before it. Promotion on social media of the event focussed on the educational and creative elements of the wildlife walk specifically, as this is what drew young people to attend. It also allowed them to be excited about and invested in the site, which made the practical conservation tasks that they would later do more meaningful.

Practical Conservation (2 hours)

Similar to the consultation sessions, seasonal tasks were completed on site, including scything, deadhedging and mulching. This would begin with an introduction to the task and the impact it has on local wildlife, as well as demonstrations on best practice. There would typically be at least two separate tasks that people could choose to take part in, with an opportunity to swap and try different tools halfway through the session.

The biggest difference between the consultation sessions and pilot volunteering sessions was an increase in the time dedicated to practical conservation. This simultaneously allowed people to try more activities and for more of the necessary conservation tasks to be completed.

Reflection (15-20 mins)

Over a late lunch, participants reflected on the day and took part in a short mindfulness activity. This was significantly less structured than the discussions during the consultation sessions, and served mostly as a space for people to share their own thoughts and feelings. Despite this being a short part of the day, it was important to people to be able to come together as a group and collectively take a moment to reflect and compare their experiences. This is particularly important in ensuring that people do feel like they are part of a community exploring nature together, and therefore encourages them to return.



Attendees

The 65 young women and non-binary people of colour who participated in at least one of the sessions occupied a variety of different backgrounds and identities:

- Although the sessions attracted people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, most young people identified as either Asian or Asian British (44%) and Black, Black British, Caribbean or African (27%) (Fig. 1).
- Whilst the majority of respondents were women (81%), there were a significant number of attendees who identified as non-binary (19%) (Fig. 2).

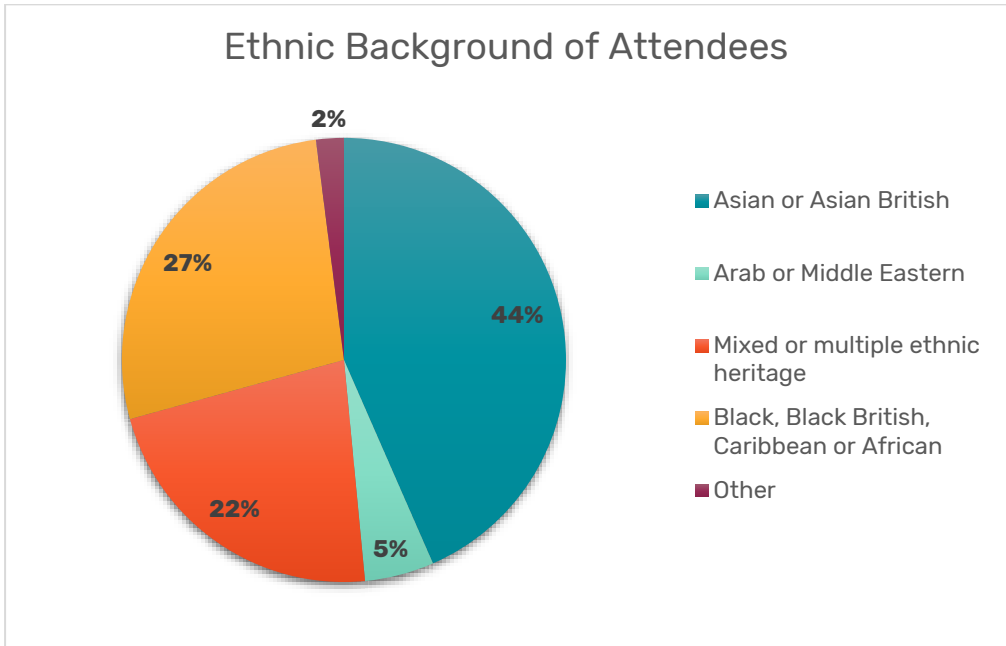


Figure 1: Pie chart showing the ethnic background of attendees

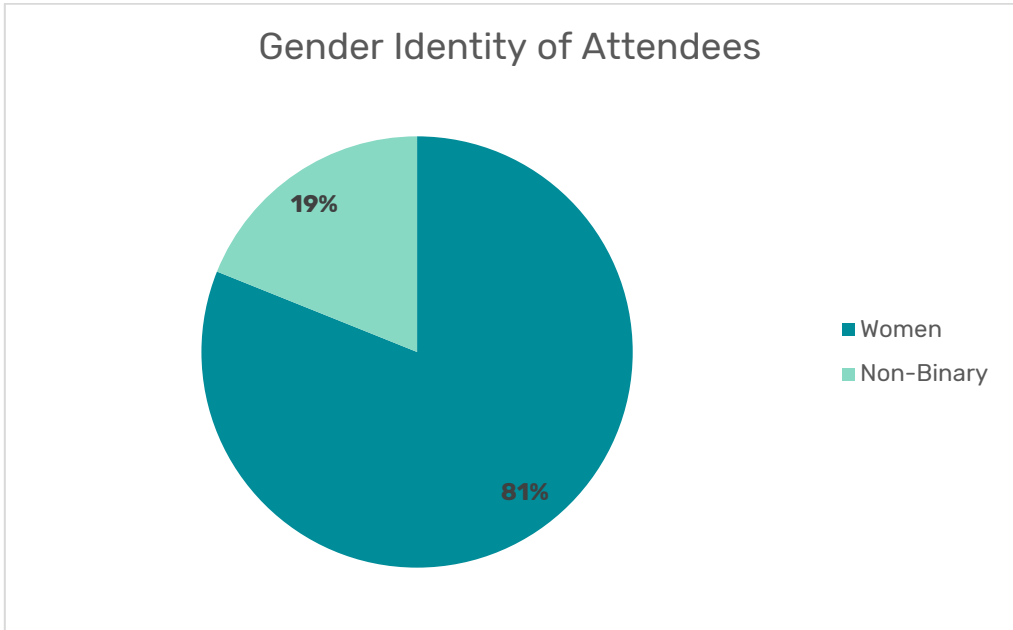


Figure 2: Pie chart showing the gender identity of attendees

Whilst most sessions were open to anyone who personally identified as being a woman or non-binary person of colour, the session that took place on 28th January 2023 at Walthamstow Wetlands was open only to Muslim women and non-binary people. This session was delivered with the support of Sustainably Muslim, an organisation that explores nature conservation through the lens of Islam. This session mirrored the other consultation sessions, with the exception being the explicit inclusion of prayer times into the schedule of the day.

The decision to deliver a consultation session specifically for Muslim women and non-binary people was due to a recognition that people of colour and people who are visibly of faith have similar (but not the same) experiences of exclusion and marginalisation due to the racialisation of religion. Notably, all attendees of this event were also people of colour and often spoke of race and religion interchangeably as shaping their experiences although they were also explicit that particular needs arose from either their race or religion.

At the outset of this project, there was initially also a desire to hold a similar session specifically for Orthodox Jewish women too, but due to the lack of existing community connections and the limited time period within which this project was carried out, this was not feasible.

The project initially intended to explore the experiences of both people of colour and people of faith due to the overlap between race and religion, particularly for people who experience marginalisation as a result of both race and religion. However, over the course of the project, it became clear that the experiences of each community is shaped by different positionalities, priorities and needs and thus it would be a disservice to both communities to attempt to condense their experiences into one report. As such, the results of the survey focus on the experiences of women and non-binary people of colour specifically, although this can naturally be informed by their own individual relationships with religion. However, our initial research has found that there is definitely an urgent need for additional research to be conducted on the needs, desires and experiences of women of faith specifically.

Survey

The online research survey was open for entries from January 2023 to March 2023, and received a total of **77** entries from women and non-binary people of colour.

The survey was open to all members of the public and responses were anonymised. It included a range of qualitative and quantitative questions and in particular provided space for participants to share their own priorities and needs. The full survey can be found in Appendix A.

The survey was shared across the social media platforms of the London Wildlife Trust and project partners (including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram), Wanderers of Colour, as well as on various London Wildlife Trust newsletters, and with relevant organisations across London to be shared with their own audiences.

The survey received a wide variety of responses:

- The survey attracted young women and non-binary people from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, with most young people identifying as either Asian or Asian British (40%) and Black, Black British, Caribbean or African (30%).
- Whilst the majority of respondents were women (84%), there were a significant number of respondents who identified as non-binary (16%).
- The most common religious group amongst respondents was Islam (34%), but 36% of respondents identified as non-religious.

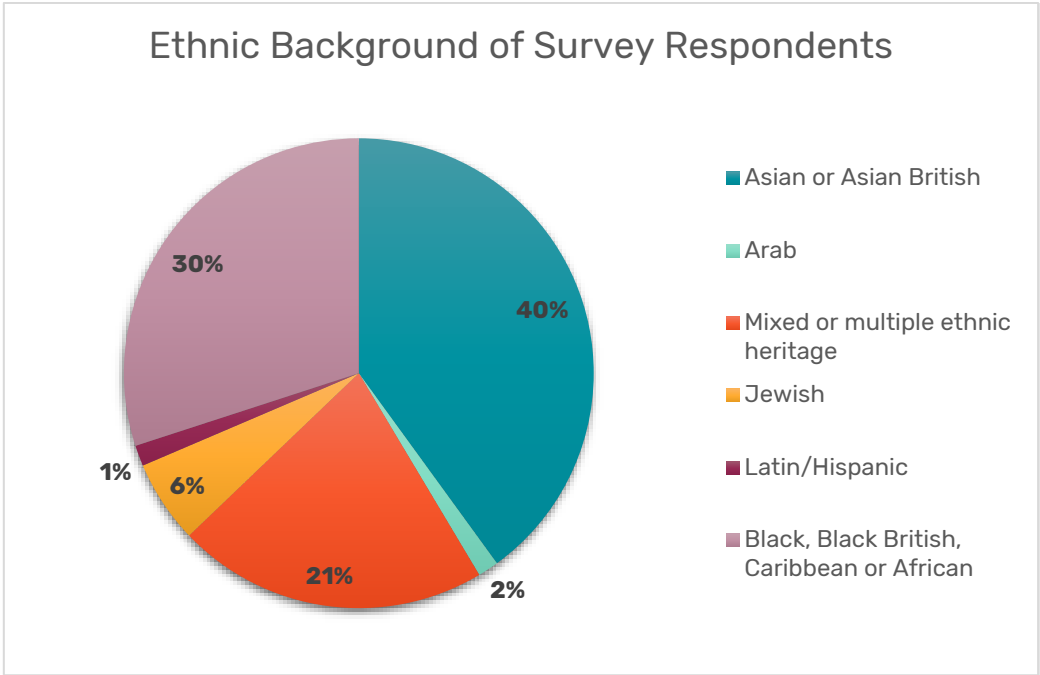


Figure 3: Pie chart showing the ethnic background of survey respondents

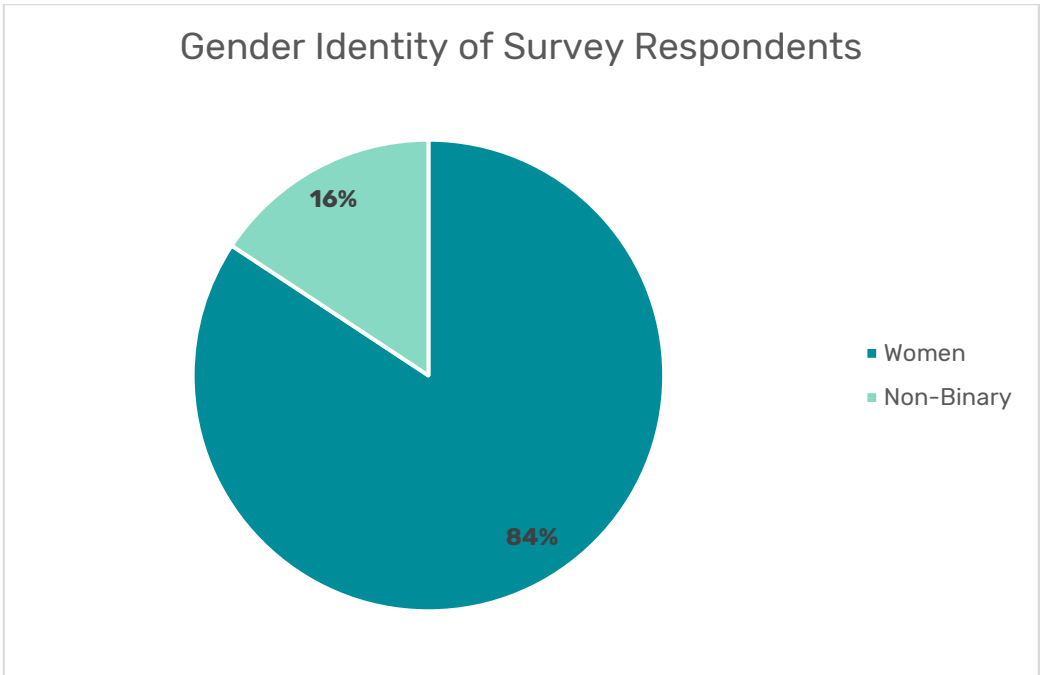


Figure 4: Pie chart showing the gender identity of survey respondents

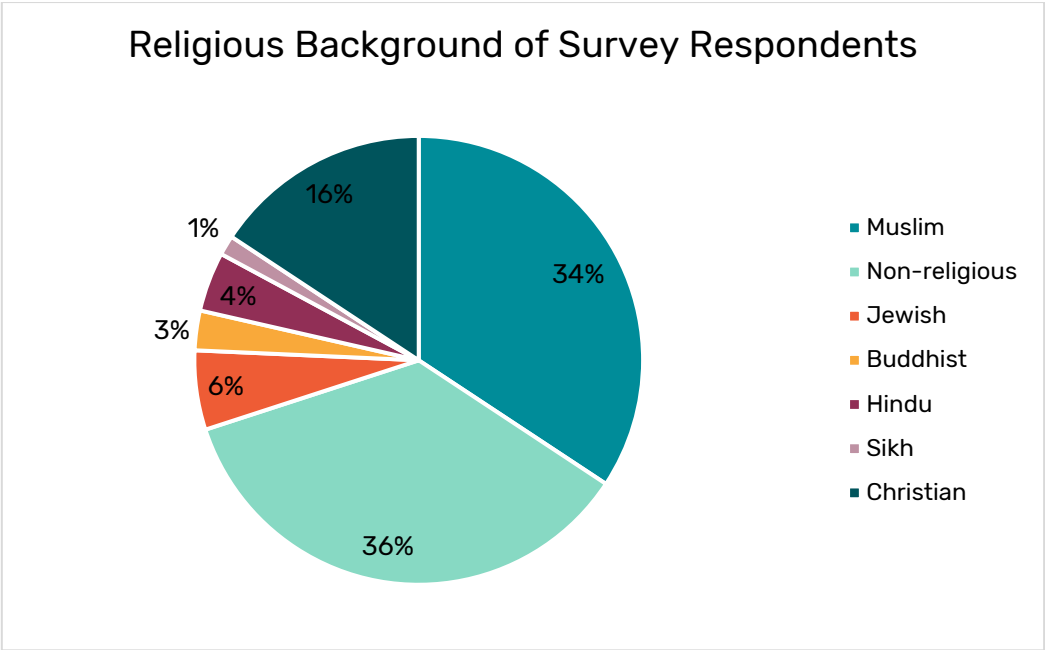


Figure 5: Pie chart showing the religious background of survey respondents

Due to the survey being open to all members of the public (rather than password-protected or conducted internally), it was able to engage a wide variety of people, including many who had never previously been involved with any of the London Wildlife Trust’s activities. However, there were some issues that arose from having the survey open to the public.

The survey clearly and repeatedly stated that its primary audience was women and non-binary people of colour as it aimed to address the gap in accessibility that is experienced by these communities within the conservation sector. However, 29% of the total entries were completed by respondents who identified as White, and 10% of the total entries were completed by respondents who identified as men. These entries were discounted during the final analysis of the data as they were not relevant to the target communities.



Results

Based on the qualitative and quantitative data drawn from the various methods of engagement, the findings and recommendations of the project have been split into three main themes: relevancy, safety and accessibility. Additionally, responses to the question of *'What does nature conservation mean to you?'* will be explored as they offer important insight into how and why young women and non-binary people of colour engage or disengage with nature conservation.

“What does nature conservation mean to you?”

This was a question asked to everyone who engaged with the Seeding Change project, whether through the survey or during discussions held at in-person sessions. Many people provided astute and insightful reflections on the role that nature conservation plays in maintaining green spaces and wildlife, but also the impact it has in wider society:

“Maintaining the natural habitat and ecosystem in the face of capitalism, gentrification, climate change and destruction of space.”

“Trying to keep as many nature species as we can in a balanced, viable, and thriving population as they all affect each other in the ecosystem. Saving species from going extinct and doing better to keep natural spaces for nature and have humans as guests in the spaces.”

'Protecting' was the most common term used to describe conservation, with 'preserving' and 'defending' also frequently appearing in people's responses.

However, many people were also unsure about what nature conservation means. When the question was posed during discussions at our in-person events, it was common occurrence for people to say that they did not know for sure what nature conservation was or that they had heard of the word but did not know enough about the work being done to define it. Similarly, 25% of survey respondents did not know what nature conservation meant with many more respondents offering guesses whilst saying that they were unsure if their guesses were correct.

Other people shared that despite being interested in volunteering in green spaces and with wildlife, they could not imagine being part of the nature conservation sector itself. One woman drew a direct connection between her feelings of exclusion from the nature conservation sector and her feelings of exclusion from Britain more generally as a Black woman:

“Imposter syndrome...The land doesn't technically belong to us...my mother came to this country and when someone asks me where I'm from, I say I'm from Somalia. I don't really say I'm British or English because I don't feel welcome here so it's hard to feel welcome taking care of the land as well.”

Another participant shared similar thoughts on exclusion:

“My mum is Columbian, and she came here later on in life and so she has memories of the rainforest and the environment and everything and she’s been here and wanted to do volunteering and stuff. But like we said, there’s this white person mentality, a classist structure where if you don’t look a certain way, if you don’t talk a certain way then you probably know less and then you feel like you don’t want to be there anymore. It feels like a microaggression and you don’t feel welcomed.”

Their responses demonstrate the complicated relationship that communities of colour have with the environmental sector, and in particular nature conservation, that is shaped by wider experiences of exclusion. Many young people of colour are disconnected from nature because their parents and their grandparents did not feel safe enough to take them outdoors, leading to a chain of disconnect ([Collier, 2019](#)).

Many people also brought up their own histories of colonialism, sharing how narratives of conservation have historically been used to disenfranchise indigenous communities in the Global South by displacing them from their land. Participants at our workshops included the children of indigenous farmers and of water and land protectors whose relationships with their local land and wildlife had been violently denied through narratives of nature conservation and colonialism. In varied ways, they continue to incorporate their inherited skills and knowledge into their relationships with the green spaces that are local to them in London, but there continues to be distrust towards the nature conservation sector and what it symbolises for their communities:

“I feel broken in my relationship with nature. I know that so much was taken from my people, indigenous people are nature's care takers and colleagues, my Jamaican family farm their own land but I can't even keep a cactus alive. I feel the loss of knowledge and connection, there's a gaping hole that's been lost to colonialism and I don't know how to fix it.”

“Some of my connotations [of nature conservation] are of colonialism...it’s conservation of animals or wildlife or plants at the expense of people who are indigenous to certain lands and it’s this gatekeeping and displacement of our people.”

It is clear that there is a significant amount of trust-building that must be done to ensure that people of colour – and particularly those also experiencing gender marginalisation – feel safe and welcome within the nature conservation sector. Whilst communities recognise that nature conservation work is vital to defend the wildlife and biodiversity of our world, many are unwilling to be involved due to concerns about perpetuating the harm that has been historically inflicted upon their communities.

Whilst it is difficult to imagine what addressing this generational trauma could look like, a significant first step would be for organisations within the nature conservation sector to engage in discussions with marginalised communities about the historic relationship between nature conservation and colonialism, about belonging in the nation and on the land, and how the current sector can be improved. These are larger and more meaningful conversations and concerns that already exist within marginalised communities and creating spaces and platforms for them to be spoken about openly will demonstrate that large organisations are willing to listen and respond to the needs of marginalised communities.

Safety

Safety is a significant concern for young women and non-binary people of colour, particularly as they are often visibly located at the intersection of multiple racialised and gender-based systems of violence. Unfortunately, the reality of our urban and green landscapes is that many people who experience racialised and gendered discrimination can often – out of necessity – be more preoccupied with avoiding potential danger than enjoying the spaces they are in ([Greater London Authority, 2022](#)). One of the largest studies conducted on sexual harassment in Europe found that almost half of the 42,000 women surveyed had restricted their freedom of movement based on the fear of gender-based violence ([European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014](#)). In particular, green spaces can often represent danger for women and non-binary people, with the recent murder of Sabina Nessa in Cator Park in Greenwich, South-East London in 2021 and, sisters Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman at Fryent Country Park in Wembley North-West London in 2020, cementing the idea of green spaces as potentially and fatally dangerous for women of colour.

“Safety [is a priority] as well. For me, as a woman, I really have to assess the situation and the area I’m going into before I go...people go on nature hikes and stuff but I need to know where we’re going, how it’s going, all the checkpoints. Especially in this political climate in London, safety is one of our top priorities, especially in nature.”

Many women also believe that local authorities and organisations are not doing enough to ensure the women feel safe whilst in parks and green spaces, particularly after dark ([Barker and Holmes, 2022](#)).

Further, due to the historic and ongoing criminalisation of young people – and particularly young people of colour – many now feel unsafe and unwelcome in public spaces, particularly within parks and nature reserves. Participants shared stories of being approached by police officers whilst walking through local green spaces, fuelled by racialised assumptions that they were in the park to either engage in substance abuse, criminal behaviour or other misdemeanours. One consultation participant summarises it well:

“A lot of parks are designed to push teenagers out of nature...they start trying to get rid of those things [that young people enjoy] because there’s an association with teenagers being outside and being delinquents.”

This ongoing criminalisation and over-policing has led to young people of colour disengaging from green spaces – including parks and nature reserves – not due to a lack of interest or passion, but due to concerns for their own safety and that of their community.

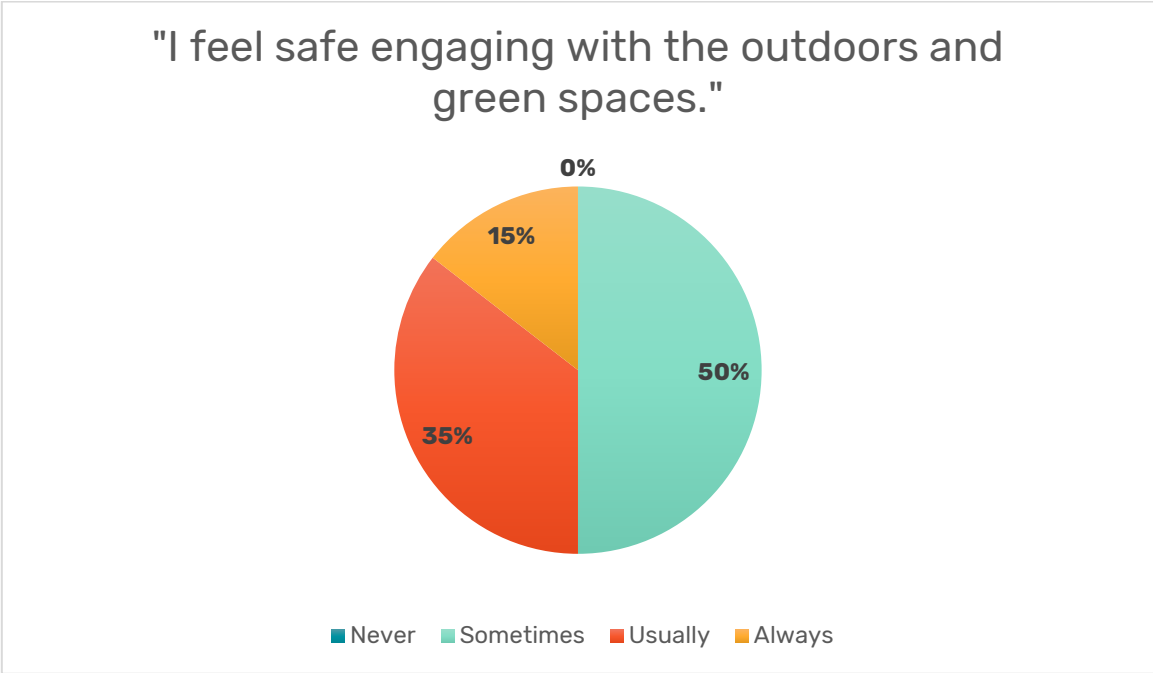


Figure 6: Pie chart showing survey responses to the statement “I feel safe engaging with the outdoors and green spaces.”

From our survey respondents, 77% of the total respondents stated that previous experiences of feeling unsafe whilst in a green space has now made them less likely to engage in opportunities and nature conservation volunteering in the future. The following table outlines some of the negative experiences that have shaped how young women and non-binary people now engage with green spaces:

Previous experiences of feeling physically unsafe whilst in a green space	Previous experiences of racial or gender-based discrimination whilst in a green space	Previous negative experiences and concerns with staff working in a green space	Previous negative experiences and concerns about interactions with members of the public whilst in a green space
54%	40%	15%	35%

Thus, whilst the following recommendations represent some of the first steps that can be taken, there is still much work to be done to ensure that women and non-binary people of colour feel safe enough in green spaces to engage in long-term opportunities.

Recommendations

Designated spaces and programmes for underrepresented communities

Due to experiences of criminalisation and exclusion, young people of colour feel unwelcome and unsafe in green spaces. Many participants shared that having a regular time or space/ programme that is designated specifically to/for youth engagement would facilitate their ability to create positive and long-term relationships with both wildlife and green spaces. For example, designating a particular location within a nature reserve that is permanently allocated to volunteering programmes for young people and communities of colour will encourage feelings of belonging and personal responsibility, which will naturally facilitate long-term engagement. Running a long-term volunteering programme specifically for young people across London Wildlife Trust Nature reserves will also nurture a similar sense of belonging. The Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust have implemented this idea through [Woodthorpe Meadow](#), which is a small woodland and grassland reserve that is dedicated to the young people involved in their [Keeping It Wild](#) team. In providing a permanent space for young people to learn about and explore conservation, the Woodthorpe Meadow undoubtedly represents the Trust's commitment to including young people into their vision of the future. For a demographic that feels unwelcome and unsafe within nature reserves, having permanence and reliability demonstrates that organisations such as the London Wildlife Trust have a long-term investment in including young people in their vision for nature conservation.

Similarly, many attendees enjoyed having sessions dedicated specifically to women and non-binary people. They shared that having opportunities that were dedicated to their communities showed them that London Wildlife Trust was aware of the gap in accessibility and was making an effort to address this. It allowed them to feel safe and welcome in a space that can otherwise evoke complicated feelings of fear and isolation:

“I was happy to see that [the session] prioritised women and non-binary people of colour so it felt like somewhere I could come as myself and experience nature in a safe space.”

“I like these spaces because they are inclusive and I don't think I would go to spaces that aren't like this because I just think I would feel out of place.”

“One of the things that appealed to me about this event was that it was for women and non-binary people of colour, because it makes me feel safer so I can try new things.”

Particularly in a sector where such communities are underrepresented, it is important to have spaces where people can openly discuss their experiences and opinions in a safe space and surrounded by people of similar backgrounds who were able to empathise and offer support:

“Maybe there could be sessions like this where they're a bit more informal and you can have discussions to get people aware about things, having conversations so then they're more likely to want to come back because

they know they can be open...And even having certain areas that need work so people will feel like they can have an impact.”

Additionally, since sessions were created with specific communities in mind, the needs that are specific to our target communities were considered within every aspect of planning and delivery, rather than being an afterthought. For example, as will be explored later in this report, factors such as prayer schedules and the need for privacy were considered when planning sessions. Having recognised that the Seeding Change sessions were safe spaces for women and non-binary people, many participants continued returning to sessions and expressed a desire for more:

“[I want] Sessions that are held for us and by us [and] frequent throughout the year when we can be outside and actively participating in the outdoors.”

Thus, having long-term programmes that are dedicated to target communities allows such programmes to be tailored to their needs, and thus facilitates the development of relationships of trust, safety and belonging between local communities and larger organisations.

Privacy and modesty

Particularly due to previous negative experiences with members of the public whilst being in green spaces, many young women of colour shared that they preferred being able to engage in conservation work away from public pathways and spaces. They shared that when working in public spaces, they were conscious of their presence being either judged or questioned by members of the public, which made them too uncomfortable to engage in their tasks wholly and joyfully.

Young women and non-binary people, have concerns about safety in terms of people staring, derogatory comments, and wolf-whistling. This was exacerbated by their positionality as people of colour, which led to increased awareness of the potential of racialised hostility from members of the public. Privacy was therefore essential to them feeling safe whilst engaging in nature conservation work.

An additional concern arose whilst working specifically with young Muslim women, for whom modesty and privacy is of particular importance, much like many other faiths. Since many tasks involved bending, reaching and other physical movements, some participants during consultation sessions shared that the presence of men would make them unable to engage to the best of their ability due to concerns around the visibility of their bodies through clothing. They said they were therefore unlikely to engage in conservation activities that took place in view of the public due to concerns around safety and privacy.

In contrast, when engaging in nature conservation tasks along a pathway that had been closed to the public, participants shared that they felt free to fully engage with nature and the wildlife that they were working with. They shared that there was less pressure for them to perform perfectly in case people were questioning their inclusion in the space, which allowed them to learn and make mistakes with the recognition that they were surrounded by likeminded people. In creating a safe space away from the public, these

sessions organically became spaces to create communities centred around nature conservation and these relationships continue to encourage people to return.

Whilst in both public and private settings, participants completed the tasks that had been allocated to them. However, when given the safety that is afforded by privacy, there was an additional sense of enjoyment that shaped their time and therefore encouraged them to return for future opportunities. Whether it be through closing off areas to the public whilst volunteers are working on them, or creating volunteering opportunities outside of site opening hours, privacy is an important factor in ensuring that young women and non-binary people of colour feel safe when engaging in conservation work.



Clean and accessible facilities

To reiterate and emphasise what is common knowledge throughout the sector, clean and accessible facilities are essential to long-term engagement in general, but particularly when working with young women and non-binary people:

“If the Wildlife Trust cares about accessibility and engaging with communities, those are things they should put money towards – toilets, wheelchair access – that has to be in the budget because then people will feel comfortable in the spaces and come back instead of thinking they tried and it didn’t work out...the actual physical space is really important as well.”

49% of survey respondents shared that nature reserves having no or poorly maintained facilities (including toilets, visitors' centres and water fountains) would prevent them from getting involved in green spaces through volunteering and site visits.

Whilst the availability of toilets and handwashing facilities is essential for everyone, additional needs that arise from medication, disabilities and menstruation means having access to private, accessible, and clean toilets and handwashing facilities is not simply a

desire, but a requirement. 'Wild weeing' – or urinating outdoors without toilets and handwashing facilities – has become a normalised practice within the conservation sector despite it being wholly inaccessible to many communities, including women. In this way, the infrastructure of nature reserves and the expectations of those working within the conservation sector continue to reflect the biases that arise from a male-dominated field: cis-male colleagues do not have additional considerations such as menstruation to consider, are more likely to feel safe enough outdoors to urinate and therefore often do not factor the need for adequate toilets and handwashing facilities into the planning and delivery of sessions. However, volunteering programmes cannot expect participants to feel comfortable and safe enough to be able to urinate outdoors. Women and non-binary people in particular require easy access to toilets and handwashing facilities to be available in order to engage with a volunteering session.

For young Muslim women, engagement relies upon the accessibility of facilities due to the need for clean spaces to complete ablution and prayer. Many young Muslim women said they are unlikely to return to a site that lacks adequate facilities as they would prioritise their ability to complete obligatory tenants of their faith:

“It’s difficult with things like wudu [ablution] if there’s no accessible toilets...it does sometimes feel like we’re working around the limitations of the space.”

"I've never felt excluded from green spaces, but as a practicing Muslim, a prayer space with wudu facilities would be amazing! Otherwise I have to find a bush to pray behind!"

For women and non-binary people – particularly when they are young people – being able to use facilities without worrying about their physical safety is a basic necessity that should be met by any organisation that genuinely aims to engage with these communities. The lack of clean and accessible facilities at a site will therefore inherently exclude women and non-binary people from engagement opportunities.

Relevancy

Rather than being inclusive, generalised projects that are nominally open to everyone often only speak to demographics who are already present within the space, with other marginalised communities therefore being excluded. As one participant aptly shared:

“The reason why this event appealed to me is that it speaks to or acknowledges that there is a lack of experience or pointed inclusion being made, I think that awareness that people of colour and differently gendered people have barriers to access to nature feels so inclusive whereas I think that if its overarching and for everyone then neutrality sometimes just speaks to existing groups who might feel enough or have the experience to say ‘yeah this is for me’ [emphasis added]. Whereas when something is specifically for marginalised groups, I think it speaks more to the

experiences they might have had which is less access to nature...It acknowledges that we may not be as experienced as someone else who may feel more comfortable identifying as a volunteer or a conservationist.”

Each and every community has its own needs and as recognised by this participant, practical nature conservation sessions that are not tailored to meeting these specific needs often become spaces solely for those from over-represented communities who already feel comfortable in them.

Young women and non-binary people of colour engage with nature for a variety of reasons that reflect their own existing interests, and recognising and incorporating this into the planning and delivery of sessions is essential to long-term engagement with nature conservation. In order to ensure that opportunities are relevant, organisers should commit to understanding and responding to the needs and desires of relevant communities to create opportunities that are tailored to their audiences.

When asked what motivates them to engage with green spaces, survey respondents responded as follows:

To feel a sense of community	To improve my physical and/or mental health and wellbeing	To explore new parts of my community	To improve my spiritual health and wellbeing	To enjoy nature and the outdoors	To have an impact on the world
43%	59%	44%	51%	66%	35%

Notably, the desire to have an impact on the world is the most prevalent narrative that is currently used to engage people in nature conservation, but is the least likely to motivate women and non-binary people of colour. Instead, they engage in green spaces for a variety of reasons that reflect their own positionality and interests. Programmes that aim for long-term engagement should endeavour to understand their target communities and respond accordingly. The following recommendations provide insight into how the Seeding Change project has aimed to produce a series of workshops that are relevant to young women and non-binary people of colour, and the steps that can be taken to continue this work.

Recommendations

Varied content of activities

As demonstrated above, young people of colour engage with green spaces for a variety of reasons and organisers should vary their content to reflect this. In particular, those who have little to no prior experience of nature conservation are unlikely to attend sessions that are solely dedicated to nature conservation for a variety of reasons, including a lack of interest and knowledge of what nature conservation may be. However, incorporating related interests into sessions is an accessible and engaging way of introducing people to nature conservation before then focusing on practical tasks:

“I think giving people an incentive to be in nature and find how calm or how interesting or how close it actually is changes that perception [of inaccessibility] and will bring more people into nature but it's hard to get past that initial hurdle.”



Whilst most participants of Seeding Change sessions did enjoy the practical conservation workshops, these workshops themselves were not the primary reason they attended.

Sessions would end with the question of what brought people to the space and what they enjoyed the most, and the wide range of responses reflects the varied entry points into nature conservation that can be incorporated into new projects. For some, spending the day working in nature was important to their own wellbeing and mental health:

“I come to events like this for a space that will boost my wellbeing and give me peace of mind.”

In particular, many participants enjoyed the inclusion of grounding exercises and the opportunity to have a moment of reflection whilst being surrounded by nature and wildlife. Similarly, some shared that their faith and spiritual wellbeing was a key motivation for getting practically involved with nature conservation. In particular, during the session aimed towards Muslim women, the day offered an opportunity to explore and develop personal relationship between faith and nature:

“Being able to grow spiritually while helping something grow physically, nurturing myself and my faith and also nature.”

Incorporating time into the session to reflect spiritually on nature was essential to their desire to engage with opportunities in green spaces.

Others enjoyed being able to create new relationships with likeminded people and the opportunity to create a community of people of colour who are interested in nature conservation:

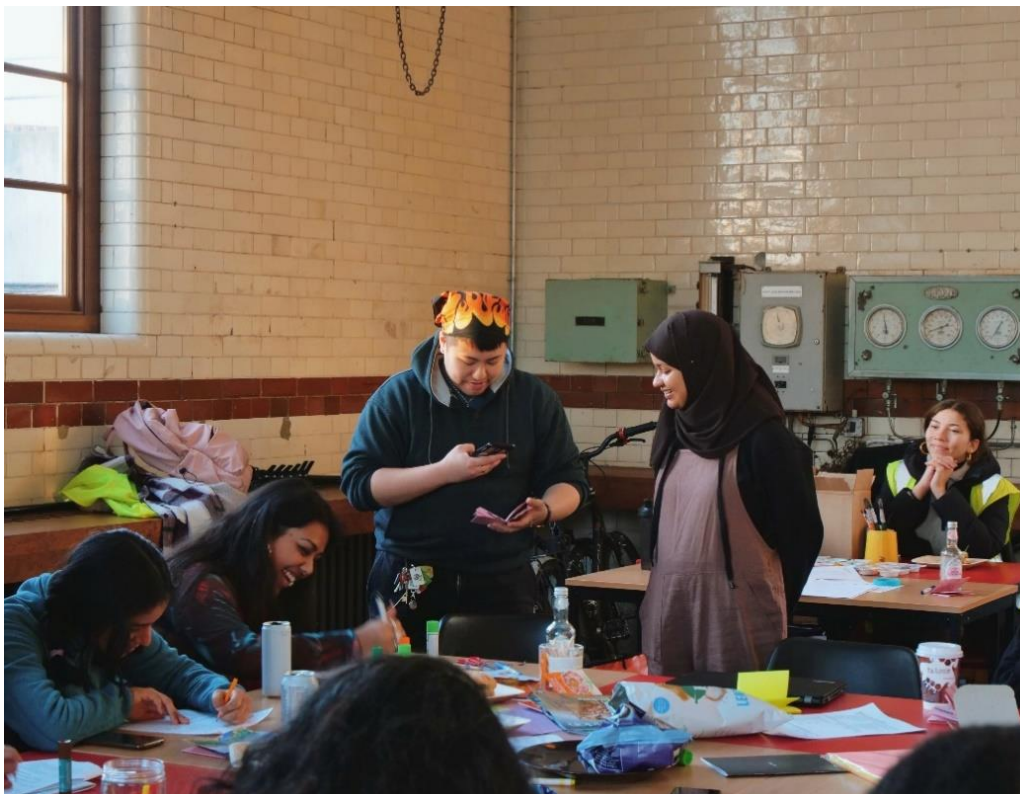
“I enjoy being in the outdoors with people of similar backgrounds, of similar ages to make acquaintances and meet new people.”

“I’ve recently just moved to London so I thought this would be a good opportunity to explore a part of London I’ve never seen before and meet people with similar interests. ”

In recognition of this, the Seeding Change sessions incorporated a variety of sessions in addition to practical nature conservation in order to attract a wider audience, including creative nature-based activities, grounding and wellbeing exercises, educational wildlife walks and spiritual reflection. Feedback from these sessions demonstrates that participants enjoyed having a variety of methods through which to engage with nature and learn about the green spaces in their surrounding area:

“I love all the elements of it together, that it was called Seeding Change and it’s actually trying to change something, the creativity, I loved being out in nature...Doing something with your hands and hopefully bringing that into my own life and the spaces that I’m in as well.”

“One thing that drew me to this event was the combination of engagement with the outdoors plus the creative element, both of those things are things that I’m interested in in my free time so to be able to combine them is nice.”



Thus, volunteering initiatives that explore nature through a variety of lenses will allow young people to engage based on their own interests, whilst also being introduced to practical nature conservation. Solely focusing on practical nature conservation when designing a long-term volunteering programme is unlikely to engage those who do not have prior experience and knowledge of nature conservation. Instead, sessions should be treated as self-contained and regular events within a larger project, in order to regularly welcome new people who may be dissuaded from committing long-term to a project. Incorporating diversity into the content delivered throughout a long-term project will also encourage people to return as each session will represent a new form of engagement with nature.

London Wildlife Trust's *Nature Nurtures* is an excellent example of how content can be varied across sessions to ensure that they remain refreshingly fun each time a young person attends. The project has so far delivered sessions on creative writing, practical conservation, nature crafts and photography, as well as producing an anthology of work that has been created during sessions.

Sessions should therefore aim to combine practical nature conservation with a variety themes and topics that are important to the communities that they are targeting and use this as an entry point to introduce communities to nature conservation.



Community connections

The importance of building relationships between organisations such as London Wildlife Trust and existing local green spaces, grassroots nature conservation organisations and youth organisations cannot be understated. A long-term and genuine commitment to building community connections is vital to engaging with marginalised communities and addressing the mistrust that currently exists between people of colour and the nature conservation sector.

Developing relationships with existing community organisations is therefore a key entry point into long-term engagement with local communities. It is important to transition away from the extraction and paternalism that has historically shaped the relationship between the nature conservation sector and communities of colour, and instead move towards partnerships of mutuality and equity. In recent months, there have been instances of larger and established organisations exploiting the labour and ideas of grassroots organisations that are often led by and for communities of colour. In recognition of the knowledge and expertise being provided by these organisations, they should be fairly resourced and this expense should be accounted for when planning the budget for a programme.

Rather than expecting communities to support nature reserves within which they may feel unwelcome with little incentive or reason, it is necessary for organisations to commit to meaningfully being present within local communities and building relationships of trust and partnership with relevant organisations.

London Wildlife Trust's *Nextdoor Nature* is an example of how community connections can be explicitly and intentionally part of an organisation's youth engagement work. It works directly with young people – and in particular those from communities that have been traditionally excluded from the conservation sector – to support them in creating youth-led projects within green spaces that are local to them.

Further, as demonstrated above, rather than being homogenous, communities have their own needs and desires that shape their relationship with green spaces and understanding these specificities is integral to long-term engagement. Existing community groups often already have knowledge of the needs of their own communities and the best methods of engagement, and thus developing partnerships with them prevents larger organisations from starting from scratch or attempting to do work that has already been done.

A significant factor in the success of the Seeding Change project's community engagement was the project partnership between the London Wildlife Trust and Wanderers of Colour, who already occupy a position of trust and responsibility within the communities that they work with. As such, people were more likely to attend workshops knowing that they had been endorsed and co-produced by an organisation that they trusted. As one participant highlighted:

“I came because I joined one of the Wanderers of Colour events in the past and it really shows the cluster effect...it's really about creating spaces that bring people together and that's how you create traction.”

On the other hand, one of the most significant limitations of the project was our inability to engage communities with whom the London Wildlife Trust does not have an existing

organisational relationship with. For example, a key demographic of interest was the Orthodox Jewish community, but the absence of a long-term community connection limited outreach opportunities.

During one Seeding Change session, many participants were passionate about the potential of a community ambassador scheme as a way of developing community connections. Here, organisations such as the London Wildlife Trust would work in partnership with members of local communities to develop volunteering programmes that cater to their needs, with the community ambassadors then supporting in outreach and delivery of the programme:

“I feel like you need to have people from different communities working for [environmental organisations]...I’m thinking of not just different cultures but different areas across London, like having community ambassadors or champions – people who are actually on the ground in those communities and know what those communities want.”

The relationship between the London Wildlife Trust and Wanderers of Colour through the Seeding Change project has demonstrated the benefits of such a partnership, but long-term engagement would require such partnerships to be more formalised and sustained beyond the limits of a single project. As with the Seeding Change project, large organisations such as the London Wildlife Trust must include the necessary expenses and administrative tasks that emerge when partnering with a grassroots organisation within the budget and planning of a project from the outset.

Representation

Representation is essential for young women and non-binary people of colour to be able to visualise themselves within all aspects of the nature conservation sector, and to feel welcome and confident when taking part in activities. This includes having representative staff from target communities being involved in the design, promotion, and delivery of specialised projects. 42% of survey respondents said that a lack of representative staff would prevent them from getting involved in green spaces, including through volunteering and visiting nature reserves.

During the design and planning stages of a long-term project, the inclusion of London Wildlife Trust staff from target communities ensured that specific needs and desires were built into the project rather than being an afterthought. In particular, they can provide insight into factors that may have been overlooked by people who do not belong to the community. For example, it was through working in partnership with Muslim women, and in particular Sustainably Muslim, whilst planning consultation sessions that the need for privacy whilst completing practical nature conservation tasks and for the incorporation of prayer times during the event schedule became clear.

In addition, diversity and representation during promotion and delivery of a long-term project cannot be understated. Particularly since the nature conservation sector is perceived by many as lacking diversity and accessibility, it is important for young women and non-binary people of colour to have people who look and sound like them doing the work that they are interested in. As one attendee aptly states, nature conservation in mainstream media often features white men (with a few white women), so it can be difficult for women of colour to see a space for themselves in the sector:

“Representation in the media plays a massive role in anything in life and where you see yourself, and if you don’t see yourself reflected then it has an impact on where you end up in life essentially. In nature conservation, all the shows I’ve watched, it’s always been old, white, typically men but also women.”

"Representation matters. Seeing more people like me accessing green spaces as an ethnic minority is key."

During Seeding Change sessions, an active and intentional effort was made to subvert this image by ensuring that – where possible – everyone present on promotional materials and involved in delivery identified as a woman or non-binary person of colour themselves. The space felt inclusive and friendly, with attendees saying it felt more like a community than a group of volunteers: Many attendees shared that they had initially signed up to sessions with low expectations due to previous experiences of performative representation, and so they enjoyed that London Wildlife Trust and Wanderers of Colour staffing of the project reflected the intended audience:

“I think it was really transformative seeing Lira [a Visitor Engagement & Volunteer Ranger at the London Wildlife Trust who identifies as a woman of colour] because even though I’ve done loads of stuff in nature and taking people outside, I actually don’t think I’ve ever seen a woman of colour leading a conservation activity...it’s just so different when it’s someone like you delivering it, it makes you feel like it’s so possible to learn more.”



Whilst the importance of having permanent and long-term staff from a diverse range of backgrounds cannot be understated, developing partnerships with local and specialised community groups is an additional way of ensuring that projects are representative of the communities towards which they are aimed. In addition to input from diverse staff within the London Wildlife Trust, partnering with Wanderers of Colour ensured that the planning, delivery and reporting stages of the Seeding Change project involved people of colour who have extensive knowledge of the challenges and experiences of communities of colour within green spaces.

Diversified media engagement

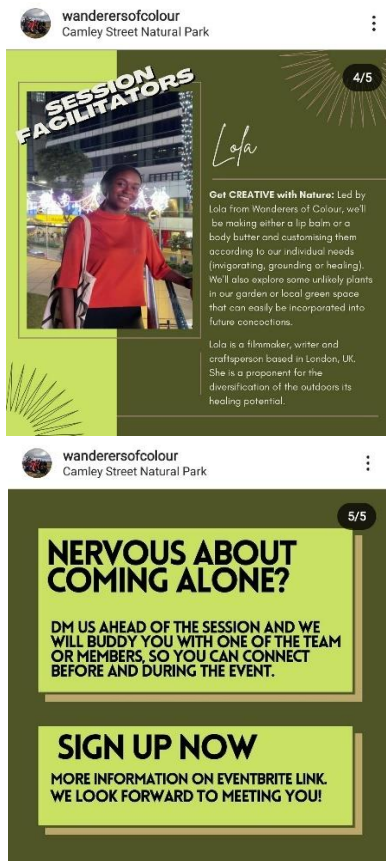
There is a need for organisations such as London Wildlife Trust to have more diverse and dynamic forms of media and communication that are tailored specifically towards the interests of young people. Whilst the current approach to communications promotes a cohesive brand design for London Wildlife Trust, this approach is less likely to engage young people who are not already interested in conservation and the work of the Trust. In general, event participants agreed that the overall social media presence of London Wildlife Trust did not seem inviting and engaging for people who had little to no pre-existing experience of nature conservation. There was a shared sentiment across sessions that the current approach towards media engagement is too formal and structured, and does not reflect the vibrancy and joy of the being and working amongst nature in a nature reserve:

“Why is nature so vibrant but the LWT Instagram so bland?”

“It needs to be less analytical, more real...more colours, more visual.”

The social media tiles created by Wanderers of Colour to advertise upcoming Seeding Change sessions provide examples of what engaging and enticing media communication can look like:





Whilst maintaining a cohesive colour palette, these social media tiles nevertheless use a variety of images and graphics in order to seem fun and engaging. Additionally, the use of the carousel feature in this post allows users to swipe through the post to gain additional information about the event, rather than having to enter another site, such as Eventbrite. This is the case for many of the London Wildlife Trust’s social media posts and may dissuade users who are intrigued by the event but deterred by the additional effort needed to find relevant information, particularly if they assume that the event is not accessible for people who are new to conservation. The use of the carousel feature also prevents any individual tile from containing an overwhelming amount of information. As such, this approach to event promotion is more likely to be engaging for people who may be new to conservation.

As aptly highlighted by one participant:

“Young people do want to be more involved in things to do with nature, there just needs to be better marketing, it just needs to be shaken up a bit so it entices them because when you do ask young people about it they are interested but because of preconceived ideas, they’re not willing to get engaged.”

71% of survey respondents shared that they are currently only willing to travel for a maximum of 30 minutes to access a green space that they have not visited before. Additionally, 43% of attendees of Seeding Change sessions heard of the project through social media, with Instagram being the most popular platform. With this in mind, social media and the digital sphere are central spaces to engage with young people across London who may have otherwise not have heard of or visited a particular nature reserve.

Having a strong and engaging online presence will allow young people to become invested in sites that they would not have otherwise visited and thus will serve as incentive to materially and practically contribute to the space. Keeping a nature reserve on people's phones and devices keeps it on their minds and serves as a good first step at engaging people who are new to nature conservation.

“It has to be reels, short bursts of ‘here’s an Instagram worthy place’ that attracts young people and then you can bring them back in...that’s where you get people out of the city and engaging with nature and then conservation comes later. If you’re not even there then it’s not on your mind.”

Even those who have visited a site will benefit from a strong online presence, as their relationship with the space can continue beyond the limits of volunteering sessions. In particular, amongst young people, there was a desire for more engagement through the medium of podcasts to allow people to learn about nature conservation and the histories and wildlife of nature reserves at their own pace.

Transparency regarding site activities

Nature reserves should endeavour to increase their public transparency regarding current and future plans for the conservation of the site. Many people reflected that they would be more excited about getting involved with volunteering sessions if they were aware of how the work they were doing would fit into the larger plan for local wildlife and habitats:

“Knowing the context makes you feel like you’re doing something meaningful...people volunteer because they want to make an impact, they want to create change so knowing what you’re doing especially for someone who doesn’t know about conservation, picking up some weeds, they might be like ‘oh why am I doing that’ but there’s always a reason as to why you’re removing those weeds and putting it in the compost heap so having context always helps.”

Here, the wildlife walks that were incorporated into both the consultation and pilot volunteering sessions serve as a template for how to create a wider narrative for engagement purposes. Before each practical conservation workshop, participants were given information regarding the history of the nature reserve and specifically how the activity that they would be doing fed into the wider work being done to, for example, support a particular habitat. Whilst the practical skills gained during a conservation session were exciting, the awareness of how these skills can be used to support local wildlife and habitats transformed them from labour to acts of joy and care. Letting people know *why* they were doing particular tasks instead of just how to do them allowed mundane tasks to become more meaningful. For example, cutting and processing branches can seem mundane but the added context of creating a bug hotel and the knowledge of why particular bugs are important to the wider wildlife at the site allowed the task to become meaningful and fulfilling.

Whilst this was a successful way of engaging participants who attended our sessions, developing a publicly available narrative of the work being done on a nature reserve is

also more likely to engage people who may otherwise not be interested or not know about the individual day-to-day tasks that require volunteer support. This could be through a timeline of yearly seasonal activities, or through projected plans for the future of particular locations on a nature reserve. Many participants also shared that they would like to be able to see the progression on the spaces they had worked in:

“It would be nice to see how the plot of land looks like to reflect on how we’ve been able to contribute, and you get a visual.”

Having a digital space that traces the progression of current and future plans also allows people to continue to engage with a nature reserve outside of a volunteering session. Additionally, providing people with an understanding of the long-term plans for a nature reserve is more likely to encourage them to emotionally and practically invest in supporting the future of a site.

Accessibility

The inaccessibility of programmes and events is a central limiting factor to engagement with communities that are underrepresented within the environmental and conservation sector. As demonstrated by responses to the question of *‘What does nature conservation mean to you?’* (explored on page 13), there continues to be confusion about what conservation work is and the various ways that people can get involved. Similarly, only 36% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they would know where to look to find new opportunities to get involved in the outdoors and green spaces (Fig. 7):

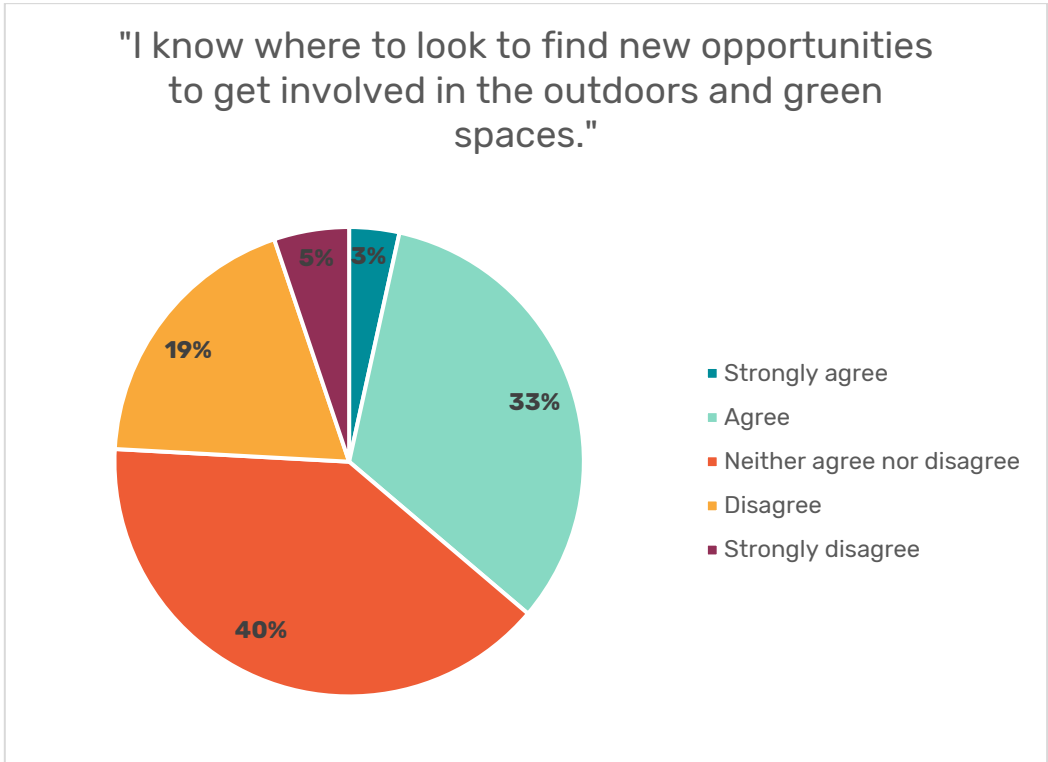


Figure 7: Pie chart showing survey responses to the statement *“I know where to look to find new opportunities to get involved in the outdoors and green spaces.”*

During our consultation sessions, some participants shared that they had been interested in entering the nature conservation for many years sector – including searching for both career and volunteering opportunities – but had been unable to find an accessible entry point:

“I want to have a career in conservation and sustainability particularly in urban spaces and I didn’t really know how to get in there with qualifications and such so I wanted to do some workshops and community projects to see how to get into it.”

For many communities, large charities and organisations that are involved in nature conservation continue to represent gatekeepers of the knowledge and skills necessary to be involved in nature conservation:

“[When I think of conservation I think of] big organisations that are really resource-heavy and it’s a thing that in my mind I can’t participate in because there’s all the equipment and knowledge that you need...but conservation can be as accessible as you want it to be.”

“I always think with conservation, you do research and you implement stuff and people like me, with my background [are] not related to the environment or conservation so I didn’t know I could be part of it.”

Thus, even for those who already have an interest in taking part in conservation work, many programmes and projects that currently exist continue to be inaccessible for a variety of reasons including a lack of suitable programmes that are affordable and commutable and a widespread lack of resources on conservation that are tailored towards the general public. These accessibility concerns are further exacerbated when working with communities who may not have existing knowledge of or interest in ‘nature conservation’ work, despite perhaps being otherwise engaged in green spaces in various ways. The following recommendations provide insight into some essential first steps that can be taken to ensure that future programmes are more accessible, particularly for communities that are underrepresented within the conservation sector.

Recommendations

Accessible language

Particularly for young women and non-binary people of colour who are new to the nature conservation sector, there is a need for the language used in communications and delivery to be made more accessible. Despite being interested in learning how to practically support the habitats and wildlife at nature reserves, the term ‘nature conservation’ can be off-putting and confusing. Many outside the sector are unsure of exactly what it entails and as has already been demonstrated, the term ‘nature conservation’ can also be contentious amongst communities of colour due to associations with colonialism, classism and elitism.

Similarly, technical terminology can often be confusing and unappealing for people who are not already involved in nature conservation, despite them being in common usage across the sector. If someone new to nature conservation does not know the meaning of a word, they are unlikely to be excited by it and may assume that it requires a level of

skill or knowledge that they don't yet have, despite the reality of these tasks being easily learnt. Additionally, because tasks can often be described using words that are not commonly known outside the sector, people are unable to make their own judgement on whether they are accessible for them based on their own needs:

“We don't have the language for it but we can do it, even if we can't describe it.”

“Nature and conservation has been an interest but I never really understood what it meant or what it included so meeting new people and finding out what that means and how we can do it together has been fun.”

For example, two Seeding Change sessions included dead hedging activities. Promotion of the first event simply described the activity as dead heading, with the Eventbrite description as follows:

'Experience seasonal nature conservation tasks on the reserve whilst learning about Walthamstow Wetland's wildlife. We'll be completing dead hedging tasks across the reserve to support local wildlife!'

However, feedback from this session demonstrated that this description of the practical nature conservation task was not accessible, with some people sharing that they felt nervous about attending due to being unsure of exactly what they would be asked to do. In response, the Eventbrite description of dead hedging was updated for the next event to explain exactly what the task was in language that is accessible:



Take part in seasonal conservation to support the wildlife at Sydenham Hill Wood! The activity we are going to get stuck into is 'dead hedging' (a dead hedge is an upright structure of woody cuttings woven between vertical stakes, which provide hiding places and nesting habitats for all sorts of creatures, as well as food for insects). This will include cutting, weaving and shaping our very own natural pathways to lead wildlife towards safety and home! No prior experience is necessary - just bring yourself!

Whilst the event description still included the technical terminology, the updated version provided a definition and a breakdown of the specific tasks and actions that would be involved. Reflections from the second session also included positive feedback about the explicit statement that no prior experience or resources were necessary.

Projects aiming to engage young women and non-binary people of colour should therefore focus on avoiding jargon that is specific to the sector and should instead describe activities in a simplified and common-sense manner.

Reimbursement of volunteer expenses

When aiming to engage with marginalised communities, and particularly those who are new to the nature conservation sector, the provision of lunch, travel expenses and any other foreseeable costs is important to ensuring that the cost of attending an event will not dissuade people from attending.

For attendees of Seeding Change sessions, travel expenses within zones 1-6 in London were reimbursed and lunch was provided either as pizza or through vouchers for on-site cafes. Refreshments and hot drinks were also provided throughout the day. Covering expenses for everyone rather than requiring people to contact the organisers if they needed support ensures that people do not feel isolated or embarrassed about asking for reimbursement. This was explicitly stated when promoting the sessions, as well as letting attendees know that they did not need to invest in any specialised equipment or resources as everything would be provided. This was received well by attendees, with feedback showing that people appreciated that the potential financial costs were explicitly considered and covered by the Trust:

“The good thing about this event is that they’ll [London Wildlife Trust] pays for your travel and also lunch, it’s a good thing that they offered both of those things for people who may be too embarrassed to ask for help but still want to experience nature.”

“It’s good that you highlighted how you’re making it accessible, like the fact that you just need to bring yourself and that food and travel is provided and you don’t need to bring equipment, walking gear.”

Feedback from attendees at Seeding Change sessions to the statement *“It was easy and affordable for me to get involved.”* demonstrates how the provision of lunch (rather than the traditional claiming back expenses approach) and travel expenses can make sessions more affordable and thus accessible:

- The majority of attendees (72%) agreed that the sessions were affordable and thus easy to get involved with

- Nobody disagreed or strongly disagreed with the sessions being affordable and easy to get involved with.

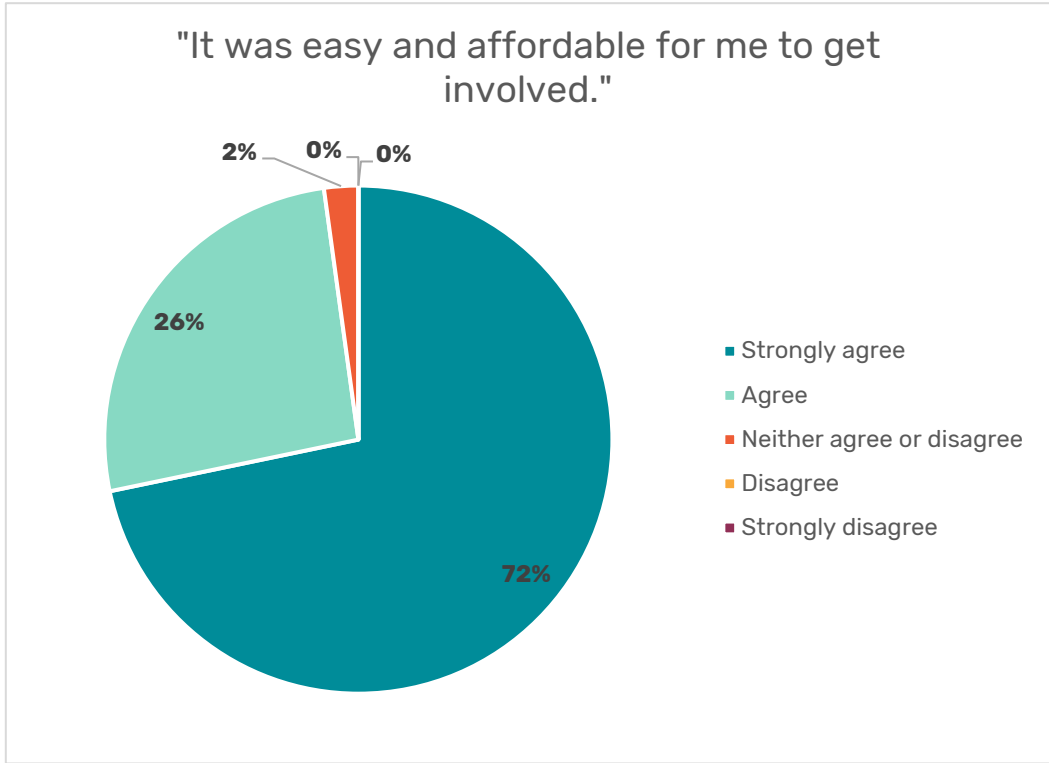


Figure 8: Pie chart showing responses to the statement "It was easy and affordable for me to get involved." from session participants.

Projects aiming to engage young women and non-binary people of colour should therefore be aware that the potential financial costs of taking part in a session may be a factor that will prevent people from being able to attend, and account for this within the budgeting of the project. In particular, the regular costs that may arise from participating in a long-term project may simply not be feasible for people to afford. It should also be explicitly and publicly stated that expenses will be reimbursed to ensure that people are aware of the support that is available.

Varied times and days for activities

Whilst there was no overarching consensus amongst participants regarding the best days and times for regular engagement activities to be organised, it was agreed that the current schedule of predominantly weekday afternoons is not accessible. Due to work and school commitments, the existing schedule limits volunteer engagement to those who are either retired or otherwise currently out of employment.

For some participants, weekday evenings were best for engagement as they were less likely to have other plans in comparison to the weekend and were able to travel directly to sessions after work or school. We held one Seeding Change workshop on a weekday evening, and this proved to be one of our most popular events. Our decision to hold this workshop at Camley Street Natural Park was shaped by its location in central London and therefore the relatively easy commute from various schools and workplaces across London.

Other participants preferred weekend afternoons, stating that they preferred being able to dedicate an entire day to engaging in green spaces and conservation. However, weekend sessions beginning in both early and mid-morning can also limit engagement to those who live nearby to a nature reserve, and prevents possible participants from across London from engaging due to travel times. One participant said that despite being passionate about conservation, she would be unlikely to sign up for an event that began earlier than 11am, as her long commute would make her anxious about being late. For this reason, our Seeding Change workshops would have varied start times to reflect expected commutes of participants, with workshops at Walthamstow Wetlands beginning at 11am, and our workshop at Sydenham Hill Wood beginning at 12pm.

Thus, it is clear that there is a diverse range of needs with regards to schedules and availability, and this should be reflected by volunteering programmes that offer a variety of times and days for engagement. Whilst a flexible schedule brings with it challenges concerning staffing and site bookings, it is essential to ensuring that organisations are able to engage with diverse communities of people.

Conclusions

London Wildlife Trust have had success in engaging and involving young people and diverse communities with nature conservation through youth programmes such as *Keeping it Wild*, *Nature Nurtures* and *Nextdoor Nature*, and through partnerships with organisations such as Black Girls Hike and Wanderers of Colour. The organisation has centred young people within its *10-year strategy*, listing engagement with young people as one of its five key priorities and practically committing to providing funding for youth engagement projects. The impact of this has been felt and appreciated by those who engaged with London Wildlife Trust through the Seeding Change research project:

"London Wildlife trust is doing some fantastic work with young people at the moment, really appreciate what they are doing to improve access to nature for people in my community. They are definitely leading the way in London in terms of inclusive opportunities for young people in nature."

Nevertheless, as the findings from the Seeding Change research project have demonstrated, there is still work to be done to extend this outreach to include underrepresented communities within the wider nature conservation sector, including women and non-binary people of colour. Programmes aiming to engage with women and non-binary people of colour should be tailored towards their own distinct needs and desires, with a particular emphasis on safety, relevancy and accessibility when developing new initiatives. The findings of this report will be used to inform London Wildlife Trust's volunteering programme going forwards, as well as being shared more widely with organisations across the nature conservation sector.

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Appendix A

Survey questions used as part of the Seeding Change Research Project. The survey was open for entries from January 2023 to March 2023.

The screenshot shows a survey form with a green header. At the top left are the logos for London Wildlife Trust and Seeding Change. The text reads: "Seeding Change: A research project partnered with Wanderers of Colour and supported by funds awarded by Natural England".

The main heading is "What makes you feel welcome in green spaces?". Below it, the text says: "You have been invited to take part in the London Wildlife Trust's Seeding Change research survey, to explore what makes you feel welcome and barriers experienced in green spaces for women and non-binary people of colour and people of faith (aged 18-25). The survey will remain open for entries until Monday 6th March 2023."

A progress bar shows "29%" completed, with "Your Details" as the current step.

The form includes the following questions and options:

- Your postcode**: A text input field.
- To which gender do you most identify with?**: Radio buttons for Man, Woman, Non-binary, Prefer not to say, and Self-define. A text input field is provided for self-defining.
- Are you...**: Radio buttons for Asian or Asian British, Black, Black British, Caribbean or African, Mixed or multiple ethnic heritage, White British or Irish, White Central or Eastern European, Other white background, Prefer not to say, and Self-describe. A text input field is provided for self-describing.
- How old are you?**: Radio buttons for Under 18 (selected), 18-21 years old, 22-25 years old, and Over 25.
- How would you describe your religious background?**: A text input field.

Navigation buttons "Previous" and "Next Page" are located at the bottom of the form.

This section will explore themes of safety in relation to your experiences in green spaces.

I feel safe engaging with the outdoors and green spaces.

- Always
- Usually
- Sometimes
- Never

I know who to contact if something goes wrong while I'm in a green space.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

If you agreed with the previous question, who would you contact?

Have any of the following prevented you from getting involved in green spaces (e.g. volunteering, attending events)?

- No/poor lighting
- Presence of dogs
- No/poorly maintained facilities (e.g. toilets, visitors' centres, water fountains)
- Lack of suitable prayer facilities
- Lack of representative staff (e.g. female staff members)
- Travel concerns (e.g. distance from station, cost of travel)
- Lack of privacy away from the public
- Lack of accessible spaces (e.g. wheelchair accessible sites)
- Lack of easily accessible safety information

Is there anything else that has prevented you from getting involved in green spaces?

Are there any previous experiences that make you less likely to engage in green spaces?

- Previous experiences/concerns about racial discrimination, or other forms of discrimination
- Previous negative experiences/concerns about interactions with other members of the public
- Previous negative experiences/concerns about interactions with members of staff
- Previous experiences where you were concerned for your physical safety

This section will explore themes of accessibility in relation to your experiences in green spaces.

I know where to look to find new opportunities to get involved in the outdoors and green spaces.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

If you agreed with the previous question, where would you look to find opportunities?

How far would you be willing to travel from your home to access an opportunity within a green spaces that you're interested in?

- Less than 10 minutes
- 10 - 15 minute walk
- 10-30 minute commute (e.g. bus, train)
- 30-60 minute commute (e.g. bus, train)
- 60+ minute commute (e.g. bus, train)
- Travel time is not a factor I would consider

Which of these periods of the year are you most likely to get engage with green spaces (e.g. volunteering, attending events)? Check all that apply.

- Spring (March-June)
- Summer holidays (July-August)
- Autumn (September-October)
- Winter (November - February)
- During religious holidays (e.g. Ramadan, Passover)
- During important educational or work-based periods (e.g. during examinations or around deadlines)

Which of these periods of the year are you least likely to get engage with green spaces (e.g. volunteering, attending events)? Check all that apply.

- Spring (March-June)
- Summer holidays (July-August)
- Autumn (September-October)
- Winter (November - February)
- During religious holidays (e.g. Ramadan, Passover)
- During important educational or work-based periods (e.g. during examinations or around deadlines)

Are there any other periods of the year that would impact your engagement with green spaces?

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This section will explore how green spaces are relevant to your life and community.

What motivates you to engage in outdoor/green spaces? Check all that apply.

- To feel a sense of community
- To improve physical and/or mental health and wellbeing
- To explore new parts of my community
- To improve my spiritual health and wellbeing
- To enjoy nature and the outdoors
- To have an impact on the world

Please include anything else that may motivate you to engage in outdoor/green spaces.


What are your favourite green spaces in London? What do you enjoy the most about them? 

What do you usually do when you visit green spaces? 

Which of the following activities would you be interested in getting involved with in green spaces? Check all that apply.


- Physical activities (e.g. hikes, walks)
- Practical activities (e.g. weeding, cleaning ponds)
- Engaging with local wildlife (e.g. bird spotting, working with habitats)
- Social activities (e.g. creative sessions, wellbeing sessions)
- None of the above

Please include any other activities that you would be interested in getting involved with in green spaces.

Are there any activities from the previous question that you would definitely not be interested in getting involved in? If so, why not? 

What does the word 'conservation' mean to you? 

Have you heard of the London Wildlife Trust? What comes to mind when you hear that name? 

Is there anything else you would like to share with us regarding your relationship with green spaces, or how things can be improved? 

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Have you been involved with London Wildlife Trust activities before?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Would you like to be signed up to London Wildlife Trust's youth mailing lists and receive updates about opportunities, events and activities? No spam, promise!

- No
- Yes - please enter your email.

If you would like to enter a random prize draw for one of two £20 vouchers, please enter your email address.

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Submit