



Conservation Professionals Pay Survey

Prospect briefing • July 2024



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Contents

Introduction	3
Benchmarking roles	3
Survey results	4
Table 1: Average pay by sector	4
Graph 1: Average pay by broad job role	4
Graph 2: Average pay by selected job roles and length of service as a conservation professional	5
Table 2: Breakdown of average salary for job roles across the whole sample	5
Average pay for Charity Trust roles	6
Table 3: Breakdown of results for charity/trusts excluding National Trust	6
Qualification and accreditations.....	6
Higher education qualifications	6
Table 4: Average salary by highest qualification	7
Table 5: Average salary by job role and qualification	7
Accreditations.....	7
Table 6: Average salary by accreditation.....	7
Job role descriptors	8
Table 7: Job role descriptors.....	8

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Introduction

This briefing provides the findings from a survey of conservation professionals. The survey was circulated online to Prospect members working in the natural environment from 15th May to 15th June. There were 365 responses, 28% work for a charity or trust and 70% in the public sector. Nearly three quarters of the responses were from members working for Natural England (34%), NatureScot (18%), National Trust and National Trust for Scotland (14%) and Joint Nature Conservation Committee (8%). The National Trust and National Trust for Scotland accounted for 51% of those working for a Trust or Charity.

Benchmarking roles

Respondents were asked to provide information on their job role, the pay for their job and how long they have been working as a conservation professional. To guide respondents, a summary description of a Conservation Professional was provided from the ONS standard occupational classification (SOC) hierarchy, which is summarised below.¹

Conservation Professional - Job Description

Conservation professionals are responsible for ensuring that landscapes, habitats and species are protected and enhanced via appropriate management and conservation. They promote public understanding and awareness of the natural environment and help to develop and implement appropriate policies to achieve these objectives.

Tasks required by this job include:

- promotes and implements local and national biodiversity action plans, particularly with regard to threatened species and habitats;
- carries out environmental impact assessments and field surveys;
- implements, evaluates and monitors schemes for the management and protection of natural habitats;
- provides advice and information to government at national and local levels, clients, landowners, planners and developers to facilitate the protection of the natural environment;
- liaises with other groups in the selection and maintenance of the Protected Site System including Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Ramsar sites, and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and National Nature Reserves (NNRs);
- maintains and develops knowledge in relevant policy areas within a national and European legislative context;
- promotes conservation issues via educational talks, displays, workshops and literature and liaison with the media;
- prepares applications for funding to other organisations, and assessing applications for funding from other organisations;
- carries out research into aspects of the natural world.

¹ https://onsdigital.github.io/dp-classification-tools/standard-occupational-classification/ONS_SOC_hierarchy_view.html

The median full time salary for a Conservation Professional, according to the latest Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, is £36,635.²

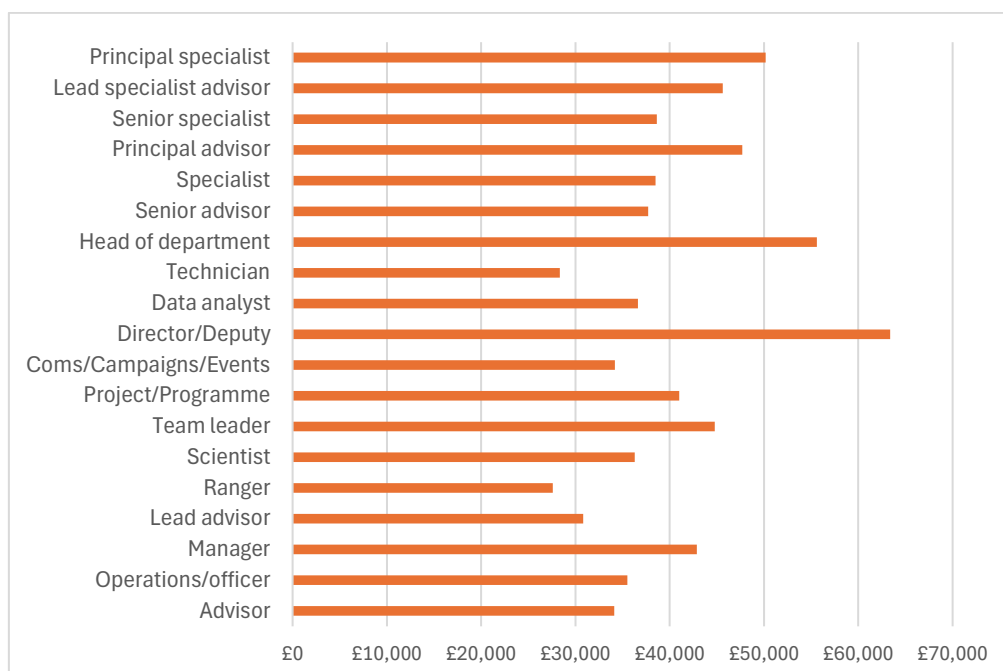
Survey results

Table 1 shows average salaries in the public sector, the charity sector and for the National Trust/National Trust for Scotland. Average salaries in the public sector are 3.6% higher than the charity sector and 11.7% higher than those working for the National Trust/ National Trust for Scotland. The gap narrows slightly for those that have been conservation professionals for more than 10 years. Salaries for those in the public sector are 3.2% higher than the charity sector and 6.8% higher than the National Trust/National Trust for Scotland. These broad averages are skewed by lower paying roles at the National Trust/National Trust for Scotland, when the ranger role is excluded from the responses of those working for these organisations the average rises to £40,468.

Table 1: Average pay by sector

Job Title	Total	Average salary	Salary after 10 Years
Charity	48	£36,498	£38,824
National Trust/National Trust for Scotland	50	£33,862	£37,528
Public Sector	254	£37,814	£40,068

Graph 1: Average pay by broad job role



2

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/datasets/occupation4digitsoc2010asetable14>

Salary results for job roles

There were 271 different job titles provided by respondents, many of these were similar job titles, which were grouped together. The job descriptors provided by respondents has enabled these jobs to be matched against roles engaged in similar activities. Table 2 shows the results where there is sufficient data for a meaningful comparison to be made for the overall average salary and the average salary for those that have worked as a conservation professional for more than 10 years. However, some caution should be taken with the results, for the majority of results the sample size is less than 30.

Graph 2: Average pay by selected job roles and length of service as a conservation professional

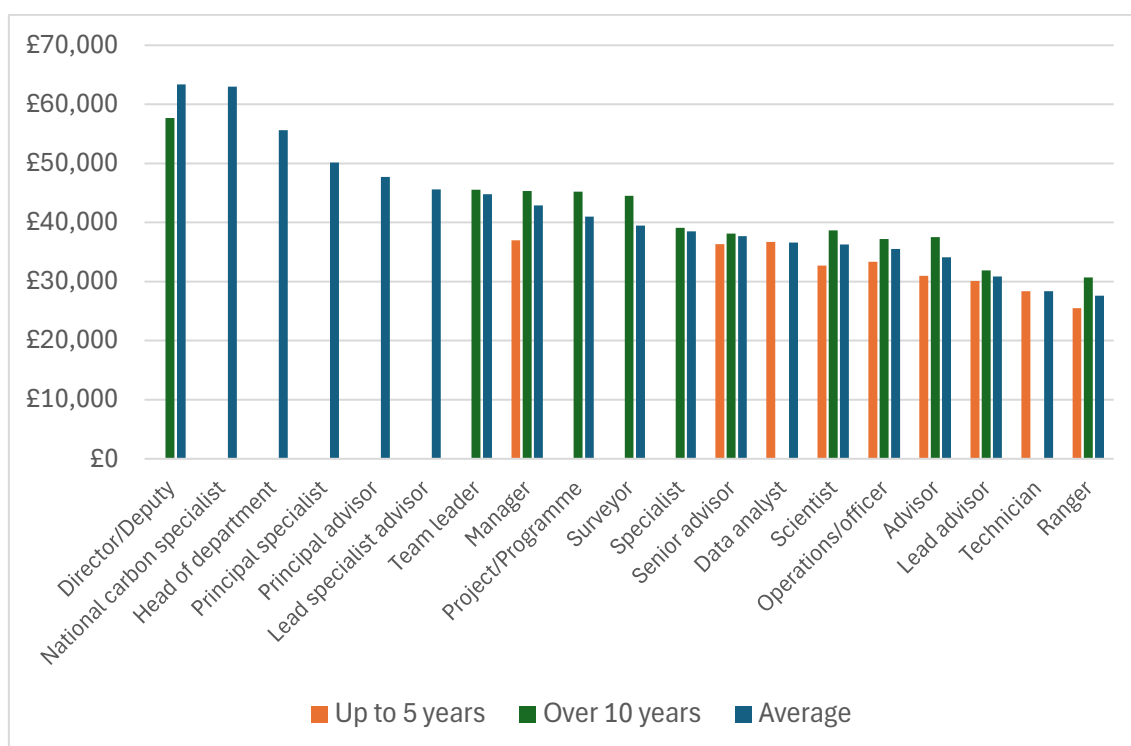


Table 2: Breakdown of average salary for job roles across the whole sample

Job Title	Total	Average salary	Salary after 10 Years
Ranger	28	£27,587	£29,401
Coms/Campaigns/Events	8	£34,174	-
Advisor	28	£34,113	£37,515
Operations/officer	53	£35,816	£37,582
Senior advisor	46	£37,700	£38,128
Lead advisor	34	£30,833	£31,879

Principal advisor	5	£47,689	-
Scientist	17	£36,556	£39,213
Data analyst	8	£36,625	-
Specialist	10	£38,480	£39,105
Senior specialist	9	£38,625	-
Lead specialist advisor	3	£45,622	-
Manager	36	£42,335	£44,763
Team leader	12	£44,786	£45,194
Project/Programme Manager	9	£42,847	£45,242
Head of department	4	£55,620	-
Director/Deputy	5	£57,711	-

Average pay for Charity Trust roles

The results in Table 3 show the average results for charity organisations excluding the National Trust/National Trust for Scotland. The remaining job roles are spread across a range of different roles but there are not enough results to provide a meaningful sample.

Table 3: Breakdown of results for charity/trusts excluding National Trust

Job Title	Total	Average salary
Coms/Campaigns/Events	4	£32,899
Operations/officer	10	£30,231
Manager	8	£41,593

Qualification and accreditations

Higher education qualifications

An overwhelming majority of respondents have a degree, a masters, PhD or equivalent qualification. This suggests that a degree is a minimum requirement to access most conservation professional roles.

There is a premium for higher degrees. The average salary of those with a PhD is 11.2% higher than those with a Masters, pay is 7.2% higher for those with a Masters compared to those with an undergraduate degree, and the pay lead for those with a Degree compared to those with a HND/HNC or other qualification is 7.6%.

However, the level of degree is not necessarily an indicator of the pay level for any particular job role. Table 5 shows a breakdown of the average pay of a number of job roles and the highest qualification. The breakpoint for the pay premium varies by role, for some

roles a higher degree does not lead to higher pay, which may indicate that the level of qualification is not the only factor contributing to the higher level of pay. More data is needed to draw any firm conclusions.

Table 4: Average salary by highest qualification

Job Title	Total	Average salary
HND or lower	21	£32,600
BA/BSc degree	137	£35,071
Masters degree	143	£37,607
PhD	56	£41,823

Table 5: Average salary by job role and qualification

	Degree		Masters		PhD	
	Count	Average Salary	Count	Average Salary	Count	Average Salary
Advisor/Lead advisor	21	£29,337	31	£34,741	7	£30,589
Operations Officer	23	£35,753	21	£36,072	5	£39,332
Senior Advisor	20	£37,855	20	£36,852	4	£41,215
Scientist	3	£26,957	3	£36,039	11	£39,315
Manager	18	£40,886	12	£43,840	6	£43,670

Accreditations

Just under a quarter (23%) of respondents have an accreditation. Most of these are licences to handle different types of animals or vocational qualifications, for example a certificate in chainsaw maintenance. Those with an accreditation have a lower average salary than those that do not. This suggests that accreditations do not attract the same level of premium as those with degree level qualifications.

Table 6: Average salary by accreditation

Job Title	Total	Average salary
Accreditation	81	£34,656
No accreditation	276	£37,707

Job role descriptors

Respondents were asked to provide a brief description of the job tasks associated with their role. The Table below provides a summary of those job descriptors for roles where there is sufficient information to provide a rounded summary. This information will be useful for future benchmarking exercises.

The information covers job roles in both the public and charity sectors, so there may be differences in the tasks associated with jobs with similar job roles but with respondents working in different sectors. Further feedback from people working in the sector will be needed to fine tune the job role titles and their descriptors.

Having reviewed the information provided by respondents there seemed to be relatively little difference between an advisor, lead advisor and operations officer, so these roles have been combined with a generic summary covering both roles. There did seem to be a difference between postholders that were senior advisors. There was also a difference for some senior specialist or principal roles, however there was not enough data to draft a descriptor for all roles. So further feedback would be required from those working in the sector.

Table 7: Job role descriptors

Role	Job Descriptor
Advisor/Operations	Advise on conservation in field of expertise/To either protect or manage - Evaluate conservation area - Set up monitoring - Assessments and Field surveys - Record finding and publish reports - Offer technical advice - Promotes action plan.
Senior advisor	Senior responsible officer/advisor. The lead contact - Links with national specialists - Builds capacity in the team identifying development needs - Develops strategic guidance. Manages contracts - Assess applications for funding - Convenes advisors to share best practice.
Technician	Provides technical support to colleagues carrying out research into aspects of the natural world.
Scientist/Research	Research Scientist - Subject expert - Facilitate data collection - Data analysis - Fieldwork surveys and reporting - Publishes research findings - Guidance in area of expertise - Disseminate research findings
Data analyst	Use data to support organisation's objectives. Work with field staff to collect data, identify analytical evidence needs, Aid the interpretation of data to a non-technical audience, use data tools (e.g. GIS).

Project/Programme management	Develop and manages projects to enhance the objectives of organisation. Provides specialist or consultancy advice for discrete projects, which may have ring-fenced funding tied to project. Measures and monitors project progress, reporting findings to relevant department.
Communications/Events	Promotes organisation's objectives to achieve positive change. Uses range of communication channels to engage with partner organisations, the public, influencers. Liaises with the media. Organises community outreach events.
Manager	Line manages a team - Produce management plans to deliver objectives and set performance indicators - Build relationships - Budget responsibility - Writing bid proposals - promote grants to stakeholders - Advocacy with other organisations - Promote engagement with communities - Up to date with regulations.
Head of Department	Oversees the delivery of a department, managing the managers within that department. Reports to Senior Management Team.
Director/Deputy Director	Leader of organisation, part of the senior leadership team. Ensures organisation achieves objectives. Manages principal managers including performance management against objectives, has budget oversight for area of responsibility. May be a specialist lead in their area of expertise.