

BIODIVERSITY

Communications Toolkit

General Public

Who are they?

In terms of attitudes towards biodiversity issues, the general public can be broken down into three broad categories:

- Carers and doers
- Carers and non-doers
- Non-carers and non-doers

The National Baseline Survey of Public Attitudes (George Street Research, 2005), commissioned by Scottish Natural Heritage to explore the general public's awareness and attitudes towards natural heritage, identified these three broad groupings based on the similarity of attitudes.

It's important to be sensitive to the characteristics of each group and acknowledge their different levels of awareness, understanding and interest.

What messages work?

Carers and doers – still an important target

These people feel they are already involved in enjoying, enhancing and protecting Scotland's environment. Despite this, they shouldn't be forgotten as they are often willing to do and learn more, and can also play a vital role in influencing others.

Carers and doers require messages that sustain and deepen their existing involvement. For example, messages should acknowledge the contribution this group has already made and illustrate, through statistics and case studies, how their contribution is making a difference.

Carers and non-doers – the core audience

This is your biggest target. These people do care about the natural environment, but aren't actively involved in enhancing or protecting it. This is a persuadable group of people, and the correct messages are likely to inspire action on their part.

A key message to communicate to this group is that action on their part is important and worthwhile; an investment in the future, with particular emphasis on their children's future quality of life and the role biodiversity plays in it.

Non-carers and non-doers – the challenge

This is the hardest group to influence as they have a relatively ambivalent attitude towards biodiversity issues.

The key here is to position biodiversity, particularly in a local context, as something relevant and tangible to their everyday lives.

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How do you reach them?

Here are some suggestions for effective communication methods to target the general public:

- Use local press and radio to communicate a local campaign and you will reach a high percentage of the general public.
- Build up a strong partnership with the local newspaper and/or radio station. Ask them to sponsor your event or follow the campaign from start to finish.
- Use community websites with news sections and forums, as well as community newsletters. Targeting these could spark off discussions leading to powerful word of mouth campaigns. In addition, church newsletters are an effective way of encouraging people to get involved through their local community.
- Communicate to a wide audience by targeting supermarkets; shopping centres; health centres; community centres; youth clubs; town halls; the Post Office, or local newsagent. Holding events and promotions will create a buzz. You can also use these channels to display campaign posters and leaflets.
- Work with local authorities to run articles in council publications that are distributed to local residents in the area. Articles can highlight local biodiversity and suggest ideas on conserving and enjoying it, for example routes for bike rides and walks.
- Link visitor sites and attractions to biodiversity, promoting it as something to enjoy.
- Facilitate partnerships between community organisations and environmental groups and charities. People are more likely to engage on a local level, and this can link the issue to a national, even a global, level. In addition, these partnerships could create local projects that result in visible local benefits.
- Where possible have a bank of case studies ready for your communications. Case studies are vital to 'sell in' lifestyle features, health features, radio talk shows, etc. Source a variety of case studies people can relate to i.e. young family, elderly, young professionals, middle age males or females without children. Sell in the appropriate case study to a publication with the same target audience.

Background Information

This information is based on the latest research carried out by Scottish Natural Heritage. See reference below.

- At a basic level, three in four adults are interested in/find relevant/are concerned about the natural heritage and its component areas of biodiversity, landscapes, special places for nature and climate change. However, only around 40% of adults specify this as 'very'. Climate change receives higher mention, perhaps because the issue has been top of mind in terms of media coverage for a longer period.
- While 71% of adults cite an activity that they would like to do more of to be involved in the natural heritage, only 40% say they would like to be more involved in the future than they are at present.
- The primary conclusion is that whilst people 'care', the natural heritage is not 'very' important in daily life at present. Therefore, two main issues will need to be addressed - encourage people to increasingly value the importance of the natural heritage and recognise its relevance to their daily lives.
- Education, health and crime are current priorities amongst adults. It is encouraging that the natural environment and climate change are next on the list of priorities.

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- Most people come into contact with the natural environment either at home in their garden, or in local parks or their local countryside. Only around 10% of people mention the countryside further away from home.
- Females tend to spend more time in their own garden than males (60% compared with 52%)
- The primary reasons adults give for visiting the countryside are for leisure, health and relaxation.
- What people particularly enjoy about the natural environment – over half of adults stated they particularly enjoyed beautiful landscapes, which was by far the most popular choice. Older people are more likely to cite growing things in their garden.
- 24% of adults state that they are very involved in the natural environment. A further 48% of adults state that they are involved in the natural environment.
- 83% of adults feel that they are very interested in Scotland's biodiversity. A similar proportion of adults are very concerned about the potential of losing it, while slightly less see it as relevant to their daily lives.
- 90% of adults feel that they are interested in Scotland's landscapes while 84% see landscapes as relevant to their daily lives and 86% are concerned about loss of landscapes.
- Encouragingly, four out of ten adults would like to do more in the natural environment in the future. Around six out of ten are happy with their current level of involvement and only 2% want to do less.

How can you encourage the general public to get more involved in biodiversity?

Emphasise the 'localness' of the natural heritage.

- Make it something that cannot be considered 'distant' and therefore not important to 'me'.
- Make it something that is 'down the road' in terms of literally being easy to get to and therefore also easy to find time to actually do – think too about transport links, public and private.

Emphasise the fact that 'you can do something'.

- People need to feel that it is worthwhile for them to make the effort as there are things they can do – think here about small and big 'things to do' and emphasise perhaps the 'small steps' principle as a starting point for someone wanting to help but not thinking they have the time.
- Make it easy to do just one thing, dispelling the idea that doing something for the natural heritage may involve 'joining a club' or 'being roped in every Saturday'.
- Also consider tasks that only need a very short space of time to complete, again making it easy to 'fit in' to people's lives.
- Ensure tasks and events are seen as 'do-able' in terms of physical and mental capacity – i.e. that they are not too difficult or strenuous, that they are not too technical or specialist, that full outdoor kit and 'green wellies' may not always be necessary!
- Emphasise the consequences of not doing something.
- Build on the need to do something 'now' rather than later.

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- Use consequences as a galvanising force to make it 'imperative'.
- For example, if there is an endangered species that is local to people then work along the lines of 'if we don't help now then we'll lose it'.
- Local schools are ideal here as children respond well to this type of 'attack' and they will radiate it out to their parents and the community as a whole.

What can you do to make people more aware of and more involved in the natural environment? (Base 1004 adults)

- Use simple and inspiring advertising – 33%
- Go into schools – 13%
- Tell/Promote the benefits to everyone – 13%
- Offer better information and advice – 13%
- Get children involved more – 12%
- Show its relevance to people's lives – 6%
- Provide more local opportunities – 5%
- Go into business – 4%
- Make it fun and less 'do-goody' – 1%
- Tell everyone about the risks if we don't help – 1%
- Other – 8%
- Unsure – 19%
- Nothing – 10%

What information source(s) would you use if you wanted to become more aware of, and/or more involved in the natural environment? (Base 1004 adults)

- Website/internet – 45%
- Television – 37%
- Local newspapers – 18%
- National newspapers – 12%
- Radio – 11%
- Libraries – 7%
- Local events/talks – 3%
- Tourist information – 2%
- Local clubs/societies – 2%
- Mobile phone – 1%
- Other – 1%
- Unsure – 7%
- None – 9%

(Source: Progressive Partnership (2007). Promoting key messages about the natural heritage – survey of public attitudes and involvement. SNH Commissioned Report 235)