



COMMISSIONED REPORT

Commissioned Report No. 186
(Part 7 of 7)

**Evaluation of effectiveness of
interpretation at six visitor centres –
Noss Visitor Centre**

(ROAME No. F01AB02)

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Evaluation of effectiveness of interpretation at six visitor centres – Noss Visitor Centre

Commissioned Report No. 186 (Part 7 of 7) (ROAME No. F01AB02)

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Year of publication: 2006

Background

Scottish Natural Heritage has funded or part-funded interpretive facilities at a range of visitor centres in Scotland. The aims of the evaluations were: to assess the extent to which interpretation provision at a sample of six visitor centres met the key aims and objectives as stated in the interpretive plans, and to identify overarching principles of good practice. Six separate reports give full details of what was evaluated, the questions used and the results, conclusions and recommendations for each of the individual evaluations (see Parts 2–7).

Evaluations were carried out during the summer of 2002. Three methods were used: 'before'/'after' at Trossachs Discovery Centre and the Scottish Seabird Centre, 'perceived learning' at Burn o' Vat Visitor Centre and the Stevenson Forvie Visitor Centre, and 'check on exit' at Knockan Crag and Noss Visitor Centre. A total of 1166 returns was achieved, largely through face-to-face interviews, representing 97% of the target of 200 returns per site.

Main findings

- The main recommendation is that most of the interpretive frameworks need to be reviewed/redeveloped. Guidelines are given for reviewing/preparing such a framework.
- Recommendations are made to guide appropriate use of the three methods used to evaluate learning.
- Formulating appropriate key questions to test the effectiveness of interpretation is a key challenge for which appropriate time, and suitable expertise is required.
- A summary table itemises what the interpretation achieved for each site in relation to: main perceived message, learning, attitudes and behaviour.
- Six suggestions are given for improving the interpretation, each of which emerged from two or more centres.

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Executive summary

Background

The evaluation of interpretation at the Noss Visitor Centre was one of six evaluations of interpretation commissioned by SNH and carried during the summer of 2002. SNH has funded or part-funded interpretive facilities at the above centres, and wanted to know how effective the various interpretive facilities were for visitors. The report, SNH (2002) – *Evaluation of interpretation at six visitor centres* discusses the three methodologies used, and presents overall conclusions from the six evaluations.

The aim of this evaluation was to assess the extent to which interpretation provision in the Noss Visitor Centre meets the key aims and objectives as stated in the interpretive plan. The 'check on exit' method was used with self-completion questionnaires to identify what 121 visitors had gained by visiting the Noss Visitor Centre.

Main findings

- The perceived main messages did not reflect the principle theme, though they partially reflected two aims and three sub themes.
- One sub theme was met for the part tested and five of six learning objectives tested were met.
- Three of five attitudinal objectives tested were met.
- Four of six behavioural objectives tested were met.

The 'check on exit' method worked reasonably well in practice, but the Warden had to check people did not return to the centre to fill in the questionnaire, and with self-completion some questions were not answered by some respondents. With this method it was not possible to check how much knowledge was acquired through prior learning.

A series of five recommendations was made to improve the effectiveness of interpretation at the Noss Visitor Centre.

Acknowledgements

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The evaluation of interpretation at Noss Visitor Centre was one of six evaluations of interpretation commissioned by SNH and carried out at the following visitor centres during the summer of 2002:

- Burn o' Vat Visitor Centre;
- Stevenson Forvie Visitor Centre;
- Knockan Crag;
- Noss Visitor Centre;
- Trossachs Discovery Centre;
- Scottish Seabird Centre.

SNH has funded or part-funded interpretive facilities at the above centres, and wanted to know how effective the various interpretive facilities were for visitors. The report 'Evaluation of interpretation at six visitor centres' discusses the three methodologies used, and presents overall conclusions from the six evaluations.

The evaluation took place alongside an Evaluation of NNR publications – Knockan Crag was the only site where both evaluations were carried out.

1.2 Noss NNR Visitor Centre

Noss NNR is an island off the east of Bressay in the Shetland Isles, which features seabirds, rich seas and geology. The small visitor centre is open for three months in the summer, attracts around 1,000 visitors during this period, and has a resident summer warden.

Appendix 1 gives full details of the interpretive Exhibition, while the main elements are listed below:

- map;
- 10 panels;
- activity boxes, feelie holes interactives, hands-on pull-out, and touch exhibits;
- warden's talk.

1.3 Aim and objectives

The aims and objectives of the evaluation of interpretation at the Noss Visitor Centre were:

Aim

- to assess the extent to which interpretation provision in the Exhibition at Noss Visitor Centre meets the key aims and objectives as stated in the interpretive plan (Muschamp, 1998).

Objectives

- to identify a list of precise objectives that the interpretation is designed to achieve;
- to undertake a visitor survey to evaluate the effectiveness of the interpretation used;
- to draw conclusions and make recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the existing interpretation.

An additional aim for the six evaluations as a whole was to recommend key overarching principles of good practice.

2 METHODOLOGY

This section explains how the methodology for the evaluation was developed through: familiarisation with the site, review of the interpretive framework detailed in the interpretive plan, identification of themes and objectives to evaluate, and selection of an appropriate survey method.

2.1 Familiarisation

Elsbeth Grant, an interpretation consultant, visited Noss Visitor Centre in spring 2001 when she:

- met the manager and wardens and explained the purpose of the evaluation;
- familiarised herself with the site;
- drew up a detailed list of the interpretation present, matching it to the themes/objectives in the interpretive plan;
- obtained information about visitors and previous visitor surveys;
- explored methods of conducting the survey.

2.2 Review of the interpretive framework

The Noss Visitor Centre Interpretive Plan (Muschamp, 1998) includes:

- 4 aims;
- 1 principle theme;
- 4 sub themes;
- 26 learning objectives;
- 5 attitudinal objectives;
- 8 behavioural objectives.

See Appendix 1 for details of these themes, objectives etc.

The term 'theme' is used to describe an overall topic for interpretation, and 'objective' to describe what visitors will be able to know or do once they have absorbed the relevant interpretation. These terms were used in different ways in the six interpretive plans, and augmented by other terms.

A review of the interpretive framework highlighted the following strengths and challenges in evaluating objectives at the Noss Visitor Centre:

Strengths

- there is a logical hierarchy of sub themes and objectives;

This made it easy to know which sub theme individual objectives feed into.

- objectives are described in specific terms;
- this made it fairly straightforward to formulate questions to test them.

Challenges

- some sub themes were ‘missing’;
eg there is no sub theme on human/cultural history, though these are addressed in the interpretation.
- some sub themes were not very clear;
eg The Warden’s Report (sub theme 4 detailed in Appendix 1) does not say what the message is, making it difficult to formulate appropriate questions.
- some objectives were not expressed in measurable form;
‘The majority of visitors will ...’ is unclear, does it mean more than 50%, or a higher percentage?
We assumed that the majority meant more than 50%.

2.3 What was evaluated

Table 2.1 shows what was evaluated: Principle theme, 1–4 sub themes, 6 learning objectives from the 4 sub themes, 6 out of 8 behavioural objectives, and 3 out of 5 attitudinal objectives. Since there was a large number of attitudinal and behavioural objectives, and difficulties formulating questions for some, they were not all assessed.

Table 2.1 Overview of themes and objectives evaluated

Purposes and objectives in the interpretive plan	Purposes and objectives evaluated	Comments
4 aims		
1 principle theme	1 theme	
4 sub themes	1 sub theme	
26 learning objectives	6 learning objectives	At least 1 from each of the 4 sub themes
5 attitudinal objectives	3 attitudinal objectives	Question about respecting birds felt to be inappropriate
8 behavioural objectives	6 behavioural objectives Plus The main thing respondents hope to find out/had found out’	Library too small to ask about, couldn’t frame a suitable question on warden’s privacy Asked to see if responses reflect the principle theme

Table 2.2 gives details of the purposes/objectives evaluated, the relevant elements of interpretation, and the corresponding interview questions.

Table 2.2 Objectives, interpretation and questions asked

Themes/objectives evaluated (from interpretive plan)	Relevant parts of interpretation	Q no.	Question (some abbreviated) from questionnaire
Main message			
Principle theme Birds need the seas to survive	All parts of exhibition and live interpretation	Q18	<i>What would you say is the main message the Noss Visitor Centre is trying to put over?</i>
Learning			
Objective 1 (sub theme 1) Shetland's seas are rich in marine life	Rich pickings Shetland's wealth The Green Sea	Q8 Q8	<i>Please tick whether the statement is correct or incorrect: (probing questions are highlighted)</i> <i>The seas around Noss are particularly rich in marine life</i> <i>Do you know why?</i>
Objective 9 (sub theme 2) The majority of visitors to Noss will recognise two of the key seabirds that nest on Noss	The best nest Noss News Interactives	Q9	<i>Can you name two species of seabird which nest on Noss?</i>
Objective 5 (sub theme 1) The majority of visitors to Noss will learn that sandeels are a key food source for sea birds	Rich pickings Food maze	Q10	<i>Please tick whether the statements are correct or incorrect:</i> <i>Sandeels are a key source of food for seabirds (correct)</i>
Objective 18 (sub theme 3) The majority of visitors to Noss will understand that if the birds run out of food, so will we	The sandeel story		<i>If seabirds run out of food it won't affect people (incorrect)</i>
Objective 24 (sub theme 4) The majority of visitors to Noss will learn that the wardens undertake research and monitoring	Warden's talk		<i>The warden on Noss is engaged in monitoring the number of seabirds (correct)</i>
Manager question (sub theme 4)	Warden's talk		<i>Noss is managed jointly with the owner as a working farm (correct)</i>
Objective 14 (sub theme 3) The majority of visitors to Noss will learn that the sandstone geology of Noss means there are many cliff edges for seabirds to nest on	The problem with eggs	Q12	<i>The cliffs on Noss are granite (incorrect)</i> <i>Please tick how much you agree/disagree with ...</i>

Table 2.2 (continued)

Themes/objectives evaluated (from interpretive plan)	Relevant parts of interpretation	Q no.	Question (some abbreviated) from questionnaire
Attitudes			
Objective 35 The majority of visitors to Noss will feel that they have had a special natural heritage experience	All parts of interpretation and visit	Q12a	<i>Visiting Noss was a special experience of the natural heritage</i>
Objective 36 The majority of visitors to Noss will feel that Noss is special and needs protection	All parts of interpretation and visit	Q12b	<i>I now feel more strongly that Noss needs protection</i>
Objective 37 The majority of visitors to Noss will feel that protecting our seas is important for both the seabirds and ourselves	All parts of interpretation and visit	Q12c	<i>I now feel that it is important to protect our seas</i>
Behaviour			
Objectives 27 (and objective 32) The majority of visitors will: walk in an anti-clockwise direction around the island not walk through the centre of the island	Warden's talk Welcome to Noss panel	Q13	<i>In which direction did you walk round the island?</i>
Objective 28 The majority of visitors will not panic when attacked by a Bonxie	Warden's talk	Q16	<i>Were you attacked by a Bonxie? If yes, what did you do?</i>
Objective 29 The majority of visitors will watch out for how one bird feeds	Warden's talk	Q14	<i>Did you watch how birds feed? If yes, which birds did you watch</i>
Objective 32 95% of visitors will not walk through the centre of the island	Warden's talk Welcome to Noss panel	Q13	<i>In which direction did you walk round the island?</i>
Objective 33 95% of visitors will spend at least 15 minutes in the visitor centre	–	Q3	<i>How long have you spent looking at the displays in the visitor centre today?</i>
Objective 36 The majority of visitors will keep away from puffin burrows	Warden's talk	Q15	<i>Did you go near any puffins on the cliffs?</i>

2.3.1 Types of question used to evaluate themes/objectives

The principle theme was checked by asking respondents:

- what they thought was the main message the visitor centre was trying to put over.

Knowledge was largely assessed with two types of question:

- respondents were asked whether statements were correct or incorrect.

Attitudes and behaviour were assessed with one type of question:

- how strongly respondents agreed/disagreed with attitude/behaviour statements.

2.4 Survey method

Noss was one of four centres where visitor numbers were too low to: obtain separate samples of visitors 'before' and 'after' their visit, ask them what they knew and then deduce how much the 'after' respondents had learned. Two alternative methods were tested at these low use centres: 'self-perception' and 'check on exit'. At Noss (and Knockan Crag) the check on exit method was used whereby visitors were asked what they knew at the end of their visit.

2.4.1 Check knowledge/attitudes on exit

At Noss as visitors left the visitor centre they were asked questions to check their knowledge and attitudes. The limitation of this method is that there is no way of knowing whether knowledge and attitudes were acquired at Noss or elsewhere.

For a full discussion of the three methods used at the six visitor centres see the report 'Evaluation of interpretation at six visitor centres' (SNH, 2002).

2.4.2 Questionnaires

A model questionnaire, developed for all six visitor centres, was adapted for use at Noss. The Noss questionnaire is included in Appendix 6.

2.4.3 Self-completion

It was not practical to have an interviewer at Noss – apart from the resident seasonal warden, uninhabited island off an island – with low numbers of visitors. A self-completion questionnaire was used instead, and distributed by the Warden at the end of the visit. The Warden was asked to give one questionnaire to each group of visitors, unless there were more than five in the group, which occurs about once a week. Questionnaires were returned in pre-paid envelopes.

2.5 Sample and error rates

2.5.1 Sample

A target of 200 completed questionnaires was set.

2.5.2 Error rates

Table 2.3 Error rates

Sample size	Applies to	Likely % errors at 95% confidence level
200	Target	+/- 7%
121	Actual sample	+/- 9%
50	Smallest sub group capable of yielding reliable results	+/- 14%

2.6 Returns

A total of 121 completed questionnaires was achieved, representing 61% of the target of 200. 192 questionnaires were distributed, giving a return rate of 63%.

Scope for a high number of returns at Noss was limited by the short season. A total of 835 people visited Noss during the 15 weeks the visitor centre was open in 2002 (excluding the open day, which is not typical and was excluded from the survey). Our results from 121 people therefore represent 14% of the visitor population of 835.

2.7 Presentation of results

Section 3 gives summary information on:

- 1 Characteristics of visitors.
- 2 Use of the visitor attraction.
- 3 Satisfaction and suggested improvements.
- 4 Other information.

Full details of these background results are given in the Appendices.

Section 4 gives full details of what the interpretation achieved.

The results of each interview question are summarised as a bar chart. Each chart is headed by the relevant question, and responses are given down the left side. Where responses are given in *italics* they represent pre-defined answers from the questionnaire. Where responses are given in normal text they represent groupings of responses given to open-ended questions.

The number of responses is shown at the right hand side of each chart. Where the number of responses is small, (usually less than 20 responses), the actual number of responses is given, rather than percentages. This is to avoid any possibility of attributing too much importance to comments made by small numbers of respondents.

3 BACKGROUND RESULTS

3.1 Summary of visitor characteristics

A total of 121 self-completion questionnaires were returned. Analysis of these questionnaires showed that 53% of visitors were males, 87% of respondents were over 35 years old, and 82% from occupational groups B and C1. 74% visited Noss with family/friends.

55% of respondents came from other parts of the UK, 17% from overseas, 16% from other parts of Scotland and 12% from within 30 miles.

See Appendix 2 for full details of visitor characteristics.

3.2 Summary of use of the visitor centre

For 82% of the 121 respondents it was their first visit to Noss. The main reasons respondents gave for visiting Noss were birdwatching (80%), walking (30%), and curiosity (14%). 50% of respondents had spent under 10 minutes looking at the displays, and 38% had spent 10–15 minutes.

94% of respondents said they looked at the map and 85% the Exhibition. 49% of respondents commented on the Exhibition. The vast majority of comments were positive, including: excellent (28%), interesting (23%) and well-presented (17%).

See Appendix 3 for full details about use of the visitor centre.

3.3 Summary of satisfaction and improvements

67% of respondents said their visit to Noss Visitor Centre was 'very' enjoyable and 22% 'enjoyable'. 34% of the 71 respondents said no improvements are needed to the visitor centre. The main suggested improvements were: improvements to the general facilities (24%), more information on identifying birds (14%), and more information on local history (10%). 44 respondents made further comments, of which most were positive: the warden is helpful (41%), it's good (25%).

See Appendix 4 for full details of satisfaction and suggested improvements.

3.4 Summary of other feedback

The main thing the 86 people who had conversations with the warden (outwith the introductory talk) gained from the conversation was information on: bird sightings (35%), other wildlife sightings (29%), general information (23%), best route to take (16%), best viewing places (15%), and island life/history.

71% of respondents said they would be likely to visit other bird reserves on Shetland. The main ones they would be likely to visit were: Hermaness (50%), Sumburgh Head (29%), and Mousa (21%). 23 respondents suggested other things they were likely to do after their visit, the main ones being: visit other bird reserves in the UK (8), recommend Noss to friends (5).

See Appendix 5 for full details of the other feedback.

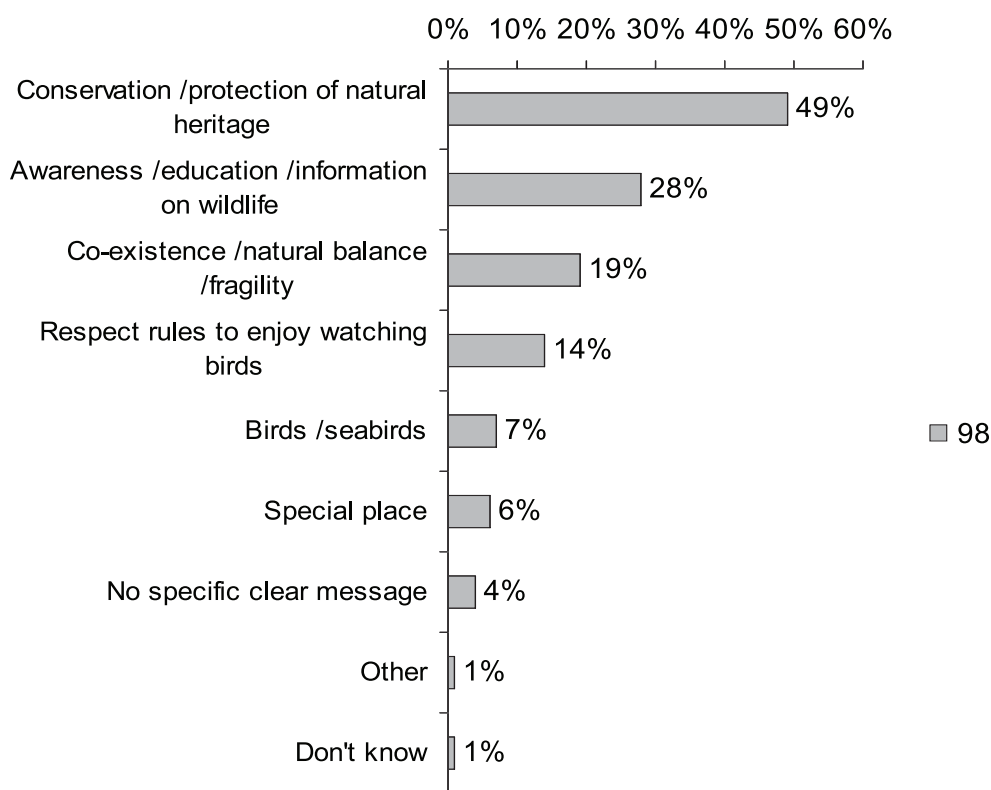
4 WHAT THE INTERPRETATION ACHIEVED

This section shows what visitors gained from the interpretation for each of the themes/objectives we selected to test. To see which theme/objective each of the following questions was testing see Table 2.2 in section 2. For a summary of what was achieved for each theme/objective see Table 4.1 at the end of this section. To avoid repetition, and for ease of reading, themes and objectives are referred to by their reference number, rather than quoted in full. See Appendix 1 for the full versions of themes and objectives.

4.1 Main message

We asked this question to see how people's expectations/experience related to the principle theme of the interpretation – 'Birds need the seas to survive'.

Q18 What would you say is the main message the Noss Visitor Centre is trying to put over?



The main perceived messages were: conservation/protection of the natural heritage (49%), awareness/education on wildlife (28%), need for coexistence (19%), and respect rules to enjoy birds (14%). 4% said there was no clear, specific message.

These perceived messages are not a good reflection of the principle theme. We therefore compared them with the aims and sub themes:

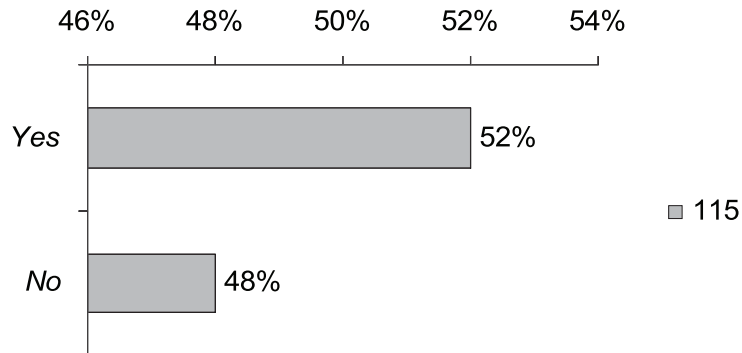
conservation of natural heritage	reflects	sub theme 3 and aim 4
awareness/education on wildlife	"	sub theme 1, aims 1 and 3
need for co-existence	"	sub theme 3
respect rules to enjoy birds	"	sub theme 4
birds/seabirds	"	sub theme 1

Respondents' perceived messages reflect, at least to some extent, sub themes 1, 3 and 4.

4.2 Learning

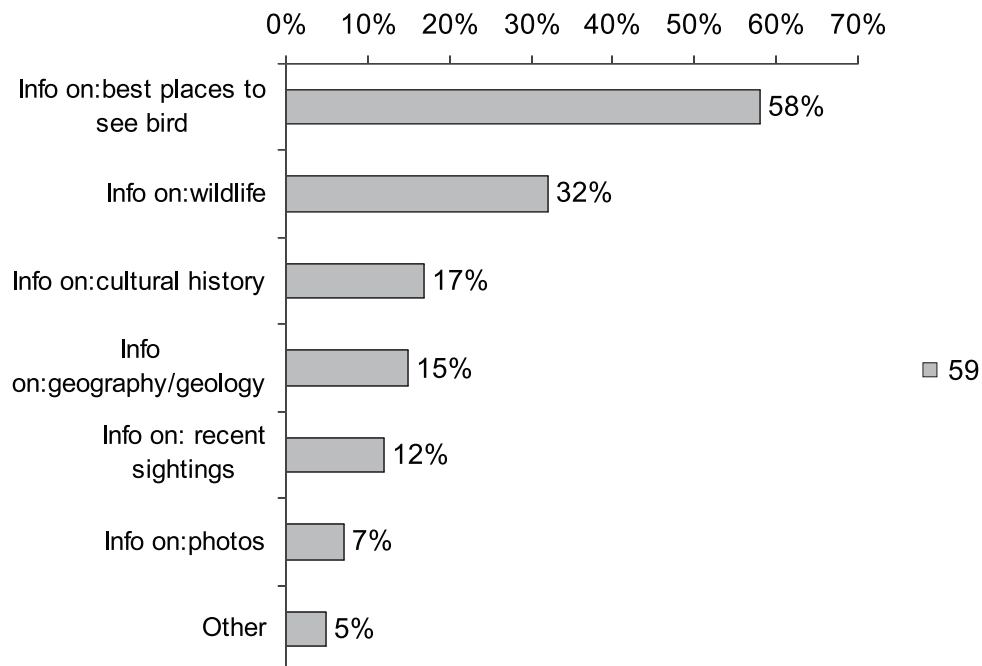
What hoped to find out

Q6a Did you hope to find out anything new at Noss Visitor Centre today?



52% of respondents hoped to find out something new at the Noss Visitor Centre.

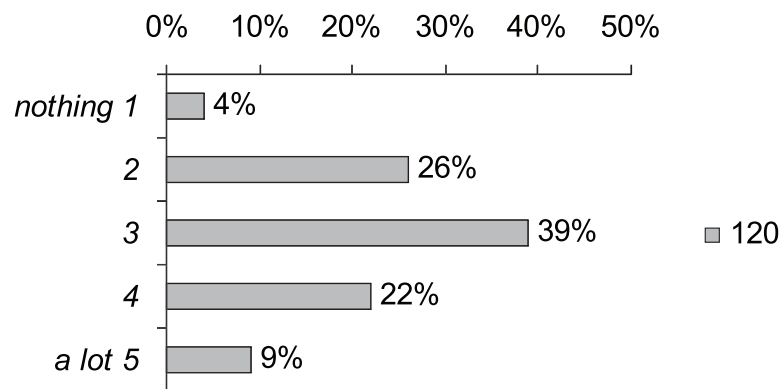
Q6b If yes, what did you hope to find out?



Of the 59 visitors who said what they hope to find out 56 wanted information: 58% on the best places to see birds, 32% on wildlife, 17% on cultural history, 15% on geography/geology, and 12% on recent sightings of birds.

Prior knowledge

Q5 Please rate your knowledge of seabirds before your visit on a scale of 1–5, where 1 is ‘nothing’ and 5 ‘a lot’.

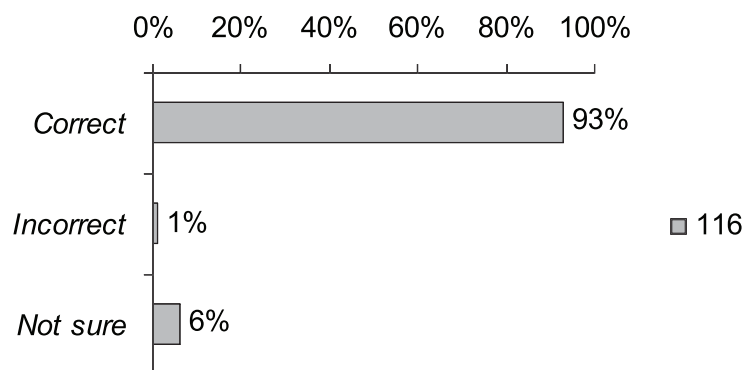


39% of respondents rated their knowledge as ‘3’ (the midpoint on the scale), 26% lower as ‘2’, and 22% higher as ‘4’. These are higher ratings than respondents gave for knowledge of geology at Knockan, suggesting that visitors to Noss are already knowledgeable about seabirds. This is also reflected in the high numbers of respondents (80%) who said that bird watching was their main reason for visiting the island.

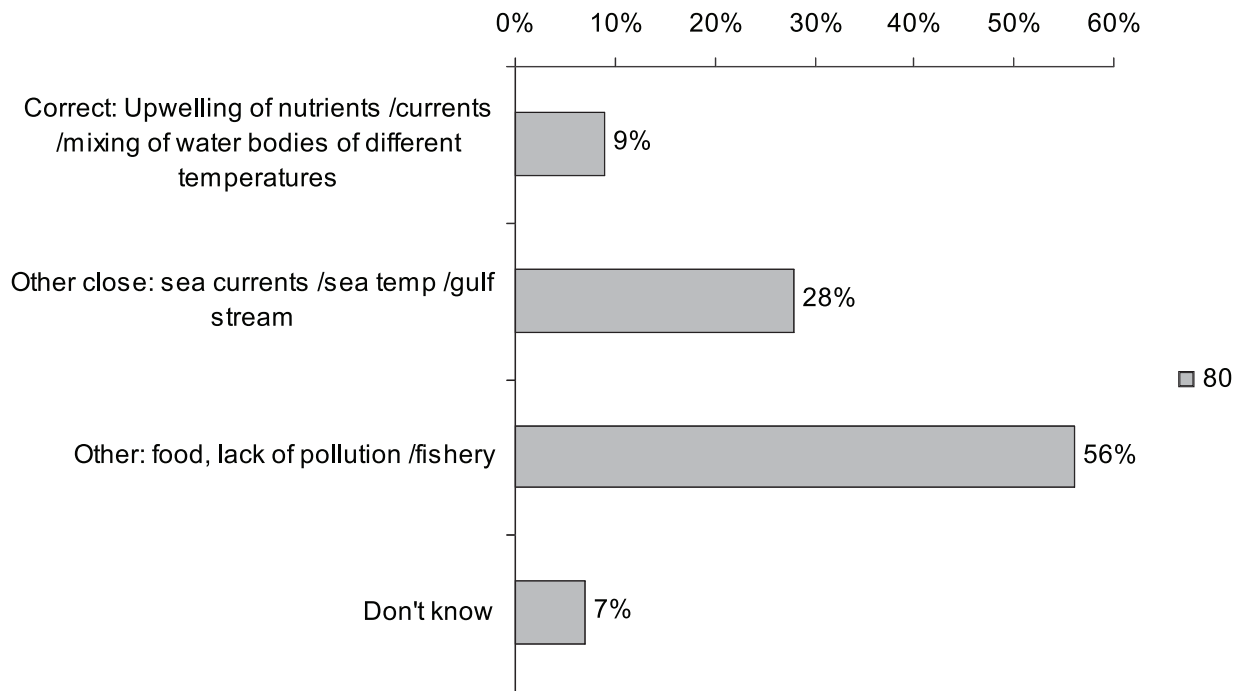
Cross tabulations were run for prior knowledge versus all the learning questions. The results did not suggest any difference between perceived level of prior knowledge and responses to learning questions.

Objectives

Q8a The seas around Noss are particularly rich in marine life.

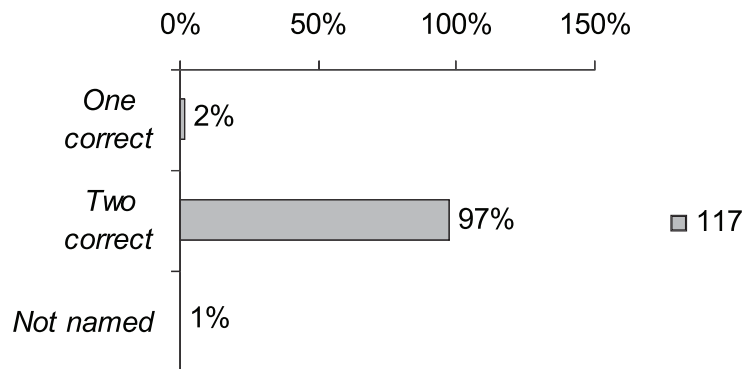


Q8b Do you know why?



Of 80 respondents who gave a reason, only 9% gave the correct answer, though a further 28% gave answers that were 'close'. It is therefore deduced that, **while 93% of respondents knew that the seas are particularly rich in marine life, only 9% knew why.**

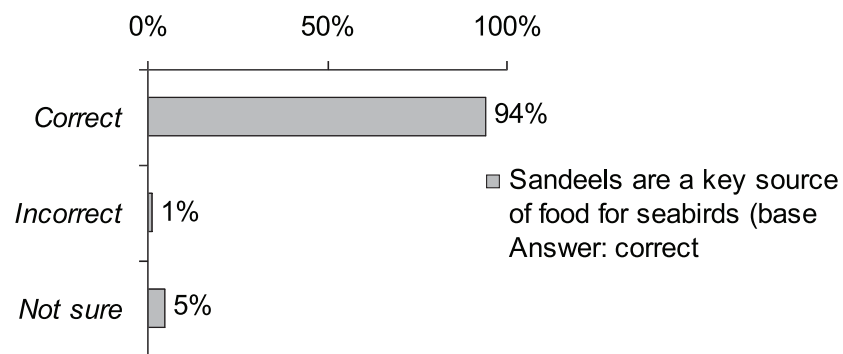
Q9 Can you name two species of seabird which nest on Noss?



Of the 117 respondents who answered the question, 97% correctly named two birds that nest on Noss.

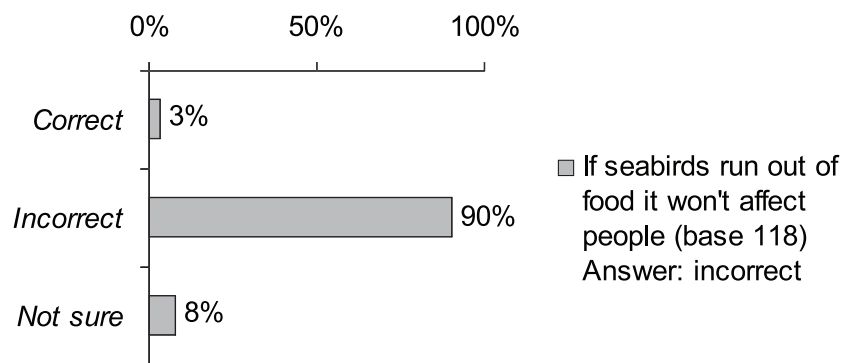
Q10 Please tick whether the statements are correct or incorrect:

10a Sandeels are a key source of food for seabirds.



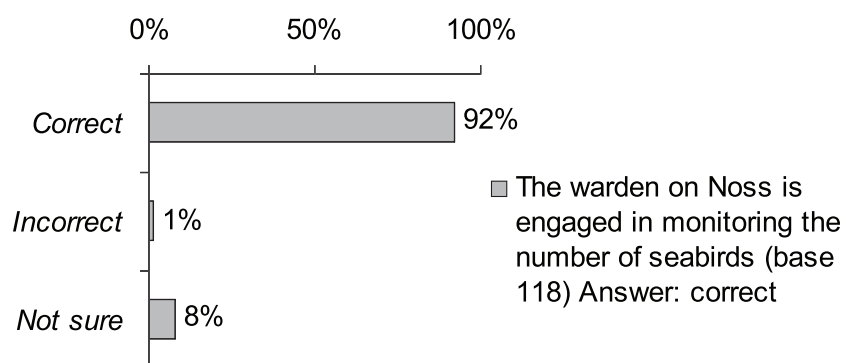
94% of respondents knew that sandeels are a key source of food for seabirds.

10b If seabirds run out of food it won't affect people.



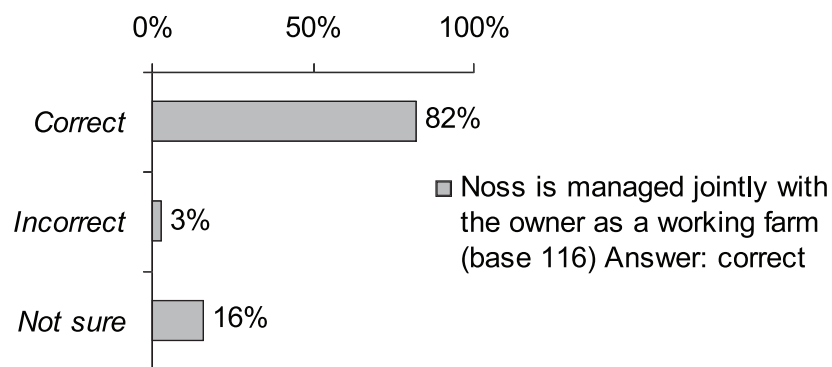
90% of respondents knew that if seabirds run out of food it would affect people.

10c The warden on Noss is engaged in monitoring the number of seabirds.



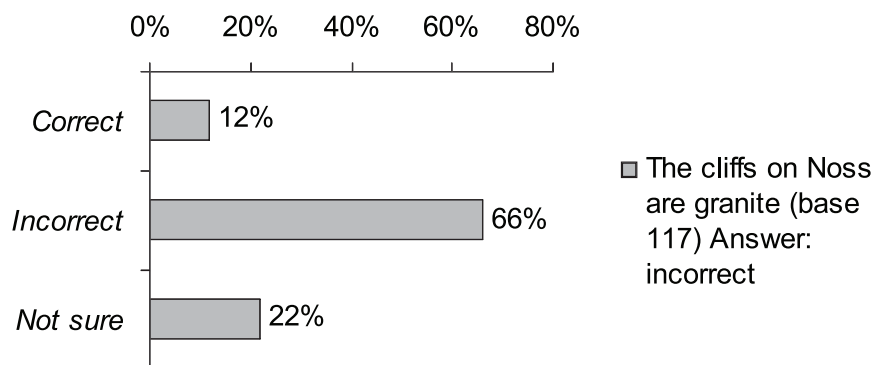
92% of respondents knew that the warden is monitoring the number of seabirds.

10d Noss is managed jointly with the owner as a working farm.



82% of respondents knew that Noss is managed jointly with the owner as a working farm.

10e The cliffs on Noss are granite.

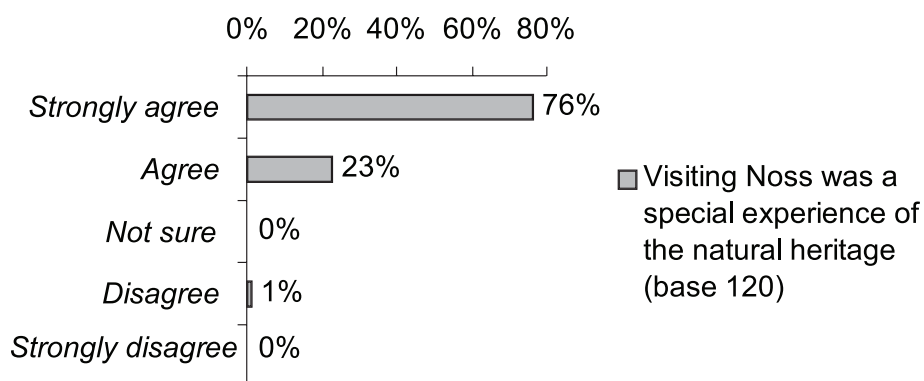


66% of respondents knew that the cliffs on Noss are not granite, 22% were not sure, and 12% incorrectly thought they are granite.

4.3 Changes in attitude and behaviour

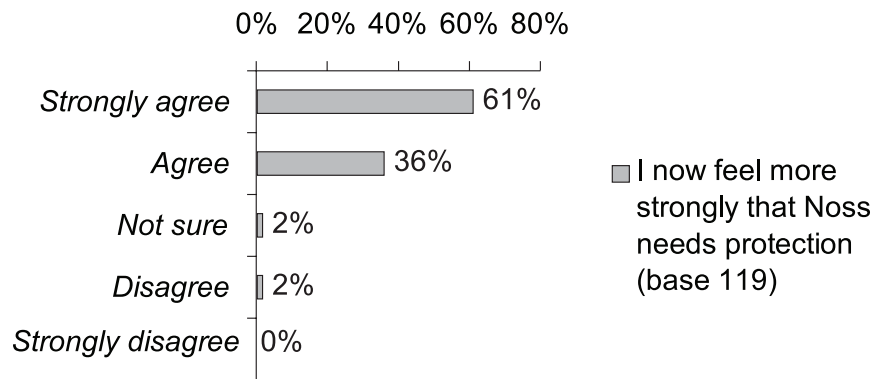
Q12 Please tick how much you agree/disagree with the following statements.

12a Visiting Noss was a special experience of the natural heritage.



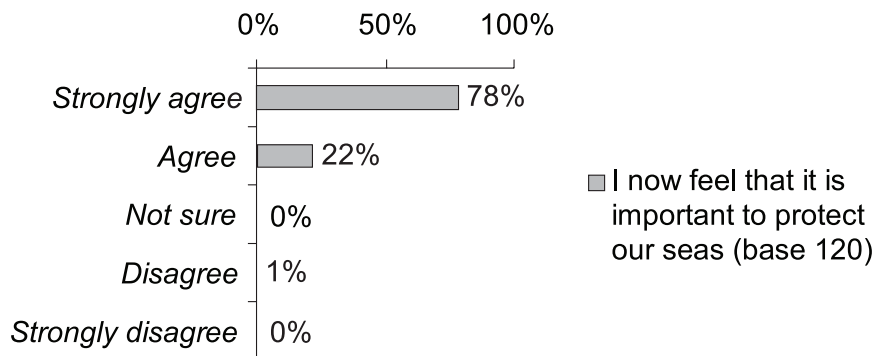
76% of respondents strongly agreed and 23% agreed that visiting Noss was a special experience of the natural heritage.

12b I now feel more strongly that Noss needs protection.



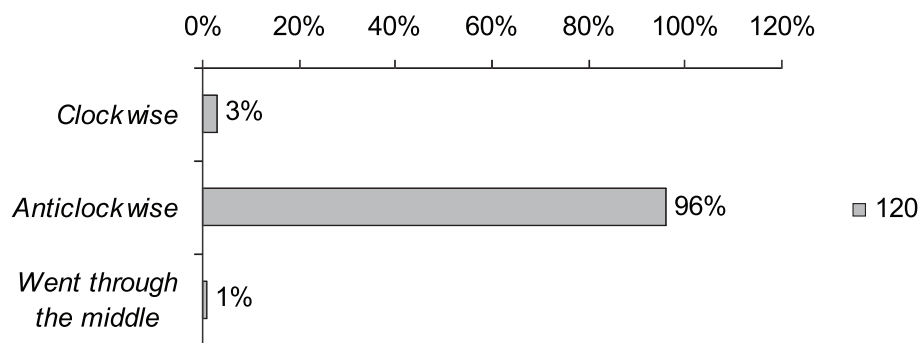
61% of respondents strongly agreed and 36% agreed that they now felt more strongly that Noss needs protection.

12c I now feel that it is important to protect our seas.



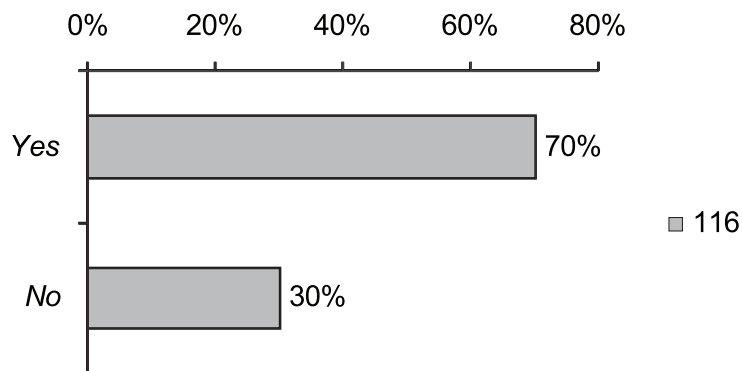
78% strongly agreed and 22% agreed they now feel it is important to protect our seas.

Q13 In which direction did you walk round the island?



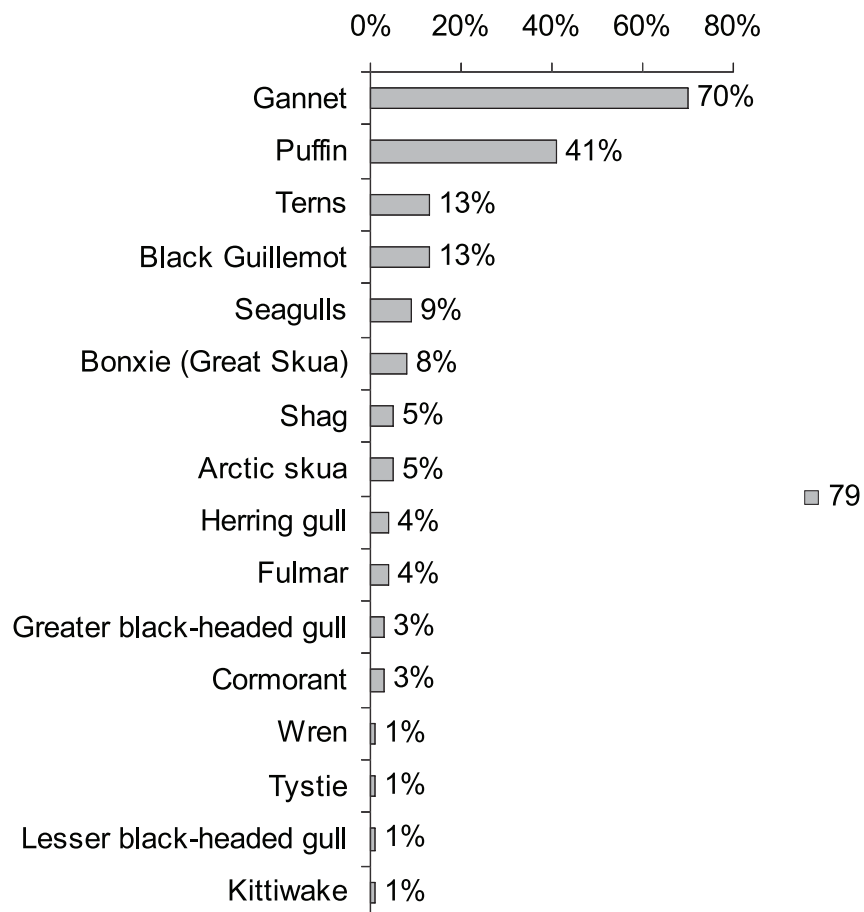
96% of respondents walked the preferred way round the island (anti-clockwise).

Q14a Did you watch how birds feed?



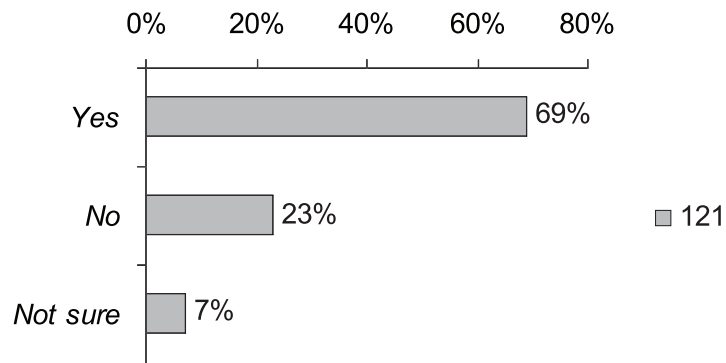
70% of respondents watched how birds feed.

Q14b If yes, which birds did you watch?



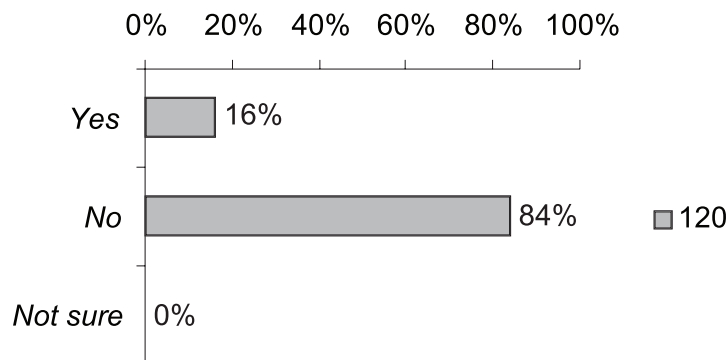
The most frequently watched birds identified by 79 respondents were gannet (70%) and puffin (41%). 14 other types of bird were identified.

Q15 Did you go near any puffin burrows on the cliffs?



69% of respondents said they went near puffin burrows. This contravenes the objective that the majority of visitors will keep away from puffin burrows.

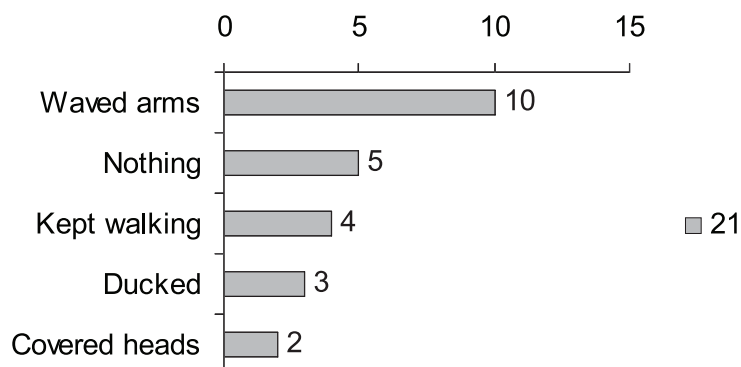
Q16a Were you attacked by a Bonxie?



16% of respondents said that they were attacked by a Bonxie.

Q17 If yes, what did you do?

Note: because of the small numbers the following chart shows number of responses rather than the usual %s.



Of the 21 visitors who answered this question none panicked. **It is deduced that the objective 'the majority of visitors will not panic when attacked by a Bonxie' was met.**

4.4 Results and conclusions

Table 4.1 summarises what visitors gained from the interpretation tested at the Noss Visitor Centre.

Prior knowledge of seabirds

39% of respondents rated their knowledge as '3' (the midpoint on the scale), 26% lower as '2', and 22% higher as '4'. These are higher ratings than respondents gave for knowledge of geology at Knockan, suggesting that visitors to Noss are already knowledgeable about seabirds. This is also reflected in the high proportion, 80%, of visitors to Noss who gave birdwatching as the reason for their visit.

Table 4.1 summarises what visitors gained from the interpretation tested at Noss Visitor Centre.

Table 4.1 Results and conclusions

Theme/objective	Summary of results	Conclusion
		Assumes theme/objective met if over 50% gave correct/appropriate answers
Main message		
Principle theme		
Birds need the seas to survive	Perceived main messages do not reflect the principle theme. However to some extent they reflect aims 1 and 3, and sub themes 1, 3 and 4	Main messages partly reflect aims 1 and 3 and sub themes 1,3 and 4, but not the principle theme
Learning		
Objective 1 (sub theme 1)		
The majority of visitors will learn that Shetland's seas are rich in marine life	93% of respondents knew that the seas around Noss are particularly rich in marine life However only 9% knew why	Learning objective met
Objective 9 (sub theme 2)		
The majority of visitors to Noss will recognise two of the key seabirds that nest on Noss	97% correctly named two birds which nest on Noss	Learning objective met
Objective 5 (sub theme 1)		
The majority of visitors to Noss will learn that sandeels are a key food source for sea birds	94% of respondents knew that sandeels are a key source of food for seabirds	Learning objective met
Objective 18 (sub theme 3)		
The majority of visitors to Noss will understand that if the birds run out of food, so will we	90% of respondents knew that if seabirds run out of food it would affect people	Learning objective met
Objective 24 (sub theme 4)		
The majority of visitors to Noss will learn that the wardens undertake research and monitoring	92% of respondents knew that the warden is monitoring the number of seabirds	Learning objective met

Table 4.1 (continued)

Theme/objective	Summary of results	Conclusion
		Assumes theme/objective met if over 50% gave correct/appropriate answers
Manager question (sub theme 4)	82% of respondents knew that Noss is managed jointly with the owner as a working farm	Sub theme met for part tested
Objective 14 (sub theme 3) The majority of visitors to Noss will learn that the sandstone geology of Noss means there are many cliff edges for seabirds to nest on	66% of respondents knew that the cliffs on Noss are not granite	Part of learning objective that was tested was met
Attitudes		
Objective 35 The majority of visitors to Noss will feel that they have had a special natural heritage experience	99% agreed that visiting Noss was a special experience of the natural heritage	Attitudinal objective met
Objective 36 The majority of visitors to Noss will feel that Noss is special and needs protection	97% of respondents agreed they now felt more strongly that Noss needs protection	Attitudinal objective met
Objective 37 The majority of visitors to Noss will feel that protecting our seas is important for both the seabirds and ourselves	100% agreed they now feel it is important to protect our seas	Attitudinal objective met
Behaviour		
Objectives 27 (and objective 32) The majority of visitors will: walk in an anti-clockwise direction around the island not walk through the centre of the island	96% of respondents walked the preferred way round the island (anti-clockwise)	Behavioural objective met Behavioural objective met
Objective 28 The majority of visitors will not panic when attacked by a Bonxie	Of the 21 visitors who answered this question none panicked	Behavioural objective met
Objective 29 The majority of visitors will watch out for how one bird feeds	70% of respondents watched how birds feed	Behavioural objective met
Objective 33 95% of visitors will spend at least 15 minutes in the visitor centre	12% of visitors had spent over 15 minutes looking at displays	Behavioural objective not met
Objective 36 The majority of visitors will keep away from puffin burrows	69% of respondents said they went near puffin burrows	Behavioural objective not met

It is apparent that the presence of the warden is critical to achieving some of the interpretive objectives, particularly behavioural, as well as for providing information, and in helping to make the visit enjoyable.

Overall, for the interpretation assessed at Noss:

- the principal theme was not reflected by perceived main messages, though 2 aims and 3 sub themes were partially reflected;
- 1 sub theme was met for the part tested;
- 5 learning objectives were met, but one not met for the part tested;
- 3 attitudinal objectives were met;
- 4 behavioural objectives were met, but two were not met.

However there is no way of knowing how much of the knowledge, behaviour and attitudes visitors had before their visit. Visitors showed a relatively high level of bird knowledge at Noss.

5 CONCLUSIONS, ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section draws together conclusions, discusses emerging issues and, where appropriate, makes recommendations under four headings:

- review of the interpretive framework;
- use of the 'check on exit' method;
- what the interpretation achieved;
- how to improve the interpretation.

Recommendations are shown as:

1 **We recommend** that ...

5.1 Review of the interpretive framework

The interpretive framework comprises the aims and objectives from the interpretive plan as itemised in Appendix 1. The term 'theme' as described in Section 2.2, is used to describe an overall topic for interpretation, and 'objective' to describe what visitors will know or do once they have absorbed the relevant interpretation. These terms were used in different ways in the six interpretive plans, and augmented by other terms.

The lower part of the hierarchy has a logical breakdown of the four sub themes into learning objectives. However, the principle theme does not seem to be an amalgam of the four sub themes, and was certainly not the main message received by visitors.

Some of the sub themes are not very clear, and would benefit from being expanded to form a complete sentence. Eg 'the Warden's Report' could become 'The warden's role is important for research and visitor management on the island'.

Visitors' suggested improvements include more information on human history. As there are no objectives listed in the Plan on human/cultural history (although it is interpreted), we suggest that objectives are formulated, so that any future interpretation can be guided by them.

A more precise evaluation of objectives could be made if the objectives were expressed in a measurable form than "Over 50% of visitors will ..."

1 **We recommend** that the interpretive framework is revisited to: review the principle theme, clarify the sub themes by writing them as complete sentences, introduce a sub theme to cover human/cultural history, and revise the objectives so that they are SMART.

The following guidelines should help this process.

Guidelines to develop a logical interpretive hierarchy

Themes and objectives should focus on unique, significant aspects of the site.

- 1 Identify key issues/aims of the site, highlighting those that can be addressed by good interpretation.
- 2 Identify key themes.

These represent the specific messages that we want visitors to take away with them. A theme should be written as a complete sentence with one main idea, and reflect the overall purpose of the facility.

- 3 Define objectives arising from key issues/aims and themes.

These can be divided into three categories:

- learning objectives – what we want visitors to know;
- emotional/attitudinal objectives – what we want visitors to feel;
- behavioural objectives – what we want visitors to do.

Objectives should be SMART, ie specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timetabled.

For further information see:

Veverka, J.A. (1994). *Interpretive Master Planning*. Falcon.

Carter, J. (Ed) (1997). *A Sense of Place*. Tourism and Environment Initiative.

5.2 Use of the 'check on exit' method

The need to use self-completion questionnaires was not ideal since a few questionnaires did not have all questions answered. Also the warden had to check people did not go back into the centre to 'find the answers'.

Checking knowledge and attitudes on exit from the visitor centre does not show how much was known prior to the visit. An attempt to relate learning to perceived level of knowledge prior to the visit did not yield significant results. This means that, while the objectives were clearly well-met at Noss, it is not possible to conclude how much is attributable to the interpretation. However, for a site with relatively low numbers of visitors the 'before/after' method of checking knowledge and attitudes before and after the visit would not be practicable.

5.3 What the interpretation achieved

Table 5.1 What the interpretation achieved

	No. in plan	No. tested	Results
Perceived main message	1 principle theme 2 aims 4 sub themes	All with one question	Principle theme not reflected by perceived main messages (but aims 1, 3 & sub themes 1, 3, & 4 reflected)
Aims	4 aims		
Learning	4 sub themes 26 objectives	1 6	1 met for the part tested 5 met, one not met for the part tested
Attitudes	5 objectives	3	3 met, two not met
Behaviour	8 objectives	6	4 met, two not met
Conclusions	Perceived main messages did not reflect principle theme, though partially reflected 2 aims and 3 sub themes. 1 sub theme met for part tested, 5 of 6 learning objectives tested were met, 3 of 5 attitudinal objectives tested were met, and 4 of 6 behavioural objectives tested were met.		

It is apparent that the presence of the warden is critical to achieving some of the interpretive objectives, particularly behavioural, as well as for providing information, and in helping to make the visit enjoyable.

Unfortunately with this method of evaluation there is no way to identify what people knew before they visited Noss. For some questions it was probably straightforward to guess the right answer.

5.4 How to improve the interpretation

Stress the importance of avoiding going near puffin burrows

As the behavioural objective to 'avoid going near puffin burrows' was not met by 69% of respondents, it is suggested that this point be reinforced to visitors on the map panel and near to the 'Best Nest' panel. It could also be reinforced by the warden during the introductory talk and highlighted along the island path and in the new leaflet.

- 2 **We recommend** that the need to 'avoid going near the puffin burrows' is reinforced in the Warden's talk and highlighted in the map in the exhibition, in the new leaflet and along the island path in the form of a sign.

Increase time spent in the visitor centre by providing more information

The second behavioural objective, which was not met, stated that '95% of visitors will spend at least 15 minutes in the visitor centre' (interpreted as the time spent looking at displays). The survey reveals that only 12% of visitors spent more than 15 minutes looking at the displays in the centre, which suggests that the visitors are more eager to get out and explore the island and see the birdlife, than read about it.

The other explanation could be that the interpretation is not relevant to what visitors want to find out, so they lose interest. This could be explained by the survey results, which show that the main thing visitors hoped to find at the visitor centre was information on the best places to see birds (58%), and on wildlife (32%). Information on cultural history (17%) and recent sightings of birds (12%) were also quoted, but to a lesser extent.

The demand for information is illustrated by the high percentage of visitors referring to the map and introductory panel (94%), which provide orientation and highlight the best places to visit on the island, as opposed to those looking at the Exhibition (85%). Suggestions for improvement include more information on bird identification (14% of respondents) and local history (10%).

Information on the island and viewing birds is provided by the Welcome to Noss panel and map.

- 3 **We recommend** that information is augmented in the exhibition and/or the new leaflet. For example: include a wipe board listing up-to-date sightings of birds, other events, etc. Include in the leaflet a map showing key sites to view sealife and birds, with a guide to help bird identification.
- 4 **We recommend** that a reference point or library is introduced in the exhibition area to provide further information on bird identification, wildlife and local history.
- 5 **We also recommend**, following our visit and discussions with the Area Officer, that there should be reference and directions to the Shetland Pony stud interpretation in the steading buildings next to the visitor centre. This should be flagged up in the exhibition area/reference point, with clear signage from the outside of the visitor centre round to the steading.

6 REFERENCES

See the report SNH 2002 for a comprehensive list of source material, references and contacts made for the six surveys.

Muschamp, H. (1998). Noss Interpretive Plan.

SNH (2002). Evaluation of interpretation at six visitor centres.

Appendix 1 Themes, objectives and interpretation elements

Noss Visitor Centre
Contact Simon Smith, Area Officer, 01595 693345.
Managed by SNH.
Whole site comprises Island of Noss, NNR, owned by private estate, managed jointly with SNH as working farm.
Visitor centre comprises Exhibition, toilet.
Interpretive plan Hugh Muschamp. 1998. <i>Noss Visitor Centre Interpretation Plan</i> .
Aims of visitor centre
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Raise awareness of the natural heritage of Noss and the waters surrounding it. 2 Increase enjoyment of visitors to the reserve. 3 Increase the value of the reserve as an educational tool. 4 Raise awareness of the role of Scottish Natural Heritage its aims and objectives.
Theme
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Birds need the seas to survive.
Sub themes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Shetland's seas are rich in marine life. 2 Leave the sea to nest on the land. 3 Whose food is it anyway? 4 The Warden's Report.
Objectives
<i>Learning objectives</i>
The majority of visitors to Noss will learn:
Sub theme 1
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 That the seas around Shetland are rich in marine life. 2 That these rich seas have a high biomass which includes great shoals of fish. 3 That the sea birds are here because of the highly productive seas. 4 That many species of seabird spend the majority of the year at sea. 5 That sandeels are a key food source for sea birds. 6 One other sea fish and the sea bird species that eats it. 7 Two things that a skua will eat.
Sub theme 2
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8 Where two species of sea bird spend the winter. 9 Recognise two of the key seabirds that nest on Noss. 10 Where two species of sea bird nest. 11 That shags or gannets sometimes use unusual nesting materials. 12 Identify either the difference between common and grey seals or porpoise and dolphin. 13 The seabirds are on Noss because of the rich seas next to good nesting sites. 14 The sandstone geology of Noss means that there are many cliff ledges for seabirds to nest on.

Sub theme 3

- 15 Remember three things that eat sandeels.
- 16 Explain how one bird has been affected by changes in commercial fishing practices.
- 17 The island is part of a giant marine food chain.
- 18 Understand that if the birds run out of food, so will we.
- 19 Explain the consequences of this for people's food supply.

Sub theme 4

- 20 That the wardens live on Noss from May–September.
- 21 That the house has no mains electricity.
- 22 To use less water in the toilet by flushing less.
- 23 That Noss sheep eat seaweed.
- 24 That the wardens undertake research and monitoring.
- 25 That monitoring of sea birds helps us to assess the state of our seas.
- 26 Understand that we share a food resource with the birds.

Behavioural objectives

The majority of visitors will:

- 27 Walk in an anti-clockwise direction around the island.
- 28 Not panic when attacked by a Bonxie.
- 29 Watch out for how one bird feeds.
- 30 Keep away from puffin burrows.
- 31 Respect the wardens' privacy.

95% of visitors to Noss will:

- 32 Not walk through the centre of the island.
- 33 Spend at least 15 minutes in the visitor centre.

A quarter of visitors to Noss will:

- 34 Look at the library.

Emotional objectives

The majority of visitors will:

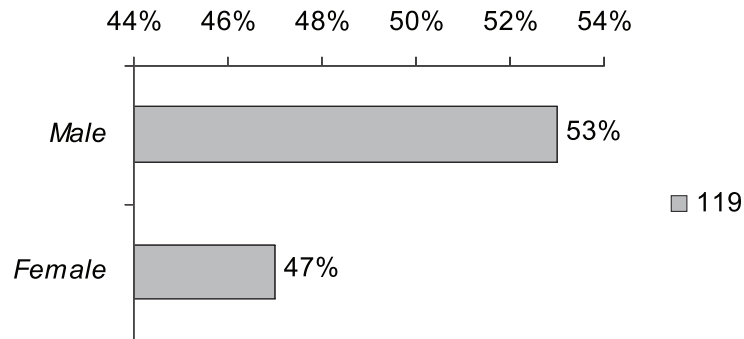
- 35 Feel that they have had a special natural heritage experience.
- 36 Feel that Noss is special and needs protection.
- 37 Feel that protecting our seas is important for both the seabirds and ourselves.
- 38 Have an increased interest in sea birds.
- 39 Have respect for the birds they have encountered at very close quarters.

SNH funded interpretive materials developed by Selkie Associates, installed 1999.		
Interpretation comprises	Description	Themes/objectives addressed
'Welcome to Noss' panel	Map and symbols, walks, highlights best places to view, where not to go	Orientation Objectives 27, 32 (behavioural)
'On dry land' panel	People living and farming on Noss from past to present	<i>Not listed in interpretive plan objectives</i>
'The Sandeel Story' panel	Effect of sandeels on bird numbers, fishing industry	Sub theme 3 Objectives 15–19
'The Fishing' panel	History of fishing in Shetland, importance to economy	<i>Not listed in interpretive plan objectives</i>
'Rich pickings' panel	Richness of seas around Shetland, methods of catching fish	Sub theme 1 Objectives 1, 5, 6, 7
'The Food Maze' panel	At child's height Who eats who by following the line	Sub theme 1 Objectives 5–7
'The Best Nest' panel	Different birds nest in different sites	Sub theme 2 Objectives 9, 10, 11
'The Problem with Eggs' panel	Birds spend most time at sea, but come to land to nest – why Noss?; wintering grounds	Sub theme 1 Objective 4 Sub theme 2 Objectives 8, 13, 14
'Noss News' panel	At child's height Classified pages – lonely hearts (bird spp.), property (nest sites)	Sub theme 2
'Shetland's Wealth' panel	Wealth in sea, not land, supporting birds, seals, porpoises, fishermen (plankton)	Sub theme 1 Objectives 1–3
'The Green Sea' panel	Mixing of waters/currents vital for rich marine life	Sub theme 1 Objective 1
Activity boxes, feelie holes interactives	Different bird species	Sub theme 2 Objectives 9, 12
Hands-on pull-out	Different species	As above
Touch exhibits	Bird remain, nesting materials, etc to touch	As above
Warden's talks	Introductory talk on arrival To welcome, for orientation, Health & Safety advice, where not/to go, SNH as co-manager with owner, practical issues Further feedback on visitors' return to boat	Orientation Sub theme 4 Some of Objectives 20, 24, others depending on visitor
Other interpretation		
Interpretive panels in old Pony Stud buildings adjoining VC. Panels installed by Shetland Amenity Trust, several years ago, focussing on use of Noss to breed Shetland Ponies for coalmines in Northern England by Lord Londonderry. Also panels on birdlife, etc of Noss, which are outdated. Leaflet – current SNH leaflet on Noss to be reviewed this year.		

Appendix 2 Details of visitor characteristics

Sex

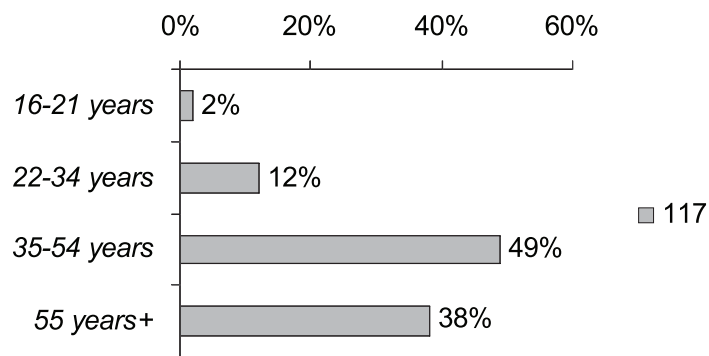
Q23 Are you?



At 53% there was a slight predominance of male respondents.

Age

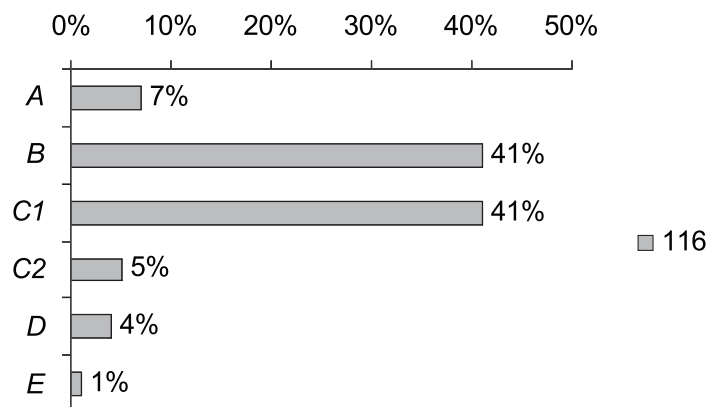
Q24 Your age band?



49% of respondents were aged between 35–54, 38% over 55, and 12% 22–34.

Occupational group

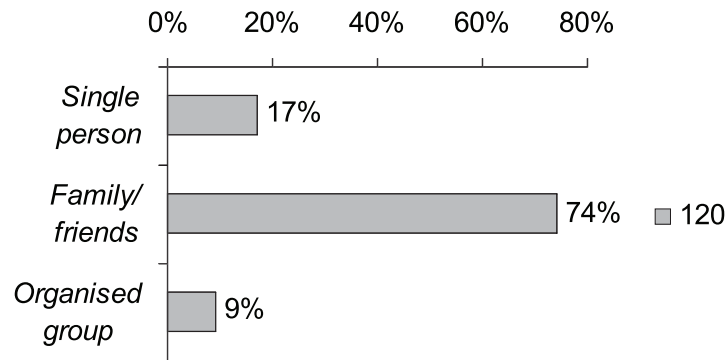
Q25 Your occupation?



82% of respondents were from occupational groups B and C1.

Type of group

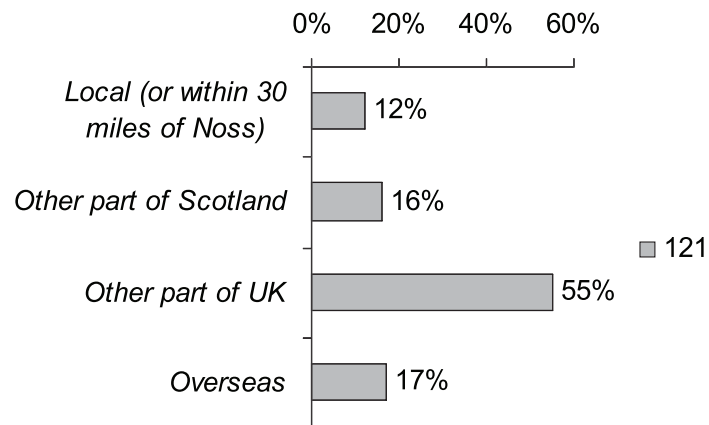
Q26 Type of group?



74% of respondents visited with family/friends.

Place of residence

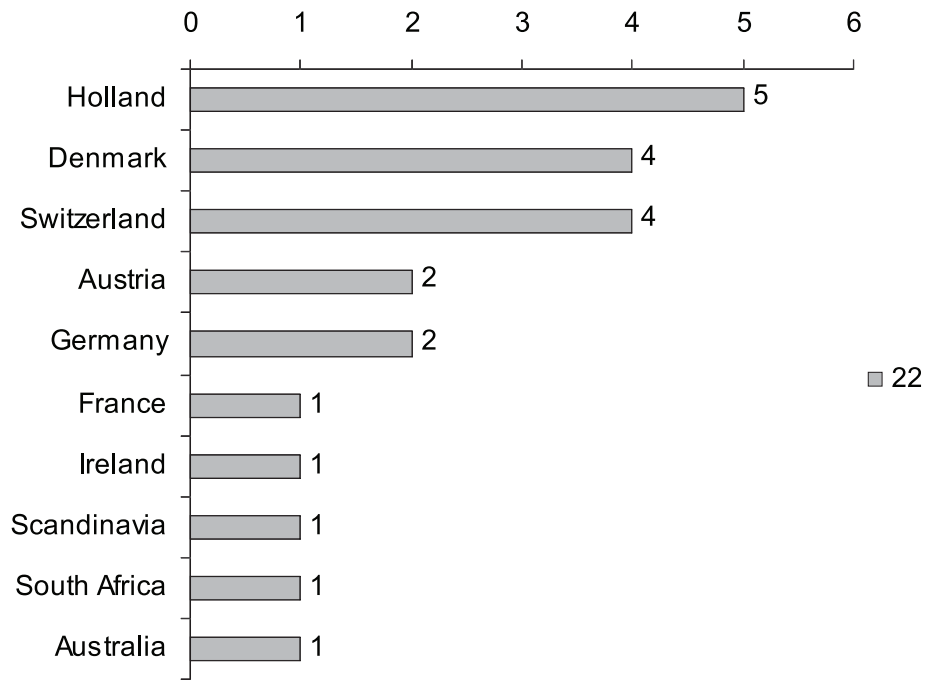
Q27 Place of residence?



55% of respondents came from other parts of the UK, 17% from overseas, 16% from other parts of Scotland and 12% from within 30 miles.

Q27a Breakdown for overseas visitors.

Note: because of the small numbers the following chart shows number of responses rather than the usual %s.

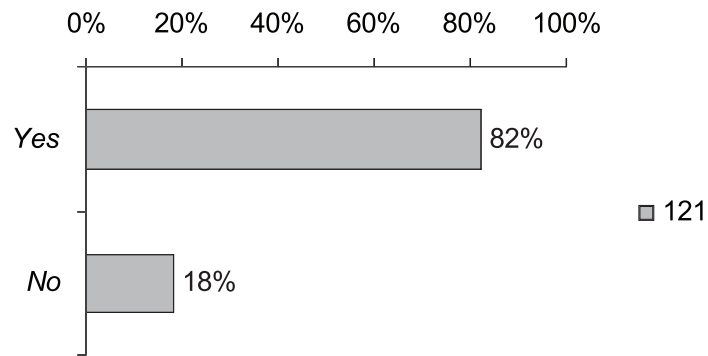


Of the 22 foreign visitors: five were from Holland, four from Denmark, and four from Sweden.

Appendix 3 Details about use of the visitor centre

Previous visits to the Exhibition

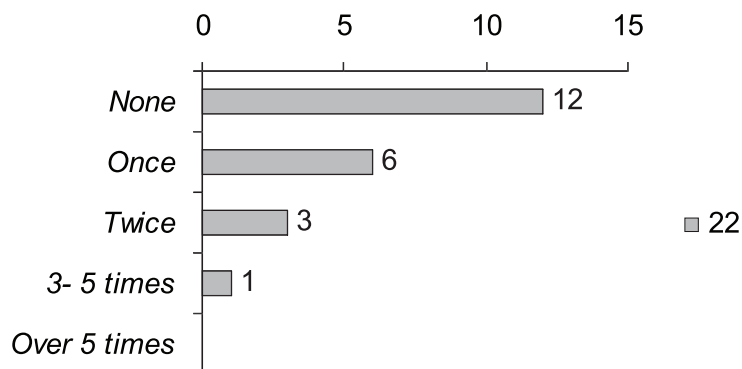
Q1 Was this your first visit to Noss?



For 82% of respondents it was their first visit to Noss.

Q2 If No, how many times have you visited Noss in the past year?

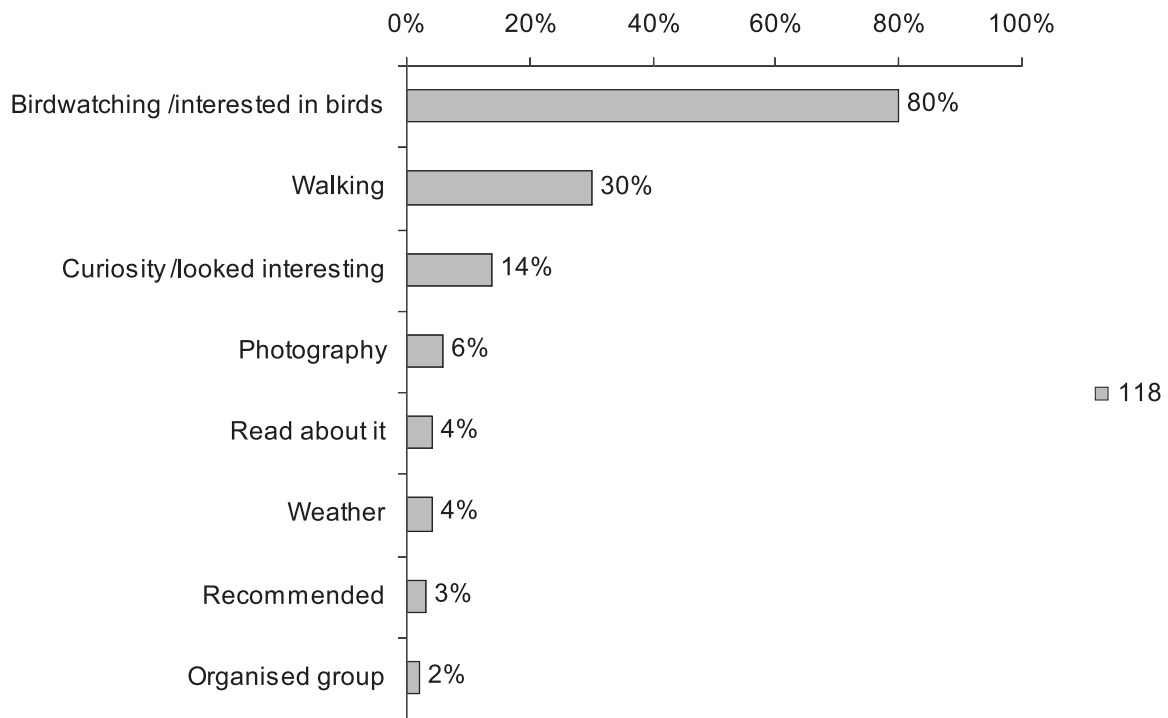
Note: because of the small numbers the following chart shows number of responses rather than the usual %.



Out of the 22 respondents who had visited Noss before 12 had not visited in the past year, six had visited once, and three twice.

Reasons for visiting the Exhibition

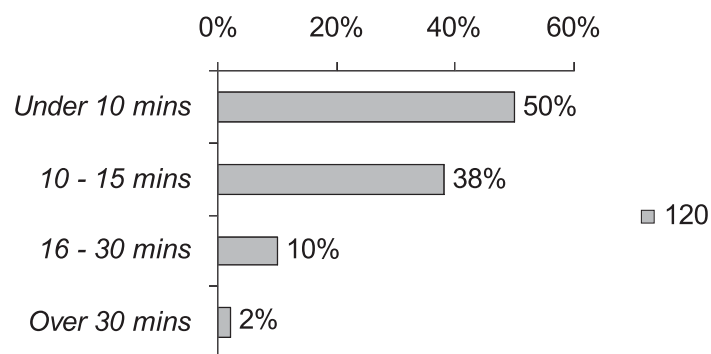
Q4 What were the reasons for your visit to Noss today?



The main reasons respondents gave for visiting Noss were: birdwatching (80%), walking (30%), and curiosity (14%).

Time spent

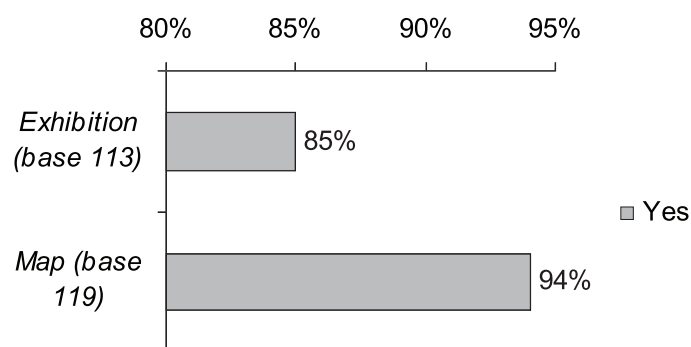
Q3 How long have you spent looking at the displays in the visitor centre today?



50% of respondents had spent under 10 minutes looking at the displays, and 38% had spent 10–15 minutes. This means **the objective '95% of visitors will spend at least 15 minutes in the visitor centre' was not met**. Visitors are requested to assemble in the visitor centre on disembarking and embarking, so the amount of time actually spent in the visitor centre is longer. For this reason, the question was framed around the time spent looking at displays and the objective is taken to imply time looking at displays.

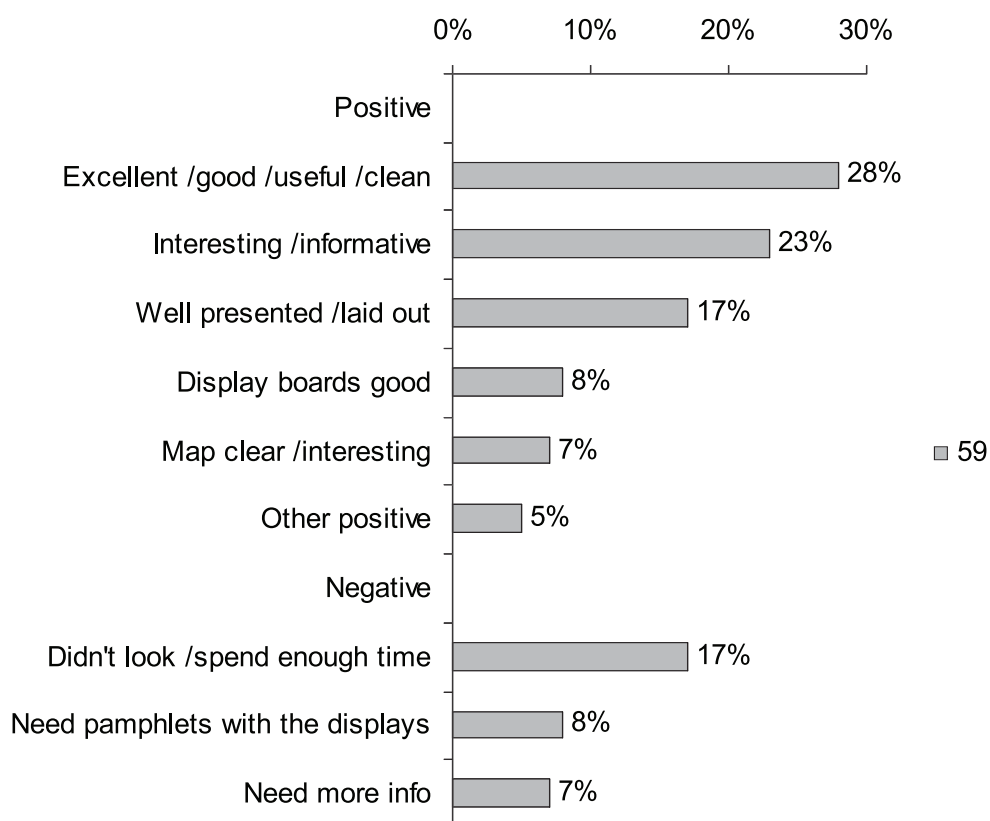
Parts of the Exhibition used

Q7 Which parts of the visitor centre did you look at or use today?



94% of respondents said they looked at the map, and 85% the Exhibition.

Q7a Would you like to comment on any of the displays in the Exhibition?

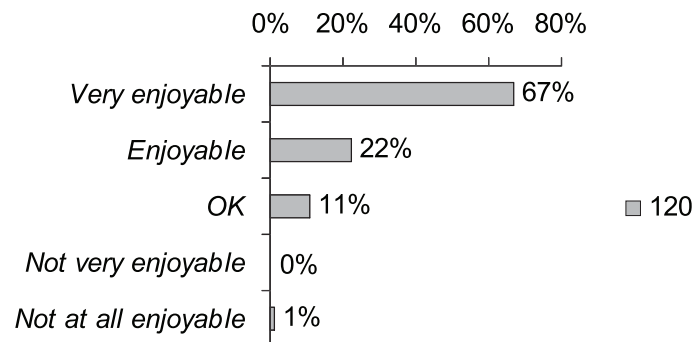


59 respondents commented on the Exhibition. The vast majority of comments were positive, including: excellent (28%), interesting (23%) and well-presented (17%). 17% said they didn't look, or didn't spend enough time to comment.

Appendix 4 Details of satisfaction and improvements

Satisfaction with visit

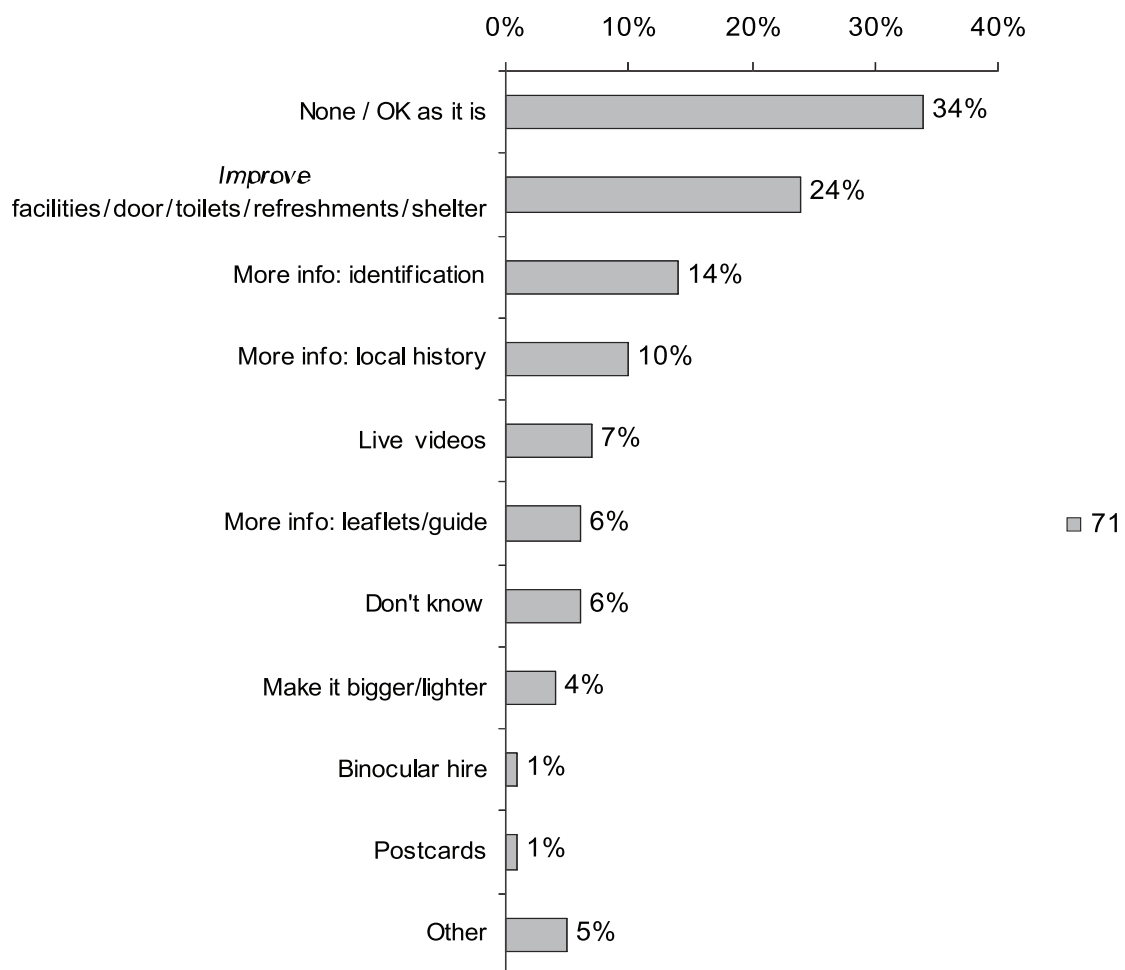
Q19 How would you rate your experience of visiting Noss Visitor Centre today from very enjoyable to not at all enjoyable?



67% of respondents said their visit was very enjoyable, and 22% enjoyable. 11% said it was OK.

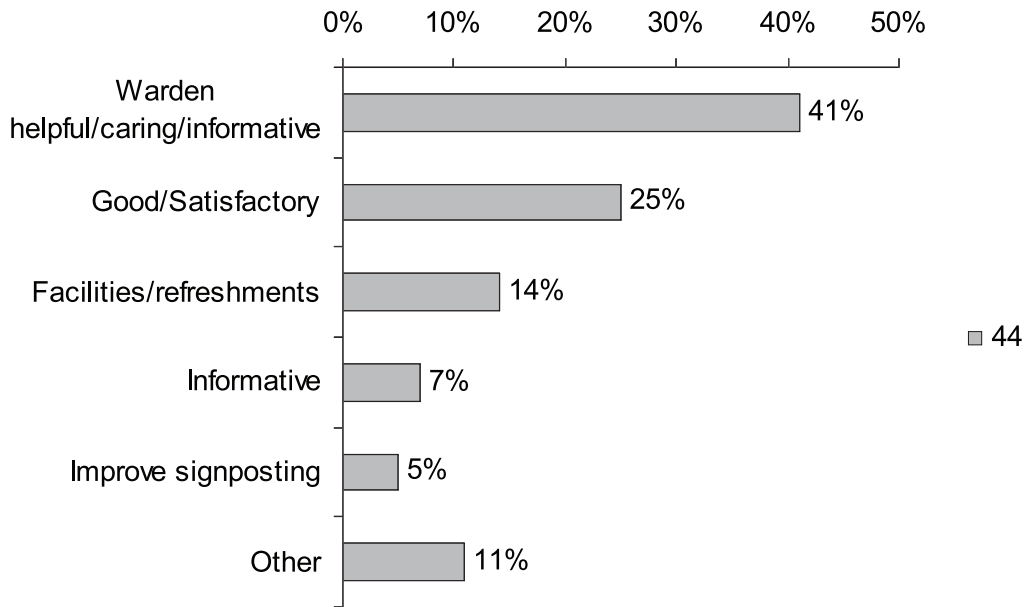
Improvements

Q20 Can you suggest any ways in which we can improve the visitor centre?



34% of the 71 respondents to this question said no improvements are needed to the visitor centre. The main suggested improvements were: improvements to the general facilities (24%), more information on identifying birds (14%) and more information on local history (10%). These and the other suggestions made should be considered for future planning.

Q21 Do you have any further comments you would like to make about Noss Visitor Centre?

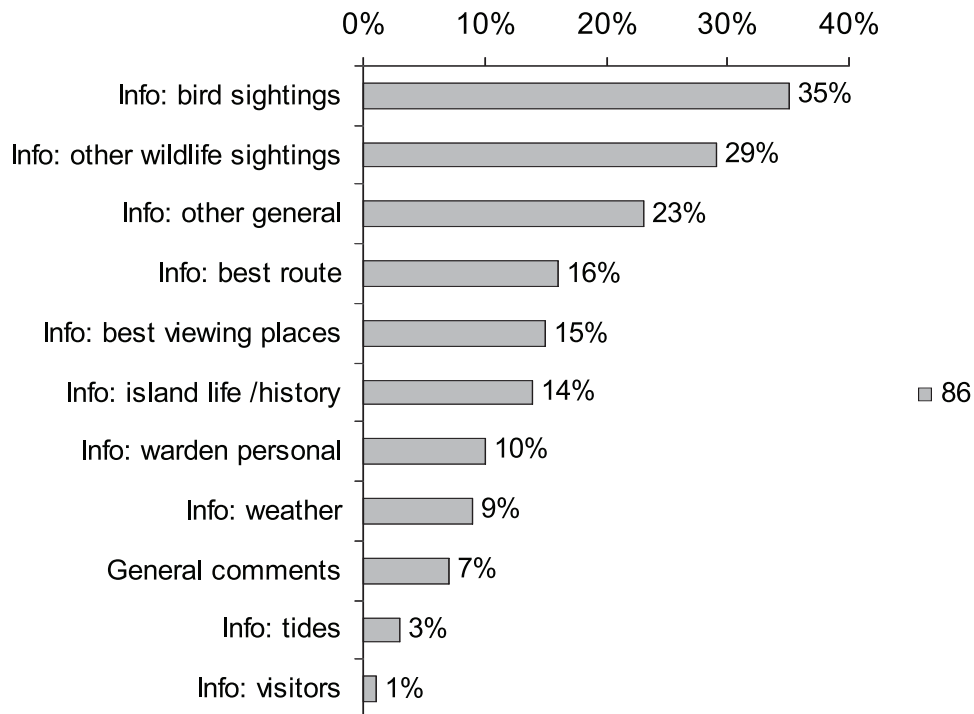


44 respondents made further comments, of which most were positive: the warden is helpful (41%), it's good (25%). On the negative side 14% suggested improved facilities/refreshments are needed.

Appendix 5 Details of other feedback

Warden conversations

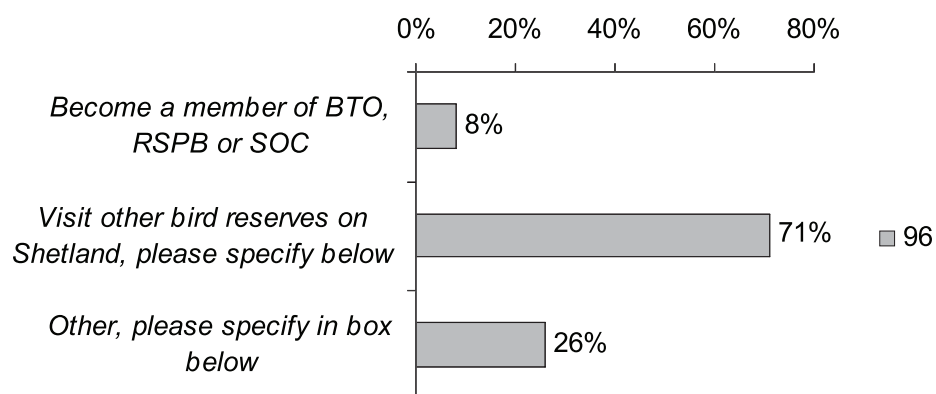
Q11 If you spoke to the warden outwith the introductory talk, what did he/she tell you about?



The 86 respondents to this question nearly all identified information the Warden gave them. The main types of information were: bird sightings (35%), other wildlife sightings (29%), general information (23%), best route to take (16%), best viewing places (15%), and island life/history.

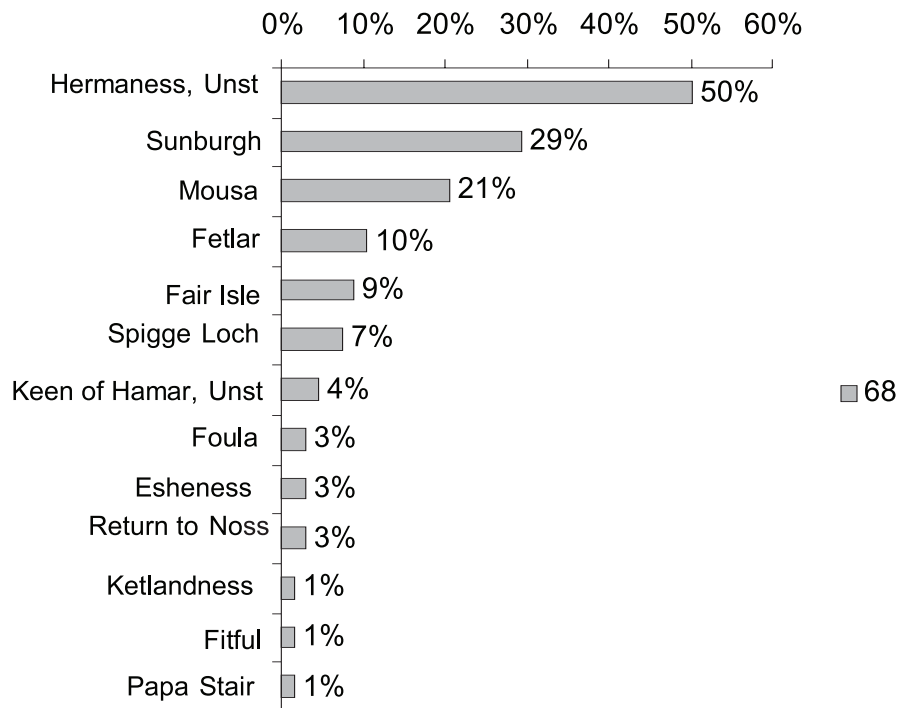
Questions requested by SNH/the site manager

Q22 Which of the following are you likely to do after your visit to Ness ...



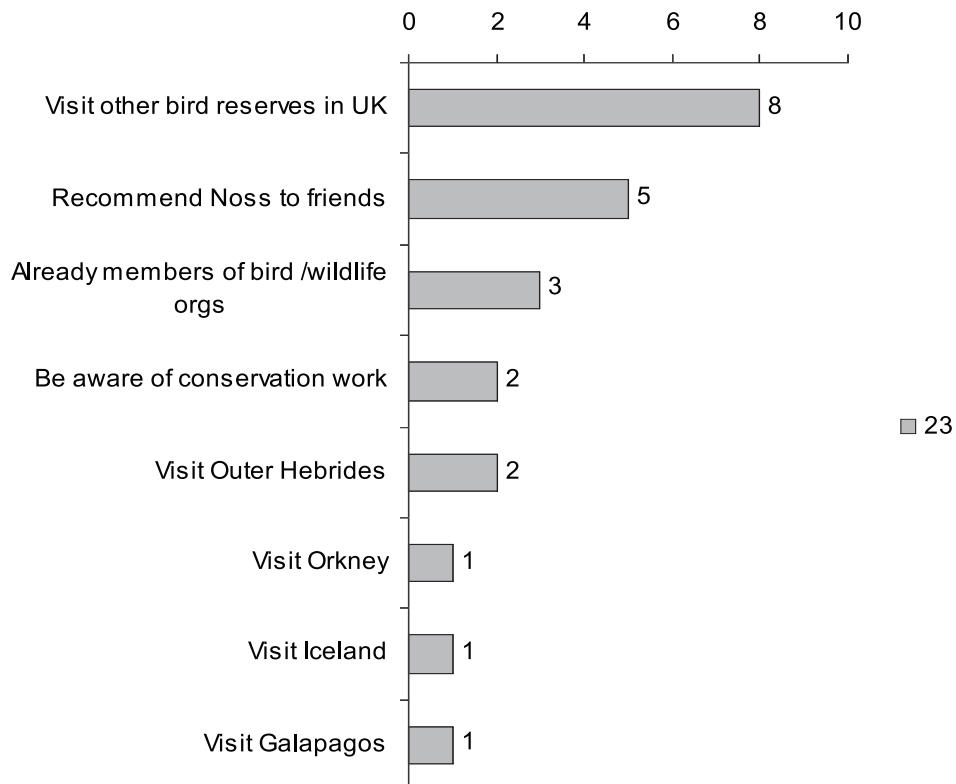
71% of respondents said they would be likely to visit other bird reserves on Shetland. Three respondents said they are already members of bird/wildlife organisations (see Q22c).

Q22a Other bird reserves on Shetland likely to visit.



The main ones they would be likely to visit were: Hermaness (50%), Sumburgh Head (29%), and Mousa (21%).

Q22c Other things likely to do after this visit.



23 respondents suggested other things they were likely to do after their visit, the main ones being: visit other bird reserves in the UK (8), recommend Noss to friends (5).

Q6 Did you hope to find out anything new at Noss Visitor Centre today?

Yes No

If Yes, what did you hope to find out?

Q7 Which parts of the Visitor Centre did you look at or use today?

	Yes	No	Not sure
Exhibition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Map	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Would you like to comment on any of the displays in the Exhibition?

For the next few questions, please tick whether you think the statements are correct or incorrect and then answer the associated question. If you're not sure whether the statement is correct or incorrect, please tick 'Not sure' .

Q8 The seas around Noss are particularly rich in marine life?

Correct Incorrect Not sure

Do you know why?

Q9 Can you name two species of seabird which nest on Noss?

Q10

	Correct	Incorrect	Not sure
Sandeels are a key source of food for seabirds...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If seabirds run out of food it won't affect people...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The warden on Noss is engaged in monitoring the number of seabirds...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Noss is managed jointly with the owner as a working farm	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The cliffs on Noss are granite	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q11 If you spoke to the warden outwith the introductory talk, what did he/she tell you about?

Q12 Please tick how much you agree/disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Visiting Noss was a special experience of the natural heritage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I now feel more strongly that Noss needs protection	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I now feel that it is important to protect our seas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q13 In which direction did you walk round the island?

- Clockwise Anticlockwise Went through the middle

Q14 Did you watch how birds feed?

- Yes No

If Yes, which bird did you watch?

Q15 Did you go near any puffin burrows on the cliffs?

- Yes No Not sure

Q16 Were you attacked by a Bonxie?

- Yes No Not sure

Q26 Type of group?
 Single person Family/ friends Organised group e.g
coach party

Q27 Place of residence?
 Local (or within
30 miles of
Noss) Other part of
Scotland Other part of UK Overseas,
please write in
country below

If you would like to enter the prize draw, please give your telephone number with full dialling code or your e-mail address.

Thank you for spending time completing this questionnaire. Now please return the completed questionnaire to the person who gave it to you or post it in the reply-paid envelope enclosed.

Staff use:-----

Questionnaire number

A B C1 C2 D E