

North Devon Coast National Landscape

‘Finding Nature’s Footprints’

Final Evaluation Report, Mar ‘26



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1.0 Introduction

This report provides a final evaluation of the 'Finding Nature's Footprints' project which has been delivered by the North Devon Coast National Landscape, and funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the National Landscape and local partners.

The report will:

- provide a brief overview of the project,
- explain the purpose and approach of the evaluation,
- provide a summary of the outputs and outcomes achieved against the original project targets.
- discuss the challenges, strengths and weaknesses of the project,
- provide recommendations for future initiatives

2.0 Finding Nature's Footprints Project Overview

Finding Nature's Footprints (FNF) was a three-year project funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) and local partners and delivered by the North Devon Coast National Landscape (NDCNL) (formerly the North Devon Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) and other local delivery partners. The project began in June 2022 and was due to finish in September 2025, but was later extended for six months to March 2026.

The aims of the project as stated in the NLHF application were:

1. to learn more about our natural heritage on the ground and actions needed to conserve, restore, create and improve habitats through surveys, monitoring, mapping and recording habitats and species to produce plans for villages, communities, features or publicly accessible sites.
2. to upskill staff, partner organisations, project volunteers and the general public in ecological skills, practical conservation and connecting with nature.
3. to support local people and visitors to take actions for nature and for people to deliver priorities in their local plans and the Devon strategies.
4. to reach and engage with new audiences for the National Landscape through: targeting schools and groups from disadvantaged communities; offering activities for people receiving green prescriptions; customised activities for young people; delivering activities with Sunrise Diversity to reach individuals with diverse identities and differing cultural and social needs.
5. to offer a range of methods to help people connect with our natural heritage - from training sessions and practical tasks to arts and celebration

Project Activities

Over the three and a half years of the project, it has successfully completed the following activities:

- Recruited project staff, including a project co-ordinator and an annual project assistant and their replacements.
- Trained National Landscape staff, partners and community volunteers in ecological skills, such as survey techniques and species identification and practical conservation / nature restoration skills.
- Undertaken habitat and species surveys of County Wildlife Sites (CWS) and other publicly accessible sites and coastal habitats.
- Run an outdoor arts programme for primary school children to connect with priority habitats in the National Landscape – called ‘Where the River meets the Sea’ and ‘Flights of Fancy’ over two years.
- Started an Environment Group for 15-25 year olds
- Run a series of events through Sunrise Diversity to engage with the diverse communities of North Devon, including migrants, asylum seekers, people of colour and the LGBTQ+ community.
- Supported the formation and continuing activities of a community-based environmental group - Hartland Nature Society
- Supported the continuing development of other local environmental groups, such as CoastWise, Friends of Hillborough, Ilfracombe U3A Natural World Group.
- Worked with other local environmental groups such as Braunton Countryside Centre, and Northam Burrows Country Park to deliver activities.
- Organised public bioblitzes on various sites across the National Landscape, including an Academy Bioblitz catering for local schools.
- Facilitated a range of public engagement and citizen science activities and events to identify, record, enjoy and learn about the varied flora and fauna of the range of habitats and landscapes of the North Devon Coast
- Supported practical nature restoration through an initiative to restore species-rich grassland, in partnership with the National Trust
- Worked with Social Prescribers and Northam Burrows Rangers to deliver wellbeing walks.

Staffing

The project was run by a small project team, comprising of:

Project Co-ordinator 1.0 fte	Joe Newbury (Aug 22 – Jan 24) Jamie Buxton-Gould (Mar 24 - Jan 25) Jess Giblett (Apr 25 – Mar 26)
Coastal Officer 0.1 fte	Laura Carolan (Jun 22 – Jul 25)
Project Assistant / Intern 1.0 fte	Lowena Arnold (Oct 22 – Oct 23) Evie Giblett (Oct 23 – Oct 24) Jamie Owen (Oct 24 – Oct 25)

Additional support for line management, finance, administration, communication and specialist advice has been provided by the National Landscape core team.

The project has also worked extensively with expert and community volunteers and local partners to organise and deliver project activities, including the Devon Biodiversity Record Centre (Devon Wildlife Trust), the National Trust, Northam

Burrows Country Park, North Devon Voluntary Services, Red Herring Productions, Sunrise Diversity, and Coastwise North Devon.

Funding

The project was joint funded by the National Heritage Lottery Fund, the North Devon Coast National Landscape, The National Trust and three local authorities - North Devon Council, Torridge District Council and Devon County Council

<i>Project Financial Breakdown 22-25</i>	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	
INCOME	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
NLHF	83,000	83,000	82,000	248,000
NDCNL	10,000	8000	8,000	26,000¹
National Trust	2000	2000	2000	6000
NDC	2000	2000	2000	6000
TDC	2000	2000	2000	6000
DCC Environment	3,000	0	0	3,000
Total	102000	97000	96000	295,000

The project was due to end in September 2025, but received a six-month extension until March 2026.

The National Landscape covers 171 sq kilometres, straddling a long section of North Devon Coast from Welcombe and the Hartland Peninsula in the West, to Combe Martin and Exmoor in the East. It encompasses a variety of priority habitats, ranging from extensive sand dune systems, salt marshes, coastal cliffs, rocky coves, wooded woodland, rhos pasture, and species-rich grasslands, and includes the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve centred on Braunton Burrows.

¹ An extra £5,000 of match funding from the NDCNL was added to cover the final six months extension



3.0 Evaluation

CLARITY CIC was appointed as an evaluation partner to advise the project team on their evaluation processes and to undertake an independent evaluation of the Finding Nature’s Footprints project after the first year and at the end of the project. The evaluation was designed as an iterative and developmental evaluation to allow for project adaptation to changing circumstances, policy context and community response/engagement.

The first stage was to provide training and support to the project team to strengthen project evaluation, particularly of qualitative data. An evaluation framework was developed, and a half day training workshop was provided on the principles and practice of evaluation. Various methods of collecting data were discussed and models provided for:

- Event feedback
- Pre- and post- training feedback
- Volunteer survey forms (on-line and face-to-face)
- School feedback forms

At the end of the first full-year of the project, an interim evaluation was carried out to help the NDCNL team review the project’s progress and to identify potential courses of action to improve delivery. This report records the findings from the final evaluation carried out in Jan-Mar 2026.

The Final Evaluation involved:

- Review of management and monitoring data

- Review of delivery partners' reports
- Review of minutes from Project Steering Group meetings
- Analysis of feedback from public events and training events
- Analysis of feedback from on-line surveys with volunteers and project participants
- Interviews with a selection of volunteers and project supporters
- Interviews with key project partners



Infographic produced by Finding Nature's Footprints Team highlighting the main achievements for the 2nd Year

4.0 Key Findings

The following sections summarise how the project has performed against its original aims and objectives. Each of the strands of activity have been rated against their proposed final target as follows:

	> 150%	Well Above Target
	100 – 150%	Above Target
	100%	On Target
	50 – 99%	Below Target
	< 50%	Well Below Target

4.1 Outcomes for Nature – Wildlife and Habitat Surveys

One of the key objectives of the project was to learn more about the natural heritage of the NDCNL by undertaking surveys and mapping work particularly in County Wildlife Sites (CWS) and publicly accessible sites within the National Landscape, in order to create a baseline for future surveys and restoration work, and to inform the National Landscape Nature Recovery Priorities.

Over the three years of the project 84 surveys and wildlife audits were carried out, including 15 surveys of CWS, 24 habitat surveys, 26 species surveys, and 22 coastal surveys. To enable the surveys, project staff and community volunteers were trained in survey techniques and species identification, providing a good basis for future survey work within the NL. Community participants were also encouraged to post their observations on iNaturalist as a continuing citizen science project which will also add to the understanding of the area.

Undertaking the CSW surveys proved more difficult than expected, and the initial target of 24 CWS surveyed was reduced to 18 to reflect this. Surveys of the National Landscape’s multiple CWS had not taken place for a number of years, and it proved difficult to get definitive boundaries of sites and information on current ownership. Site fragmentation meant that it was necessary to identify multiple landowners and negotiate permissions individually, which took a lot of time. Added to this, surveys could only be done during a specific seasonal window, meaning that the timing of recruitment and the turnover of staff had a limiting effect on the number of surveys that could be undertaken. The result of this was that the number of CWS surveyed and habitat surveys conducted was slightly below target.

Outcome: To learn more about our natural heritage through surveys monitoring and mapping			
Activity	3-yr target	Achieved	
Surveying County Wildlife Sites	18	15 CWS surveyed	
Habitat Surveys	27	24 habitat surveys undertaken, involving 318 volunteers	
Species Surveys	24	26 species surveys undertaken, involving 644 volunteers	

Coastal Surveys	15	22 coastal surveys undertaken, involving x volunteers	
Species Records lodged with DBRC			
iNaturalist Records		17,988 records, including 1,726 records of 178 protected species and 2,166 records of 295 national status species	



4.2 Outcomes for Nature – Nature Restoration

As part of the project, FNF supported the National Trust’s initiative to restore species-rich grassland habitats on NT sites across the National Landscape (<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/devon/woolacombe/north-devon-grasslands-project>)

- Over the three years of the project 58 ha have been harvested for seed, 196 ha have been over-sown to create new species-rich grasslands, with over 378 volunteers being involved.



Members of the Environment Group inspecting the meadows over-sown as part of the North Devon National Trust Grassland Restoration project.

During the third year of project, staff have been developing three Community Nature Recovery Plans through a process of stakeholder engagement and local consultation. These plans will provide a local counterpart to the county-wide Local Nature Recovery Plans and identify local priority habitats and individual and community-level actions to protect wildlife and enhance habitats in the three areas of Combe Martin & Ilfracombe, Croyde and Georgeham, and Hartland and Welcombe.

Outcome: To understand actions needed to conserve, restore, create and improve habitats to inform a community-led Recovery Plan for the AONB			
Activity	3-yr target	Achieved	
Nature Restoration – restore species-rich grasslands on sites in NDCNL	60 ha	54 ha have been harvested for seed	
	60 ha	196 ha have been over-sown	
	200	378 people have been involved	
Community—led Nature Recovery Plan for the NDCNL	3	3 action plans have been developed	

4.3 Outcomes for People - Training

A key outcome for the project was to train staff and volunteers in survey techniques and species identification, so as to facilitate the surveying and mapping work. Again, the project has successfully met its target for this outcome and continues to train community volunteers. Feedback from training events is good, with an average of a 2-point increase (on a scale of 1-5) in people's knowledge of identifying and surveying techniques. As well as training in ecological skills, the project set out to inform people about various aspects of good practice and practical conservation such as pond making, orchard pruning and dry-stone walling.



Outcome: People (staff, partner organisations, volunteers, general public) will have received new skills in ecology – identifying and surveying skills - practical conservation and connecting with nature			
Activity	3-yr target	Achieved	
Staff Training - Ecological Skills – ID and survey techniques	6 training for each member of staff	Staff have attended on average 7.5 training sessions each	
Community Training - Ecological Skills – ID and survey techniques	25 training sessions for 250 people	40 training sessions delivered to 444 people	
Practical Conservation Training	12 practical training sessions for 75 people	17 training sessions delivered involving 364 people	
	12 good practice workshops for 60 people	13 workshops delivered involving 268 people	
	12 webinars reaching 240 people	10 webinars delivered involving 560 people	

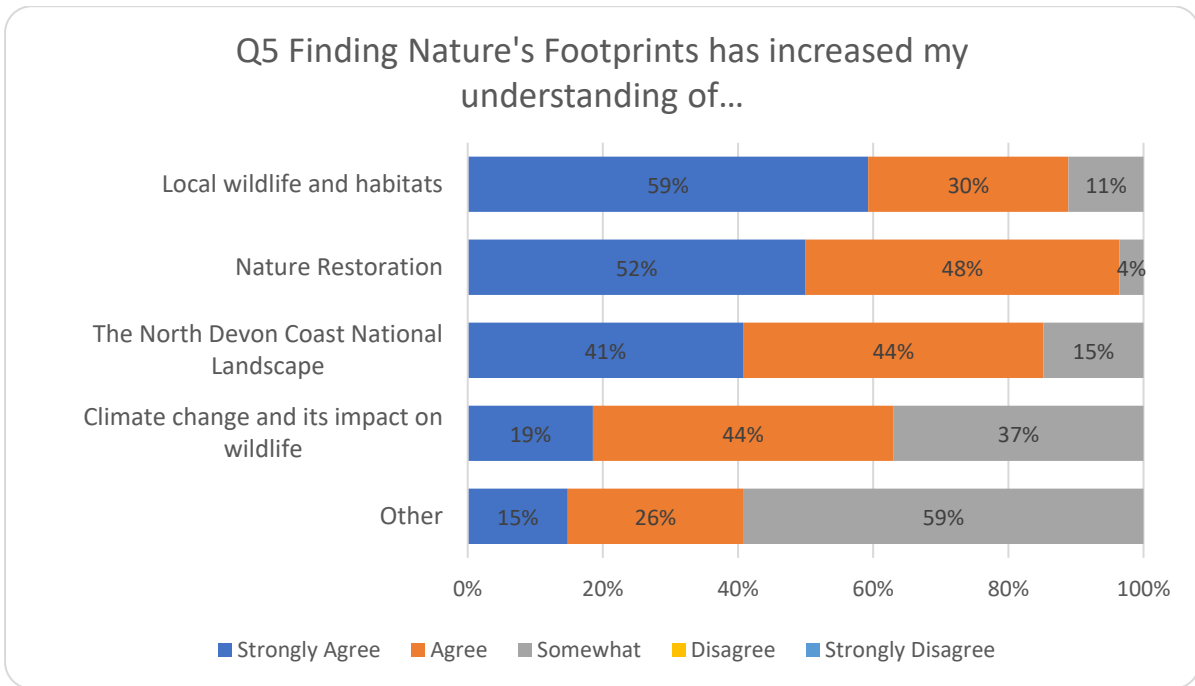
4.4 Outcomes for People – Public Engagement

Over the course of the three years, the project team has organised a range of events to engage the public, including annual bioblitzes, and a number of coastal activities.

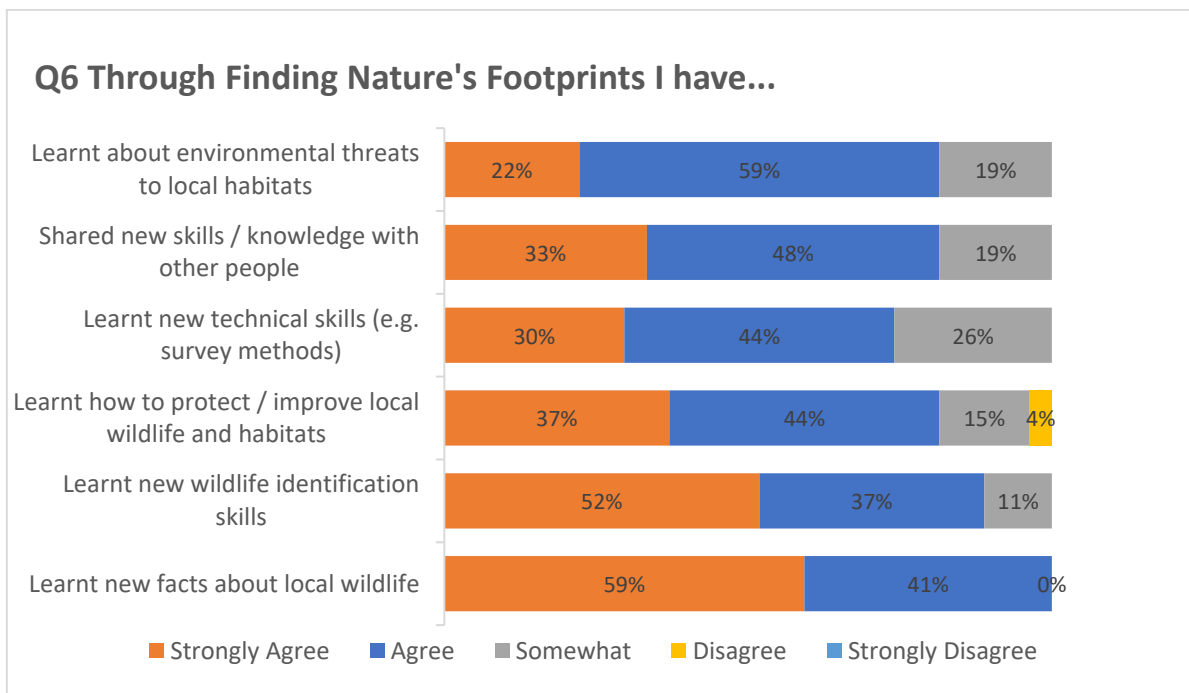
Outcome: People will have been offered a range of methods to help them connect with our natural heritage			
Activity	3-yr target	Achieved	
Public Engagement		65 Engagement Events have included 2539 participant attendances	
Reaching new Audiences		79 activities involved 296 participants	
Annual Bioblitz	3 bioblitz events over 3 years, the 1050 participants	3 bioblitz event conducted, involving with 1072 participants	

Those who signed up to the FNF mailing list were asked to take part in an on-line survey at two points during the project. Of the 250 contacted in 2023, 63 responded to the questionnaire, while in 2025 there were only 27 responses, maybe reflecting the different engagement levels throughout the project. Respondents reported an increased knowledge and understanding of local wildlife and habitats, and a greater awareness and connection with nature.

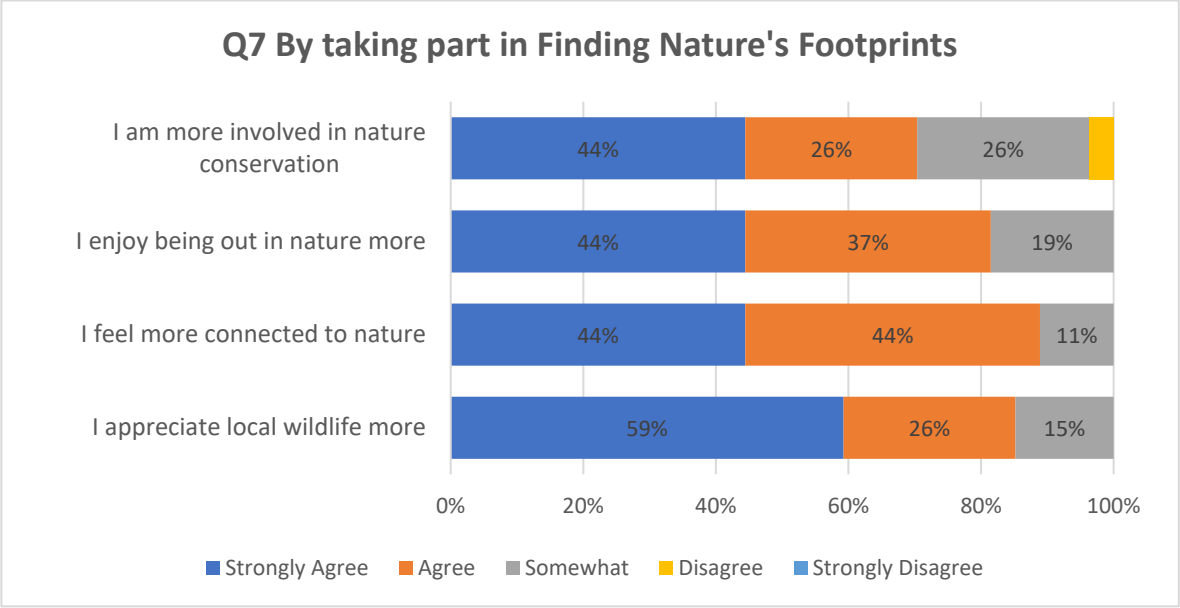
- 89% of respondents to the on-line questionnaire said that the project had increased their understanding of local wildlife and habitats, while 100% had increased their understanding of nature recovery and 85% of the North Devon Coast NL.



- 89% of respondents felt that they had learnt more about local habitats and species identification, while 100% had learnt more about nature restoration.



- 57% reported enjoying being in nature more, while 62% felt more connected with nature and 65% appreciated local wildlife more.



For a full analysis of the survey findings, please see Appendix 1



WOOLACOMBE PLANT ID SESSION

North Devon Coast National Landscape Environment
Come along for an evening to practice your plant ID skills heading down to the Woolacombe dunes to find some of the rare species to ID.

Upcoming Date:
1st July
7-9pm

Meeting Point:
Marine Drive Car Park
What 3 Words:
///birthdays.av
.goodnight
Transport
available
jamie.b
d

Wildlife Recording Day

North Devon Coast National Landscape
Join us for a day surveying all of the wildlife of Lee Bay! From grasshoppers and seaweed, come and record it all.

Upcoming Date:
24th May
10-3pm
No experience
equipment re

Holy Trinity Churchyard
11am - 1pm Sat 17 Jan
Join us in a discovery
of these exquisite and
unique organisms

Lichen

Hot Soup and a roll will be served at 11am
Church after our foray in the churchyard,
Q&A session with visitors

ILFRAC Bioblitz

SATURDAY 8TH JUNE

- 10:00 Hillsborough
- 13:00 Cow Green Community Garden
- 13:00 Hele Bay
- 15:00 Cairn Nature Reserve
- 19:00 iNaturalist Freshwater Workshop Bicclescombe
- 21:30 Bats & Moths Bicclescombe

Scan for more info
or head to
bit.ly/ilfbb



4.5 Outcomes for People – Reaching new audiences

Overall, the project has done well in reaching new audiences. Of the 2,539 people engaging with the project, just over a half have been new to NDCNL activities. The FNF project also targeted specific groups through a series of initiatives, often led by community partners and supported by FNF staff:

- The ‘From the River to the Sea’ and ‘Flights of Fancy’ projects, delivered by Red Herring Productions, was highly successful in the quality of environmental and creative work carried out with schools. Over two academic years Red Herring Productions delivered 9 workshops engaging 163 children from 3 schools. However, the practical difficulties of working with different schools and circumstances beyond their control, meant that the project did not quite reach its targets as originally planned.
- The FNF team worked with project partners Sunrise Diversity to provide opportunities for groups who otherwise might not have engaged with the project. Asylum Seekers and members of the LBGQTQ+ community took part in tailored outdoor activities that met their specific needs. Although this strand of work was initially delayed and was hampered by funding constraints on the delivery partner which limited their capacity, 55 people engaged with 7 outdoor activities, which was only slightly below the original targets.
- To engage with a younger audience, the FNF team formed an Environment Group targeting young people between the ages of 15-25. Initially, the group was very successful and engaged 43 young people in a variety of specific activities. It provided good opportunities for young people to learn more about the environment and the principles of nature recovery, and to get a taste of the skills they might need for a career in the environmental sector. However, it proved difficult to maintain the numbers of young people, while the time and capacity needed to organise and administer the group started to become too difficult for the team to manage, and the group did not continue.

Outcome: New Audiences will have been reached and engaged				
Activity	3-yr target	Achieved		Comments
General Engagement				Of the 2,539 attending, 54% have been new to NDCNL activities
Flights of Fancy:	9 workshops with 180 children from 6 schools	9 workshops with 163 children from 3 schools		In partnership with Red Herring Productions as delivery partner.
Sunrise Diversity:	60 people engaged with 8 outdoor activities	55 people engaged with 7 outdoor activities		In partnership with Sunrise Diversity as delivery partner.
NDCNL Environment Group: Environmental activities for	30 young people involved in 36 events	43 young people involved in 35 events		But regular attendees have significantly dropped in the last 18 months

NDCNL Environment Group

The NDCNL Environment Group was set up by the FNF team to engage with young people aged 15-25. Launched in May 2023 the group successfully attracted young people mainly through the local sixth-form and FE colleges, but including some older young adults.

The Environment Group offered a range of hands-on activities with a mix of environmental activity, social, and conservation work. Events included night-time rock-pooling, rapid rainforest assessments, bird ringing, 'Bats, Moths and BBQ' and a two-day expedition along the Hartland coast visiting sites of particular environmental interest along the way. In total 43 young people took part in the group, with attendances ranging from 2 -12. The most popular events seem to be those with some sort of social element. The group has been particularly valuable for those wanting to study or gain experience in environmental issues and a couple of individuals have become involved in survey work of the wider FNF project.

The group required considerable input from the FNF team to organise and manage the events. Transport can be difficult for young people, particular in remote, rural areas like North Devon. By their nature young people are into lots of different things and it can be difficult maintaining engagement in the face of competing interests and demand. They are also a transient group who will be moving on, and often out of area, for work or studies.

However, the group has been greatly appreciated by those involved, and has provided invaluable 'work experience' for those wanting to take an environmental career further. Factors in this success include:

- An energetic and enthusiastic member of the FNF team
- Planning a varied programme with a mix of hands-on practical activities and social opportunities.
- Engaging with young people at local schools and colleges who are studying environment-related subjects
- Creating a social media platform and content to keep young people engaged
- Working with young adults who are wanting to pursue an environmental career, and offering them practical experience in basic environmental techniques

Quotes

"Brilliant"

I really enjoyed,, "being amongst other people who care passionately about nature"

"The environment group has been such a great thing to be a part of over the summer. I got to meet people of the same age who like the outdoors and nature even more than me. It was great to hear their knowledge and share mine, whilst participating in fun activities in nature."

4.6 Outcomes for People – Green Prescriptions

As part of the Nature’s Tonic initiative, the project sponsored a series of wellbeing walks in partnership with Ilfracombe Social Prescribers, and Northam Burrows Country Park. These walks targeted older, socially-isolated and less-able residents, with ages ranging from 45-84. The main feature was regular fortnightly wellbeing walks, led by the social prescriber or the Northam Burrows rangers. In total, the project facilitated 22 wellbeing walks, involving 122 participants – well above the original targets.

Outcome – Green Prescriptions				
Nature’s Tonic: Nature on prescription	16 sessions with 96 participants	22 wellbeing walks involving 122 participant visits		In partnership with Northam Burrows Country Park rangers and Ilfracombe Social Prescribers.

Feedback from the walks has been universally good. 86% of participants have come regularly to the walks, mainly for the chance to be outdoors in nature. 86% reported an improvement in their physical and mental health. Participants appreciated the presence of FNF staff, and the opportunities to learn more about the wildlife and plants that often go unnoticed in their surroundings.

Q2 What was the main reason you wanted to join the Wellbeing Walks?	%
The chance to be outdoors in nature	100%
To socialise with other people	86%
To improve my physical fitness	86%
To improve my mental health	86%
It was recommended by my GP / other health professional	76%



5.0 What has Worked Well

In the next section we will be looking at the areas in which the project has worked well. These findings are based on the feedback from project participants, discussions with members of staff and interviews with statutory and community partners.

5.1 The Project Team – Feedback from partners and participants consistently praise the project team for their enthusiasm, energy and expertise. Factors highlighted include them being personable, well-organised, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable. The use of interns / project assistants was particularly appreciated as people felt it brought a younger, enthusiastic dynamic to the project which also supported engagement with young people. Indeed, in recognition of their good work the Finding Nature's Footprints Team won the VCSE Sector Environment and Heritage Award 2025.

5.2 Focus on community engagement – Running through the whole project has been its approach to community engagement, working with and through existing and new community groups. By supporting existing environmental groups such as Coastwise, the Friends of Hillsborough, Ilfracombe U3A Natural World Group and facilitating the formation of new community groups such as the Hartland Nature Society, the project has helped to develop and strengthen local social capital in the environmental sector. Groups valued the team's 'supportive presence' and advice, and its connections into the wider network of environmental groups. Coastwise, in particular, appreciated the support with organisational and policy issues, including Health and Safety and Safeguarding, which they feel has left the organisation in a stronger position.

This developmental approach to community organisations, as well as the focus on training community members with survey and identification skills has helped embed environmental knowledge and capacity in local communities which will outlast the project.

Likewise, the focus on engaging with local communities and parish councils in the development of Community Nature Recovery Plans, through consultation and awareness raising events was commended. The Nature Recovery Plans hold great promise for the future relationship of local communities with the National Landscape and as frameworks for future action, but it is too early to know how well these will embed in and what their long-term role will be.

5.3 A Citizen Science Approach - A key driver for the project was to undertake a series of habitat and species surveys across the area's protected sites and important habitats. By taking a citizen science approach through training and supporting volunteers and members of the public to help with these surveys added greatly to the project. Although, ultimately, a lot of the work in surveying county wildlife sites had to be undertaken by project staff due to timing and the exacting nature of those surveys, the involvement and support of volunteers has been invaluable as a way of engaging the interest of volunteers and increasing their knowledge and expertise in surveying and identification skills, that will hopefully benefit future projects. The introduction

of iNaturalist was also seen as good way of engaging ordinary members of the public with their local wildlife.

Over the three years of the project, a good number of sites were surveyed, including 15 County Wildlife Sites and a number of other important but un-designated sites, generating good quality data which will provide a good baseline (if only partial) for future work in mapping changes in habitats and key species.

- 5.4 Public engagement** – A number of community partners noted the success of the bioblitzes and other public engagement activities. The annual bioblitzes engaged a large number of North Devon residents, increased people's awareness of local habitats and wildlife, and hopefully sparked more long-term interests in nature. As well as the bioblitzes, the project was able to support a wide range of other public events and activities, often in partnership with local community groups, which were able to appeal to different tastes and interests. Working with the NDCNL with its wider reach, access to experts, and greater promotional ability, allowed local community groups to reach audiences they may not have been able to engage with before.
- 5.5 Collaboration and Partnership Working** - Working with a range of project partners, both specialist and delivery partners, has allowed the project to deliver much more than it could ever have done on its own and across a broader range of activities, as well as allowing it to integrate its activities with the wider environmental community in the area. In turn, the FNF project, by offering its particular expertise and its focus on citizen science, has extended the type and range of activities that partners such as Coastwise and Braunton Burrows Countryside Centre could deliver.
- 5.6 A Focus on Young People** – Many partners felt that the focus on young people was an important element of the project. Whether this was through the arts based activities co-ordinated by Red Herring in the first two years of the project, the Academy bioblitz event, the Environment Group, and the use of interns, engaging with and interesting young people in the natural world and their local environment was seen to be much needed and a very important feature of the FNF project.

The internship, in particular, was seen as a good model of helping young people on the first step towards a career in the environmental sector. The internships provided the three young people involved with training and practical opportunities to increase their knowledge and skills and some experience in basic ecological techniques. The NDCNL Environment Group has also helped young people in North Devon thinking of studying environmental issues to gain a wider insight into ecology and nature conservation.

Hartland Nature Society

The Hartland Peninsula is a particularly important area for wildlife within the NDCNL and Biosphere Reserve with a range of habitats from geologically significant coastal cliffs, ancient wooded valleys, moors and heathland, grasslands and pasture. However, with a sense of remoteness away from the centres of population, the popular tourist beaches and away from the focus of environmental activity at Northam and Braunton Burrows, there was less organised wildlife activity happening in the area.

With its roots in the guided walks set up with a previous grant from the NDCNL, and the enthusiasm of a key community member, the FNF project provided the opportunity to establish a more permanent group which could expand its activities and set it on a sustainable future. With an inaugural meeting in January 2023, the Hartland Nature Society now has over 70 signed up members, and a full programme of events and activities including regular opportunities to be involved in surveying and other citizen science projects. Their activities are regularly attended by 10-20 participants.

The important factors in the success of the group have been,

- A keen and knowledgeable community organiser
- FNF funding and resources for set-up costs
- The support and encouragement of the FNF team
- The wider platform of the FNF project on which to publicise and promote the group.
- Access to habitat and wildlife experts through the FNF project
- A small doing pot to pay for venue hire, costs for visiting experts etc.



Quotes:

"It's friendly and fun, and people have the opportunity to learn about the local wildlife and local landscape"

"It's been wonderful. Insects just used to be 'creepy crawlies' to me, but now I have a real appreciation of their variety and complexity. It has rekindled an interest in the country."

<https://www.northdevon-NDCNL.org.uk/findingnaturesfootprints/action-0/hartland-nature-society>

6.0 What has not gone so well

Over the course of the three years, the project team has faced a number of challenges in delivering the FNF project.

6.1 Staff turnover has been a recurrent problem for the project. Not only has there been three project assistants and three project co-ordinators over the three years, but there have also been major changes in the National Landscape core team. Although a common challenge for short-term funded projects like this, the use of annual interns has also added to the sense of churn. This constant change contributed to a perceived lack of focus, as different people emphasised different elements of the project, and probably at times to a loss of momentum. It also created extra pressure on the limited capacity of the project team, with lost time as staff began winding down, or getting up to speed, and the added work for core staff of recruitment, induction and familiarisation. In the view of some partners, staff turnover, together with the inherent seasonality of project activities, gave a 'stop-start' feel to the project.

On the positive side, it has been noted that different people have brought different interests, skills, expertise and experience and a different approach to the role, which in many ways has also enriched the project.

6.2 Limited staff capacity - In designing the project, the amount of time and capacity needed to facilitate partnership working and community engagement was probably underestimated. The project has only been able to achieve its objectives by working extensively with partners and volunteers. Although this in many ways is a positive factor for the project, partnership working and working with volunteers requires a considerable amount of co-ordinating, liaising with and managing the different parties. Added to this the capacity needs of the developmental approach to community engagement, and the extra needs created by staff turnover, left various elements of the project under-resourced and staff over-stretched.

6.3 Public engagement – Even though the bioblitzes and other public engagement activities were undoubtedly one of the project's successes, some partners have questioned their lasting impact and whether the National Landscape is the most appropriate body to carry them out. A lot has changed in the three and half years since the project began. At that time, many organisations were still gearing up after the pandemic, and the public were more reticent in joining in public events. Since then, organisations such as the Braunton Countryside Centre, Northam Burrows Countryside Park, Earth Action North Devon, The National Trust and Devon Wildlife Trust have started delivering their own projects with similar public events and activities, making the National Landscape's role less necessary. Added to this is the fact that such events require a lot of organising and human capacity to deliver, and therefore may not be resource-effective.

6.4 Community Nature Recovery Plans – Although it was always envisaged that the Community Nature Recovery Plans would be delivered in the final

year of the project once the survey work had identified the local needs and priorities for nature recovery, due to the constraints on staff time the plans have only effectively been worked on in the last six months of the project. Though later than anticipated, this has allowed time for wider community engagement with community groups and parish councils, but has left little time for the plans to be embedded within the communities, or for people to take up the challenge of how they will be delivered. It is early days for the plans and it remains to be seen what their long-term impact will be.

6.5 Overambitious Project Design – Finding Nature’s Footprints was always an ambitious project, with a number of different strands and multiple partners. As noted above, this led to some capacity issues which limited the amount of time and energy that could be invested in particular elements of the project. Indeed, some of the strands could have been stand-alone projects in their own right, for instance the Red Herring ‘arts in school’ project, and the Green Prescription Wellbeing Walks. This would have allowed greater focus on the planning and development of these initiatives with increased impact and follow through.

In the context of the time (2022-23) when the project was being developed, and in the aftermath of the Covid Pandemic when people and organisations were still adapting to a new way of working, it probably made sense to bundle all these initiatives into one, but now three and a half years later the climate has changed and there are many more players and initiatives, making the National Landscape’s involvement less necessary.

7.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

In the three and a half years of the project, Finding Nature’s Footprints has achieved a great deal, and realised its aims of:

- Having a better understanding of the natural heritage of the North Devon Coast,
- Increasing the knowledge and skills of staff and volunteers,
- Raising the public’s awareness of the range and beauty of North Devon’s wildlife, and
- Helping people to take practical action to restore nature.

In addition, it has helped to raise the profile of the National Landscape amongst the public and eased the rebranding of the Area of Natural Beauty (AONB) into the National Landscape, which might have been difficult without such a public facing initiative.

In response to the findings of the evaluation and the comments of project partners, we would suggest the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1 – Refocus its activities on what only the NL can do

The National Landscape has a unique position in the ecosystem of environmental organisations within North Devon. With its ‘feet on the ground’ through active engagement with communities and landowners, and its statutory remit to engage with regional and national bodies, it can act as a mediator, facilitator, and networking agent. North Devon has a substantial concentration of environmental organisations and organisations with an environmental remit, both statutory and community-based. The National Landscape needs to reflect on what its unique role is within this ecosystem, and where it can best commit its limited resources.

Since the inception of the project four years ago, the landscape of environmental activities in the area has changed, and there may now be organisations and people better placed to organise and deliver some of the specific initiatives that were included in the FNF bid, such as the wellbeing walks, the arts-based project etc. Going forward, it may be better for the National Landscape to focus on facilitating and co-ordinating community action, rather than organising and delivering it itself.

To support this, the National Landscape could benefit from having an explicit change model, or ‘Theory of Change’ that details how its interventions will lead to the change it wants to see, both in the landscape and for people, in pursuit of its statutory duty to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area.

Recommendation 2 - A continuing commitment to a ‘bottom-up approach’

This project has been notable in the way it has worked with individuals and communities in a bottom-up approach – training and upskilling volunteers, focusing on citizen science initiatives, working collaboratively with locally-based community groups and going out directly to parishes to gauge their vision and ambitions for nature restoration. This is a long-term investment in the future of the national landscape, but also requires a long-term commitment beyond the three years of a funded project. We recommend that the National Landscape should continue its efforts in developing and strengthening community-based environmental groups, and supporting local communities to take action on their Nature Restoration Plans.

Equally, it should continue to support and upskill volunteers with ecological skills so there is a pool of trained, motivated individuals who can help with the ongoing monitoring of key sites. It can take many years for ordinary members of the public to gain the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to undertake surveys, and the NL might need to put some thought into how it and other partners can provide training pathways for people interested and motivated to pursue their knowledge and skills further. Once again, this requires long-term commitment, but once invested in, it could be a lasting resource for the future health of the natural landscape.

Recommendation 3 - Focus on Increasing Social Capital² to benefit the natural landscape

² Social capital refers to the networks, relationships, shared norms, and trust among people that enable collective action, cooperation, and mutual benefit within a community.

The National Landscape as an organisation will always be limited in what it can do on its own, because of the continuing squeeze on national resources, and the consequent limited capacity of the core team. Its reach can always be improved by working with others and putting effort into increasing the social capital of the ecosystem of environmental organisations and interested individuals. The vision of this project was to create environmentally informed and environmentally active individuals and communities for the benefit of the national landscape. This approach will require a long-term commitment beyond the three-year funding cycle which should be embedded in the revised NDCNL Management Plan.

The project has been notable for the amount of collaboration and partnership working that has taken place. Although, this can take considerable extra resources to fulfil, this collaboration and networking can reap benefits for the long-term future of the area and its natural heritage. Every organisation, whether purely local or with a wider area of interest, can bring something valuable and different to the table, with its own unique focus, access to different resources and different reach into the local community. Together, they can do so much more than any one organisation could possibly do. With further co-ordination and collaboration between groups, and a common focus on the good of the natural heritage, then so much more could be done. There needs to be a wider vision amongst the family of environmental groups of creating a network of networked groups across North Devon for the benefit of nature and the national landscape.

Appendix 1 – Findings from the On-line Questionnaire

Thank you for your participation at a Finding Nature's Footprints event. The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect your feedback to help us improve future events & inform future funding. All information will remain confidential.

	2023	2025
Responses	89	27

Q1 How did you find out about Finding Nature's Footprints events and activities?

Q1 How did you find out about Finding Nature's Footprints events and activities?	2023	2025	Cumulative Total	%
Contact with project officer	27	8	35	26%
Word of mouth	21	7	28	21%
Event publicity	12	8	20	15%
Through other organisations	11	8	19	14%
Social media	9	-	9	7%
NDCNL e-newsletter	5	4	9	7%
Email	-	3	3	2%
Internet search	3	4	7	5%
Leaflets	1	0	1	1%
Other	-	2	2	2%
Total instances	89	44	133	100%

In total over 61% of respondents found out about FNF events and activities through other means than FNF publicity, through contact with the project officer, by word of mouth or through other organisations. This may indicate that FNF publicity did not reach those who were not already involved with the project.

Q2 Before the start of this project, had you taken part in North Devon NDCNL events and activities?

	2023	2025	Cumulative	%
No	33	12	45	50.00%
Yes	30	15	45	50.00%

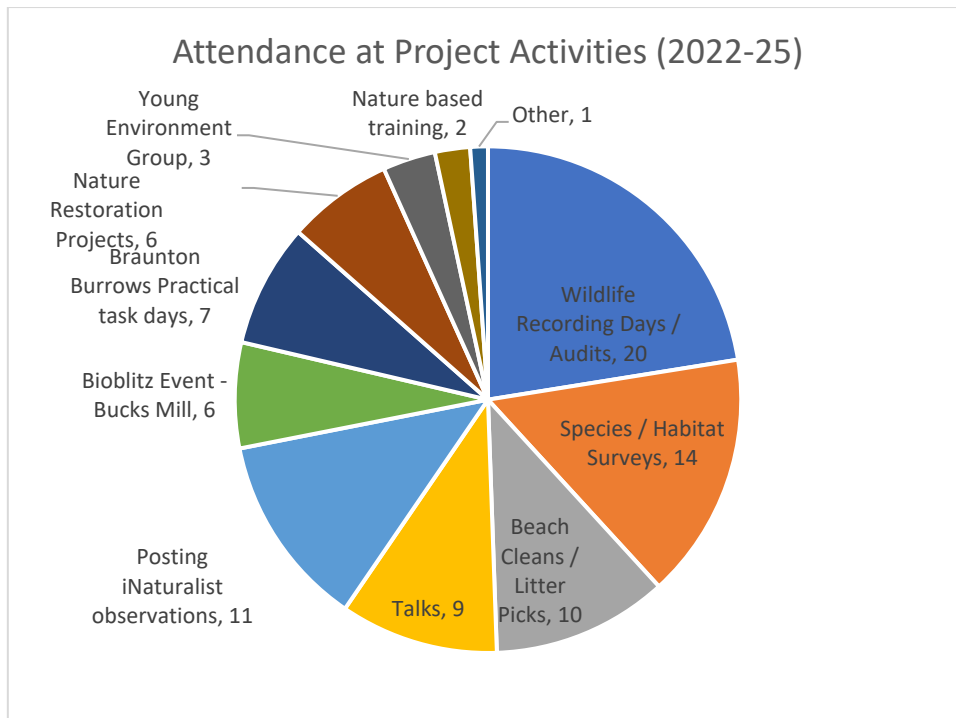
Total	63	27	90	100.00%
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50% of those who responded were new to North Devon NDCNL activities.

Q3 Over the last 3 years, which of the project's activities and events have you been involved with?

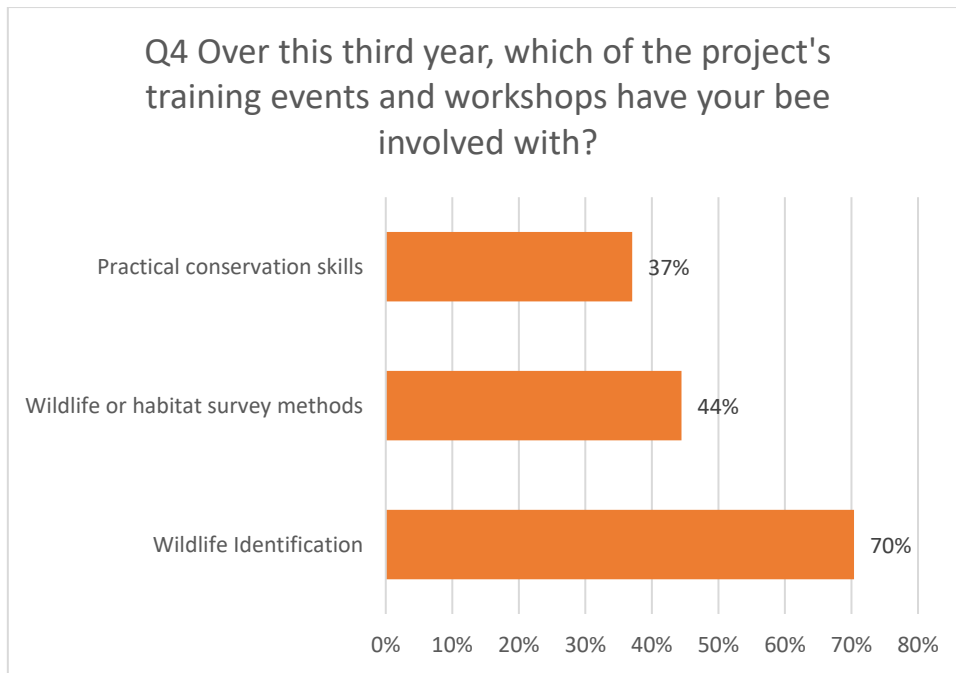
	Occurences (2025)	Percentage of Respondents (27)
Wildlife Recording Days / Audits	20	74%
Species / Habitat Surveys	14	52%
Beach Cleans / Litter Picks	10	37%
Posting iNaturalist observations	11	41%
Talks	9	33%
Braunton Burrows Practical task days	7	26%
Bioblitz Event - Bucks Mill	6	22%
Nature Restoration Projects	6	22%
Young Environment Group	3	11%
Nature based training	2	7%
Other	1	4%
TOTAL	89	

On average, respondents had attended over 3 activities.



Q4 Over the last 3 years, which of the project’s training events and workshops have you been involved with?

Q4 Over the last 3 years, which of the project's training events and workshops have you been involved with?	Number	As a percentage of respondents (27)
Wildlife Identification	19	70%
Wildlife or habitat survey methods	12	44%
Practical conservation skills	10	37%
Other	0	0%

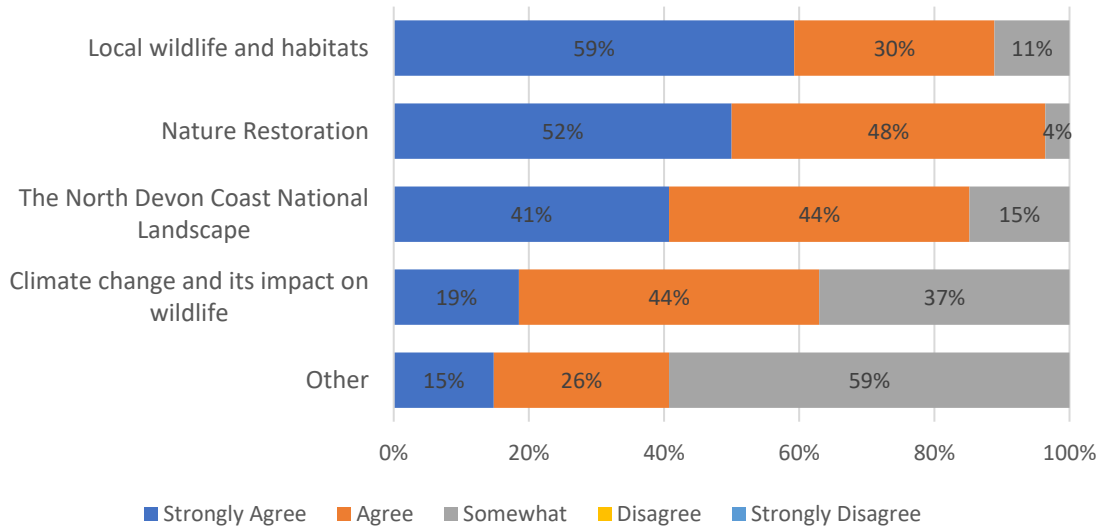


What difference has FNF made to you

Q5 Finding Nature's Footprints has increased my understanding of

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Local wildlife and habitats	16	8	3	0	0
Nature Restoration	14	13	1	0	0
The North Devon Coast National Landscape	11	12	4	0	0
Climate change and its impact on wildlife	5	12	10	0	0
Other	4	7	16	0	0

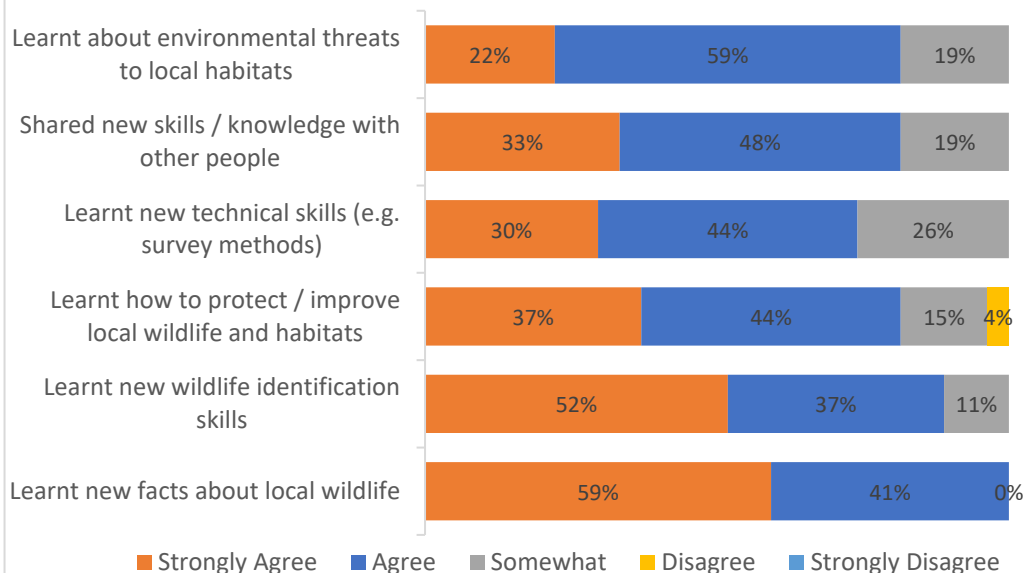
Q5 Finding Nature's Footprints has increased my understanding of...



- 89% of respondents felt that they had learnt more about local wildlife and habitats, while 100% had learnt more about nature restoration.

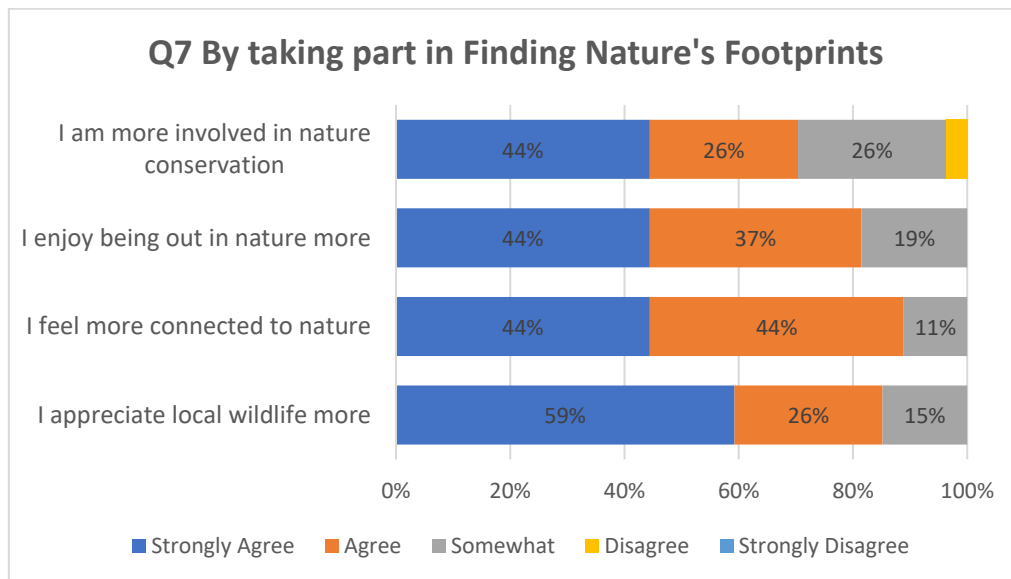
Q6 Through Finding Nature's Footprints, I have....

Q6 Through Finding Nature's Footprints I have...



- 57% reported enjoying being in nature more, while 62% felt more connected with nature and 65% appreciated local wildlife more.

Q7 By taking part in Finding Nature's Footprints



Q8 What have you enjoyed most about Finding nature's Footprints activities and events

- The considerable help & information we have received to assist us with maintaining & conserving the woodland, grassland wild flowers, trees, birdlife,
- Empowering to think you can do your bit
- Bioblitz Ilfracombe
- The superb knowledge of the Finding Natures Footprint team
- Meeting like minded people and helping local plants and wildlife
- seashore activities
- The plant and insect surveys. The practical tasks eg scything and slashing and sowing wildflower seeds
- Networking through different avenues
- All of the sessions I've attended as part of Finding Nature's Footprints have been brilliant! The staff have expert knowledge and are very happy to answer questions. It's been so much fun getting involved in various wildlife audits and other events and I've learnt a lot through it. Thank you! It has also been really helpful having events on weekends at times when working people can do and also sharing lifts to help with access and reduce emissions
- Meeting like minded people
- Learning more
- The enthusiasm of the staff to help local nature
- Finding out about the wildlife specific to the local area where I live
- Experts on hand to help with identification of plants and insects
- Meeting dedicated people regarding the natural and exchanging knowledge
- Being encouraged to take part
- Wildflower ID
- Meeting the enthusiastic staff members
- getting closer to understanding nature and feeling a bit more agency in the climate crisis.
- Social aspect sharing with like minded people in my area

- Learning new skills, particularly species identification, and engaging with like-minded people.
- The networking opportunities
- I have enjoyed the talks
- Meeting new people involved in nature conservation

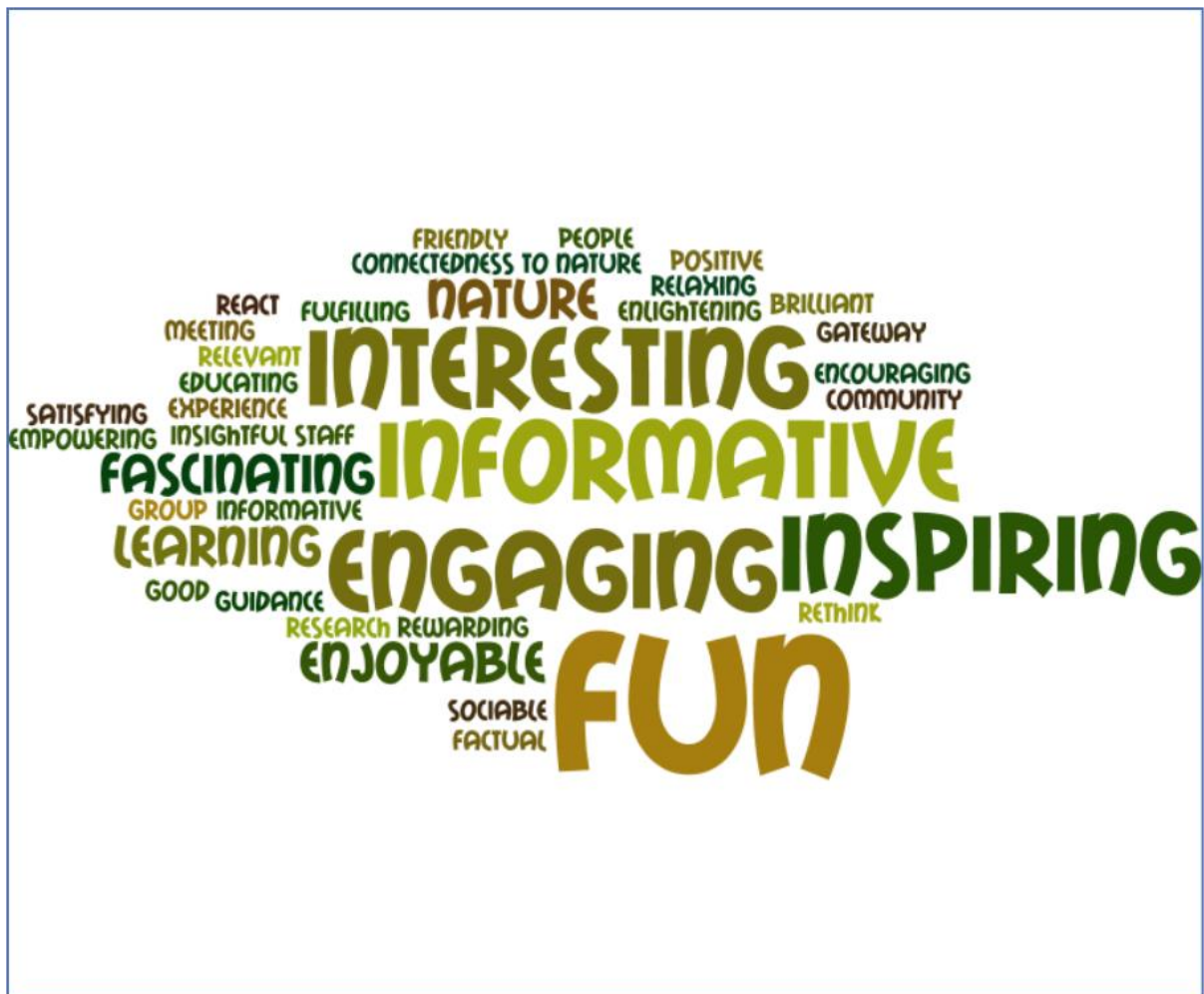
Q9 What about Finding Nature's Footprints activities and events could be improved

- Encourage further local participation in village
- Publicity
- Nothing, all the events looked very well organised and open to the public
- More of them and better communication about events and the project
- co-ordinating meetings/involvement with other wildlife groups
- Social media presence locally inviting engagement
- It would be amazing to have another similar project again!
- Too short term. What happens to records afterwards
- More, for longer!
- Longer term contracts for the staff, they deserve it
- More regular events in Ilfracombe. The events themselves were superb. The leaders have real knowledge, enthusiasm and energy and are also patient and welcoming.
- I think they are run very well
- Increase staffing to release some pressure from the members of the small team involved
- Hard to say as it all seems so helpful
- Providing feedback. We never saw the report on the Combe Martin evening workshop.
- Keeping staff contracts longer
- To be continued!!!! Please don't let it stop here.
- Publicity if more knew more would join in
- Diversity of events - connecting people to nature from a wellbeing, interconnected perspective. More on nature and wellbeing - learning to use nature to support yourself.
- nothing
- More continuity in the events I attended

Q10 If you could sum up your experience of Finding Nature's Footprints in three words, what would they be?

- Empowering, interesting, enjoyable
- Fun and informative
- Interesting, relevant, positive
- Relaxing Fun informative
- some good events
- Group. Nature. Fun

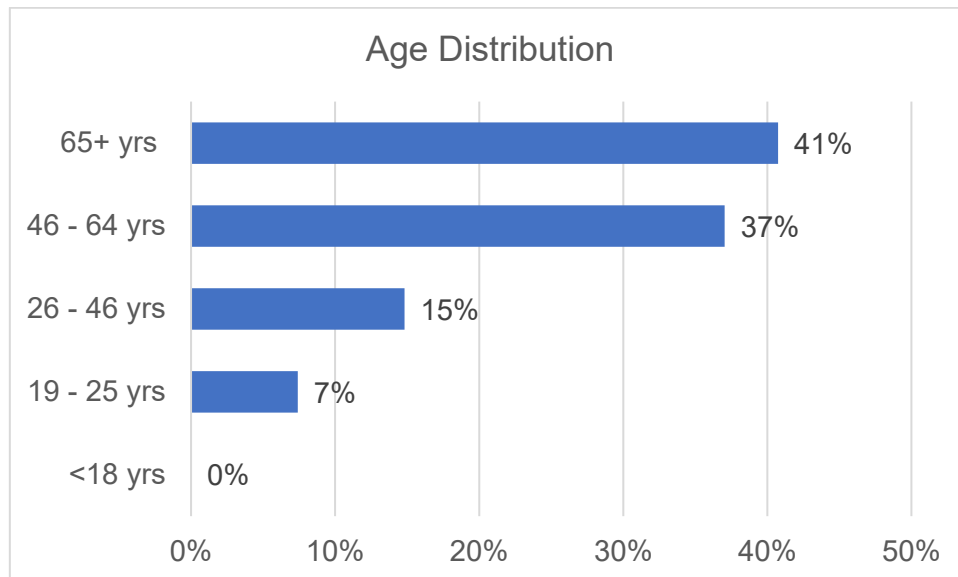
- Very insightful staff
- Inspiring, fun, brilliant!
- Learning, experience, people
- Interesting, informative, inspiring
- Friendly factual and fun
- Inspiring, enjoyable, fascinating
- Research, Rethink, React
- A rewarding and satisfying participation in worthy activities with lovely people.
- enlightening encouraging guidance
- Acted as a gateway to citizen science activities
- Fascinating educating sociable
- connectedness to nature
- Nature learning meeting
- Informative, engaging, inspiring.
- informative, fun, engaging
- interesting, engaging, fun
- Community, fulfilling, engaging



About you

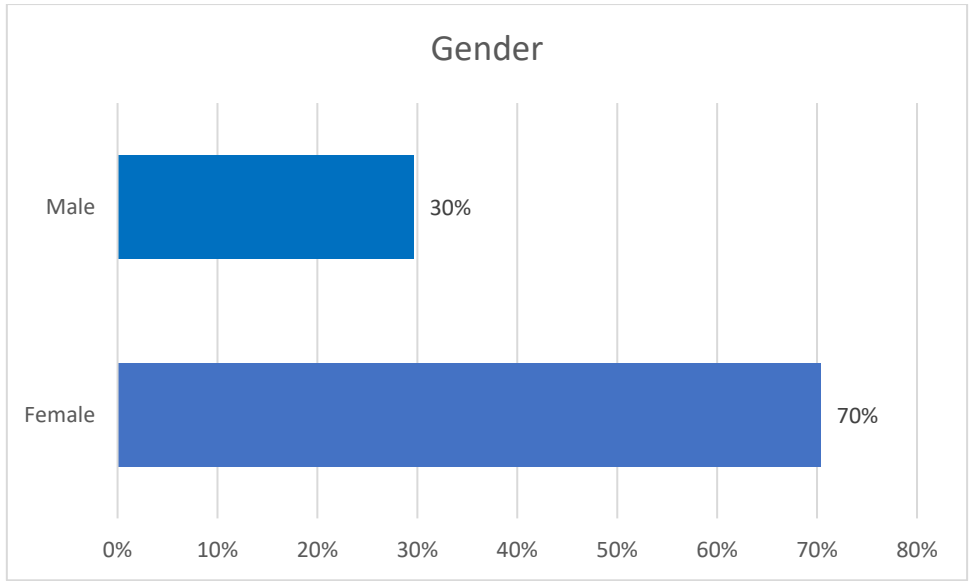
An outcome of this project is to increase the diversity of people who visit, understand and conserve the North Devon Coast NDCNL. Providing this information helps to monitor our progress.

Q12 Age

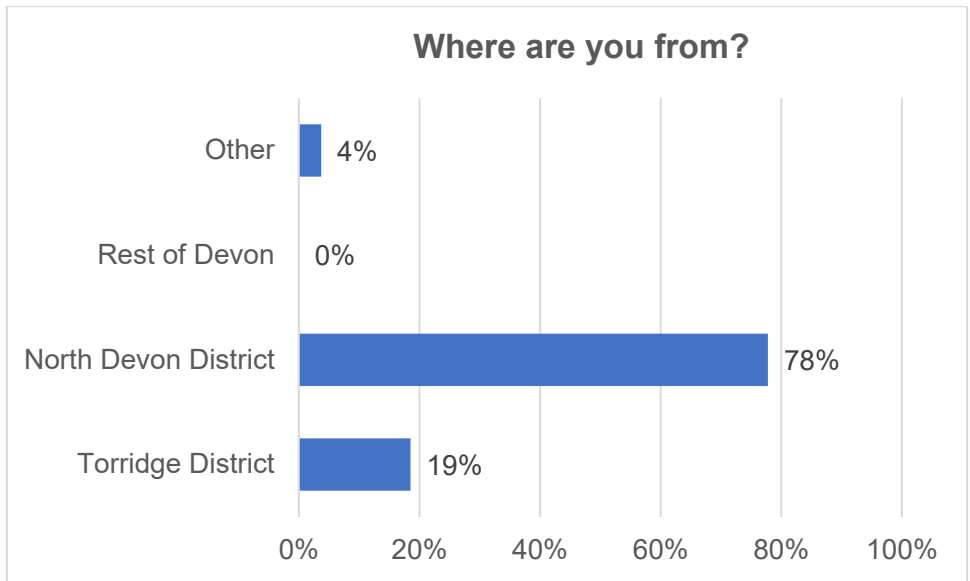


- 78% of the respondents were aged over 46.
- while under 25s make up less than 7%
- Putting this in context, data from the 2021 Census shows that of the resident population in the NDCNL, 60% are 45 or over, and 22% are under 25. The number in the 15-24 age range is much lower than national statistics, as many leave to find education, training or employment.

Q13 Gender



Q16 Where are you from?



Appendix 2– Project Tracker

	Targets & measures of success	Target	Delivered	(%)
Project Coordination - full time, 3 year Project Coordinator job, planning and delivering programme of activities (events, training, projects), managing interns and placement students, recruiting, training and managing volunteers, providing nature advice to public and community, carrying out habitat and species surveys, advise on Plans, recording data and outputs.	1 new job created; delivery of project achieving targets and outcomes	1	3	300
Project Steering Group meeting at least quarterly providing oversight of progress and delivery of results, outcomes and spend; guidance to team; supporting activities; supporting project promotion; participating in evaluation.	15 meetings over life of project. Project delivered on time and achieving target outputs and outcomes	15	12	80
Internships - three x one-year, paid, graduate internships providing botanical, technical and community engagement skills, training and experience	3 employed and gaining skills throughout the project	3	3	100
Nature volunteers - recruit, train and manage a small team of volunteers from across the AONB who want to increase their knowledge and skills, whilst sharing their passion for nature with others in the community	10 project volunteers recruited and trained; volunteers supporting and delivering activity in the AONB	10	9	90
TRAINING				
Staff Training - Phase 1 habitat surveys; outdoor first aid; and 4 people skills courses e.g. managing volunteers; equality & diversity awareness; video skills etc. to reflect individual needs/interests	Project Coordinator 1	6	7	117
	Project Coordinator 2	6	5	83
	Project Coordinator 3	6	3	50
	Intern 1	6	10	167
	Intern 2	6	10	167
	Intern 3	6	12	200

Community Training - Species ID, species recording, survey methods, photography and video skills, terrestrial and inter-tidal habitat surveys, biotope surveying, report writing, mapping, accessing data resources. Delivered mainly by team and some outside experts.	250 people benefiting from training courses	250	389	156
	25 training courses delivered	25	33	132
Practical Conservation Training - Learning about habitat restoration and management through one-to-one advice, demonstrations, site visits, practical training sessions, talks and guides from staff teams.	12 practical training sessions	12	16	133
	practical training sessions for 75 people	75	354	472
	12 good practice workshops	12	13	108
	good practice workshops for 60 people	60	281	468
	12 talks/webinars	12	10	83
	talks/webinars reaching 240 people	240	714	298
Wildlife Audits and Actions				
Surveys of 18 County Wildlife Sites carrying out Phase 1 habitat survey, with landowner permission and/or access from PROW, producing report and data to DBRC and summary data available online to public	24 County Wildlife Sites audited	18	15	83
Wildlife audits of villages/hamlets/landscape features/farms and local sites (eg school grounds, cemetery, village ground, footpath)	27 sites audited across 14 parishes	27	24	89
	54 volunteers involved	54	318	589
Species surveys - of common and special species including farmland birds, pollinators, garden birds, common mammals, invertebrates, non-native invasive species etc.	24 species surveys	24	26	108
	involving 72 volunteers	72	644	894
Coastal habitat surveying including seabirds, strandline surveys, intertidal and dune habitats, invasive species; litter removal/beach cleaning on remote beaches; community engagement activities	12 activities with volunteers(*Community training*)?	12	9	75
	15 surveys	15	22	147

with coastal species and habitats including for National Lottery Players	6 extreme beach cleans	6	6	100
	9 activities with the public	9	32	356
	activities with the public - involving 1000 participants	1000	1034	103
Species-Rich Grassland Restoration on several National Trust sites across the AONB trialling a range of approaches. Activities to include: training of NT staff, volunteers and project team in concepts, methods, surveying and monitoring; sowing seed to create donor sites; harvesting with machines and community input; quadrat vegetation surveys. Specialist equipment.	60ha harvested for seed	60	54	90
	60ha sown to create new species-rich grassland	60	196	327
	6 staff trained	6	21	350
	15 volunteers trained	15	0	0
	200 people engaged	200	378	189
Community led Nature Recovery Plan for the AONB - collating data from project surveys and community audits, supported with data from DBRC and Devon Nature Recovery Plan mapping. A plan of what is known, what is still to discover and actions to restore, create and improve nature.	1 Plan produced in full with summary document	1		
Connecting with Nature - reach new audiences				
Flights of Fancy will create a poetry & sound walk with pupils from two secondary schools and four feeder primary schools at both Northam Burrows and Braunton Burrows, facilitated by Red Herring artists. It will offer pupils and members of the public, the opportunity to experience Northam Burrows, the Estuary and Braunton Burrows and to connect with nature in exciting new ways & to respond creatively. The pupils' poetry/prose will form the substance of the walk, developed by Red Herring and shared with participants & public with an exhibition presented at Northam Burrows Visitor Centre and Braunton Countryside Centre.	180 schoolchildren	180	163	91
	12 teachers	12	13	108
	from 6 schools	6	3	50
	9 workshops	9	9	100
	and 9 walks in the AONB	9	6	67

<p>Sunrise Diversity - explore nature and the outdoors. Project team to work alongside staff to provide opportunities to learn about wildlife and nature spaces, to experience outdoor activities, to visit local green/blue spaces, to enjoy, connect with and better understand the coast and countryside.</p>	60 people engaged	60	55	92
	6 team engagement sessions	6	6	100
	8 outdoor visits/activities	8	9	113
<p>Nature's Tonic - working with project partners to develop practical activities (conservation, learning, citizen science, gardening, recording) within the AONB and its setting to offer 5-week half-day sessions to people who are isolated, needing to increase mobility and/or experiencing low level anxiety. This will be accessible through referral by the GP surgery-based social prescribers in the Bideford and Braunton areas.</p>	16 sessions	16	23	144
	with 96 participants	96	133	139
<p>Young Environment Group - to offer a range of activities, walks, talks and visits in evenings/weekends managed by members and hosted by Braunton Countryside Centre; develop wider engagement with young people across the AONB with activities near to them working with project partners</p>	30 young people engaged	30	43	143
	36 meetings/activities	36	36	100
<p>Annual Bioblitz (x3) - to bring together a wide range of people to learn about and explore habitats and species and to celebrate the skills and knowledge they have acquired through the project. Sites could include Northam Burrows Country Park, Lee Bay, Braunton Burrows.</p>	3 Bioblitz	3	3	100
	with 1050 people attending	1050	1072	102
On target (>60% 3-year target)				
Below target (<60% 3-year target)				
At Risk (<20%)				
Data Needed				

Appendix 3 – List of FNF partners

The National Trust - https://www.facebook.com/NorthDevonNT/?locale=en_GB
Northam Burrows Country Park <https://www.torridge.gov.uk/northamburrowsevents>
Devon Biodiversity Records Centre <https://www.dbrc.org.uk/>
Devon Wildlife Trust www.devonwildlifetrust.org
North Devon Voluntary Services <https://ndvs.org.uk/>
Red Herring Productions <http://www.redherringproductions.co.uk/>
Sunrise Diversity <https://sunrisediversity.org.uk/>
Braunton Countryside Centre - www.brauntoncountrysidecentre.org
Coastwise www.coastwisenorthdevon.org.uk
Friends of Hillsborough - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1085120345774843/>
Hartland Nature Society - <https://hartlandnaturesociety.org.uk/>
North Devon District Council - <https://www.northdevon.gov.uk/>
Torridge District Council - <https://www.torridge.gov.uk/>
North Devon UNESCO Biosphere - <https://www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk/>
Devon County Council - <https://www.devon.gov.uk/environment/>

