

North Devon Coast National Landscape

# ‘Finding Nature’s Footprints’

Interim Evaluation Report



Report prepared by:  
Clarity CIC  
CIC number: 9147860  
[www.claritycic.org](http://www.claritycic.org)

Registered office:  
Old Bakery, Harbertonford,  
Totnes, Devon TQ9 7TA

## Contents

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Project Overview
3.0	Evaluation Methodology
4.0	Key Findings
5.0	Discussion
5.1	What's working well
5.2	Challenges
5.3	Areas for Improvement
6.0	Conclusion & Recommendations
7.0	Appendices

### 1.0 Introduction

This report provides an interim evaluation of the 'Finding Nature's Footprints' project being 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 so far against the proposed project targets.
- discuss the challenges, strengths and weaknesses of the project,
- provide recommendations for suggested courses of action in the remaining two years of the project.

### 2.0 Finding Nature's Footprints Project Overview

Finding Nature's Footprints (FNF) is a three-year project funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) and local partners and being delivered by the North Devon Coast National Landscape (formerly the North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty - NDAONB).<sup>1</sup> The project began in June 2022 and is due to continue until September 2025.

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

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.

---

<sup>1</sup> For reasons of historicity and recognition, the report will use the term Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, AONB.

4. to reach and engage with new audiences for the AONB 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 diverse cultural communities.
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

Since the project began in June 2022 it has completed the following activities:

- Recruited a Project Co-ordinator and two Interns
- Trained AONB staff, partners and community volunteers in ecological skills, such as species identification and survey techniques
- Recruited and trained community volunteers
- Undertaken surveys of county wildlife sites (CWS), habitat surveys of publicly accessible sites and coastal habitats, and surveys of specific wildlife species.
- Run an outdoor arts programme for primary school children to connect with priority habitat in the AONB – ‘Where the River meets the Sea’ and ‘Flights of Fancy’ over two years
- Started the AONB Environment Group for 15-25 year olds
- Supported the formation of a community-based environmental group - Hartland Nature Society
- Organised a public Bioblitz on Northam Burrows
- Facilitated a range of 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 AONB
- Supported species-rich grassland restoration in partnership with the National Trust

The project has a small project team, comprising of:

Project Co-ordinator	1.0 fte	(from Aug 22)
Coastal Officer	0.1 fte	(from Jun 22)
Intern	1.0 fte	(Intern 1, from Oct 22 – Oct 23) (Intern 2, from Nov 23 – Oct 24)

Additional support is provided from the core AONB team in relation to finance, administration, team management, communication and specialist advice

The project also works 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, Coastwise North Devon.

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

<i>Project Financial Breakdown 22-25</i>	<b>2022/23</b>	<b>2023/24</b>	<b>2024/25</b>	
<b>INCOME</b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Total</b>
NLHF	83,000	83,000	82,000	<b>248,000</b>
AONB	10,000	8000	8000	<b>26000</b>
National Trust	2000	2000	2000	<b>6000</b>
NDC	2000	2000	2000	<b>6000</b>
TDC	2000	2000	2000	<b>6000</b>
DCC Environment	3,000	0	0	<b>3,000</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>102000</b>	<b>97000</b>	<b>96000</b>	<b>295,000</b>

The project is due to end in September 2025

### **3.0 Evaluation**

CLARITY CIC has been appointed to undertake a two-stage independent evaluation of the Finding Nature's Footprints project and to assist the NDAONB team with their on-going evaluation methodology. The evaluation has been 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 has been carried out to help the NDAONB team review progress with the project and to identify potential courses of action to improve delivery. This evaluation involved:

- Attendance at annual bioblitz
- Review of management and monitoring data
- Attendance at Project Steering Group meeting
- Feedback from training events
- On-line survey with volunteers and project participants
- Interviews with key volunteers and supporters
- Interviews with partners

## 4.0 Key Findings

The following sections summarise the project's progress to date against the NLHF aims and objectives. Each of the strands of activity have been rated against a profiled mid-term target taking into consideration the programme plan and natural seasonality of activities, as follows:

	Well Above Target
	Above Target
	On Target
	Below Target
	Well Below Target
	Not started

### 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 North Devon Coast AONB by undertaking surveys and mapping work particularly in County Wildlife Sites (CWS) and publicly accessible sites within the AONB to create a baseline for future surveys and restoration work, and to inform the AONB Nature Recovery Plan.

In order to facilitate this, staff and volunteers were trained in survey techniques and species identification. The project has been highly successful in attracting volunteers to support this work and has completed the necessary training for staff and volunteers. It has done a number of surveys during the 2023 season, already achieving its three-year target of 24 species surveys, and encouraged participants to post their observations on iNaturalist as a continuing citizen science project.

However, due to a number of practical reasons, the project is currently well behind on its target of surveying 24 CWS, and below target on its habitat surveys.

Unexpected challenges faced by the team included,

- Lack of a readily available definitive list of sites and their current owners
- Identifying landowners and negotiating permissions for undertaking surveys on CWSs.
- Site fragmentation over the intervening years since the last survey has meant the need to get multiple permissions.
- Given the seasonality of survey work, and the timing of the recruitment of project staff, survey work could only commence in spring 2023.

**Outcome:** To learn more about our natural heritage through surveys, monitoring and mapping

Activity	3-yr target	Progress to date		Comments
Surveying County Wildlife Sites	24	2 CWS surveyed		Well below target (see notes above)
Habitat Surveys	27	6 habitat surveys undertaken, involving 239 volunteers		Below annual target
Species Surveys	24	25 species surveys undertaken, involving 480 volunteers		Already achieved 3-yr target
Coastal Surveys	15	7 coastal surveys undertaken, involving 66 volunteers		Above target
Species Records				<i>This is yet to be collated</i>
iNaturalist Records		3,319 Observations 1,354 Species 512 Identifiers 30 Observers		<i>60% of observations are currently 'research grade'</i>



Infographic produced by Finding Nature's Footprints Team to highlight the main achievements for the 1<sup>st</sup> Year

# Finding Nature's Footprints



## Connecting

Engagement activities have reached 1,822 people in the first year. Over half are new audiences



54% New Audiences



**Red Herring Productions**  
Red Herring Productions have used performance and poetry to connect 160 children from 3 schools with the AONB's Habitats and Species



The AONB Environment Group is connecting young people aged 15-25 with experiences in the environmental sector. 23 individuals and 15 events

## Skills and Knowledge

200 people have undertaken training from 39 different courses



Over 4,000 species records from surveys and iNaturalist



Survey and Map  
25 Wildlife Surveys  
480 Volunteers

## COASTWISE NORTH DEVON

Working with Coastwise to broaden membership, organise events and survey shores

7 Coastal Surveys  
66 Volunteers



Communities and volunteers have completed wildlife audits of 6 locations



**Hartland Nature Society**  
Supporting the start up and activities of the Hartland Nature Society with over 70 members and an active calendar of training, surveys and talks in the Parish



## 4.2 Outcomes for Nature – Nature Restoration

As part of the project, the FNF team have been supporting the National Trust on their initiative to restore species-rich grasslands habitats on NT sites across the AONB (<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/devon/woolacombe/north-devon-grasslands-project>)

- In the first two years of the project 80 ha of donor sites have been identified and surveyed, 235 ha have been harvested for seed, 100 ha have been over-sown, involving 139 volunteers.



Work on developing an AONB-wide Nature Recovery Plan and its consequent community-based local action plans is due for delivery in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the project.

<b>Outcome:</b> 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	Progress to date		Comments
Nature Restoration – restore species-rich grasslands on sites in AONB		80 ha donor sites surveyed		In partnership with NT as delivery partners Well above target
	60 ha	235 ha have been harvested for seed		
	60 ha	101 ha have been over-sown		
	200	139 people have been involved		
Community—led Nature Recovery Plan for the AONB		Scheduled for year 3		Not started



Localised practical action plans		Scheduled for year 3		Not started
----------------------------------	--	----------------------	--	-------------

### 4.3 Outcomes for People - Training

A key first year milestone was to train staff and volunteers in survey techniques and species identification in order 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. The biggest increases were in their knowledge of surveying techniques.

**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

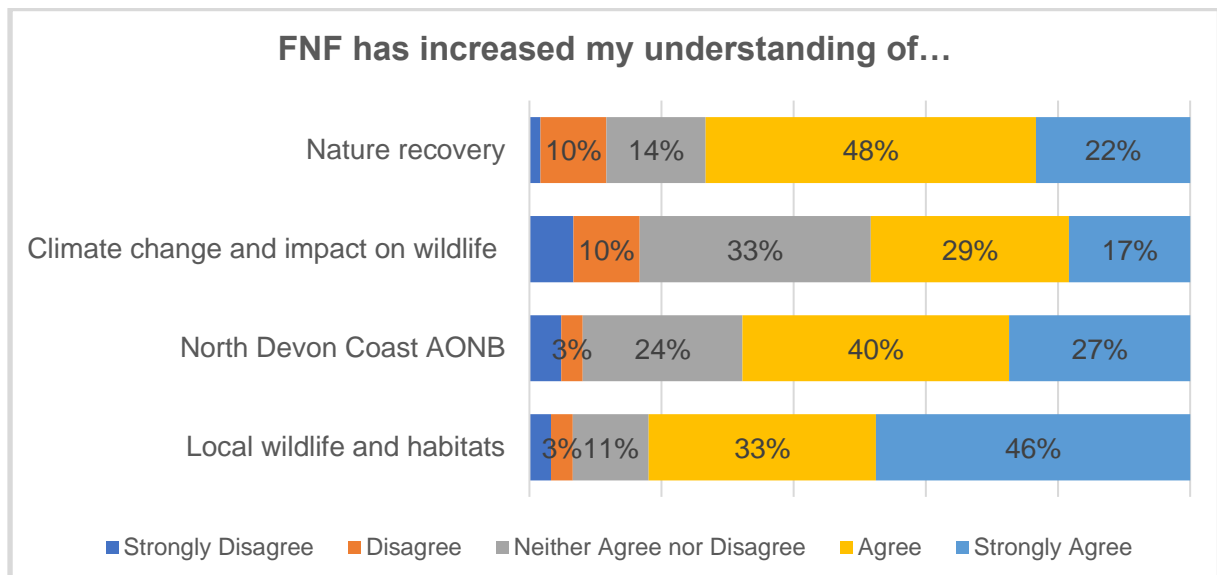
Activity	3-yr target	Progress to date		Comments
Ecological Skills – ID and survey techniques	12 training sessions	Staff have received 17 training courses		Well over target
	250 attendees at 25 training sessions	180 attendees at 18 training days		Provision and take up of training days doing very well 72% of project target
Practical Conservation Training		Not started yet		



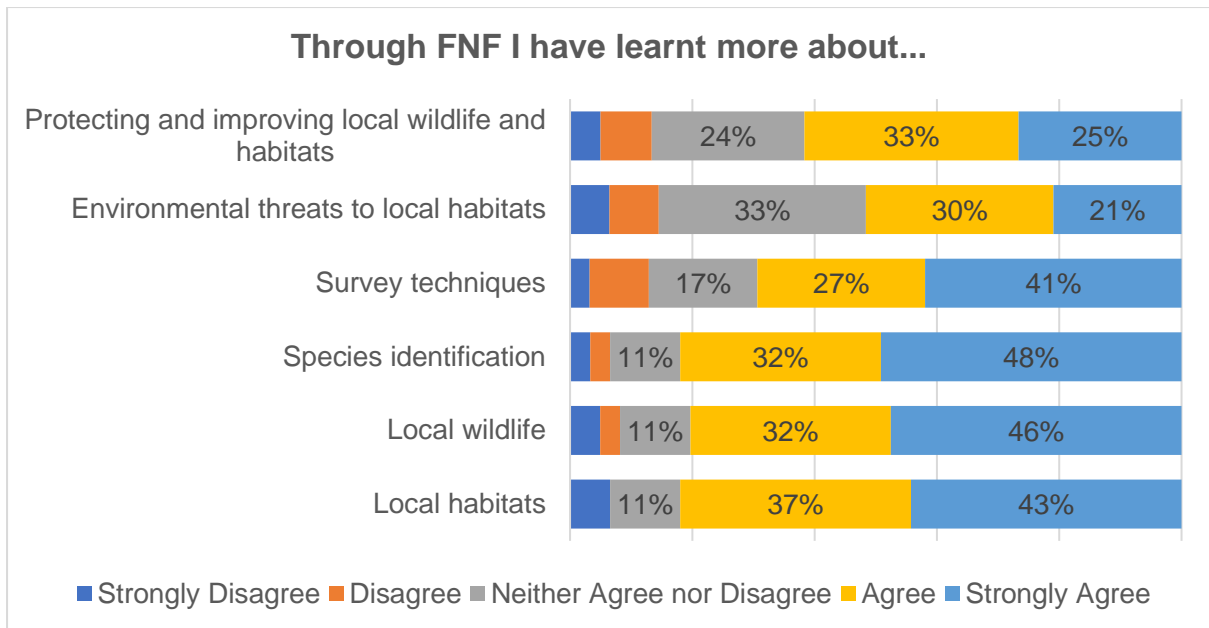
#### 4.4 Outcomes for People – Public Engagement

As well as the training of community volunteers and practical surveying and restoration activities, the project team have organised a number of events to engage the public over the last 18 months, including the bioblitz held in July 2023 which attracted 437 participants, and a number of coastal activities. Those who signed up to the FNF mailing list were asked to take part in an on-line survey. Of the 250 contacts surveyed 63 responded to the questionnaire, a 25% response rate. Respondents report an increased knowledge and understanding of local wildlife and habitats, and a greater awareness and connection with nature.

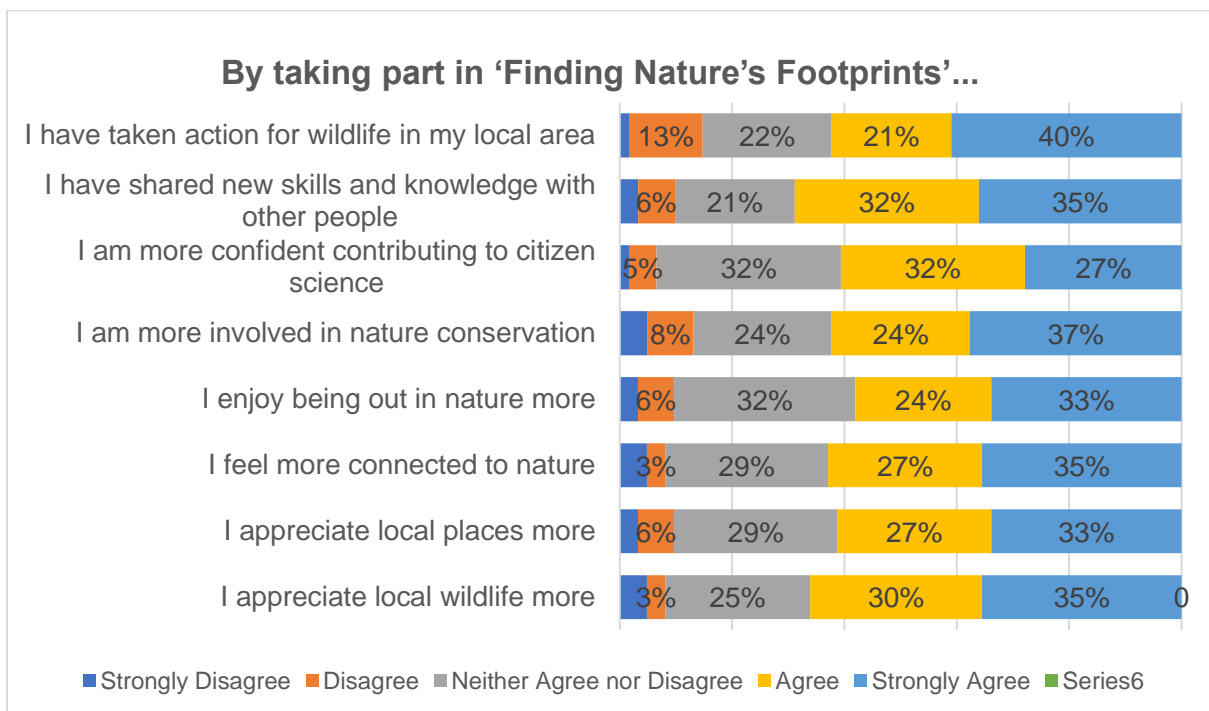
- 79% of respondents to the on-line questionnaire said that the project had increased their understanding of local wildlife and habitats, while 70% had increased their understanding of nature recovery and 67% of the North Devon Coast AONB.



- 80% of respondents felt that they had learnt more about local habitats and species identification, while 68% had learnt more about survey techniques and 58% about protecting and improving local wildlife and habitats.



- 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

<b>Outcome:</b> People will have been offered a range of methods to help them connect with our natural heritage				
Activity	3-yr target	Progress to date		Comments
		Engagement Activities have reached 1822 in the first year		This includes engagement in any of the activities including children taking part in the arts projects, community volunteers and public events
Coastal Activities	9 activities involving 1000 participants	12 activities involving 203 participants		In partnership with Coastwise Three extreme beach cleans had to be cancelled due to bad weather.
Annual Bioblitz	3 bioblitz events over 3 years, the 1050 participants	437 attendees at 1 bioblitz event		

#### 4.5 Outcomes for People – Reaching new audiences

- Overall, the project has done well in reaching new audiences. Of the 1,822 people engaging with the project so far, 54% have been new to AONB activities. This is also reflected in the response to the on-line questionnaire, where 52% of respondents were new to the AONB.
- However, for a variety of reasons, the project through its work with partners has not yet been able to reach as many people in the range of different audiences originally envisaged in the project submission.
- The ‘From the River to the Sea’ and ‘Flights of Fancy’ projects, delivered by Red Herring Productions, have been highly successful in the quality of environmental and creative work carried out with schools. Over the two academic years Red Herring Productions has 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 has not been able to work with as many schools or with as many pupils as originally planned for.
- The initiative to work with diverse cultural groups and the LBGTQ+ community through Sunrise Diversity, has been delayed. There have been a number of engagement events, involving 36 people, but as yet there have been no outdoor activities.
- The AONB Environment Group is widely seen by partners and participants as a highly successful initiative. Over the last 6 months the project has engaged with 23 young people between the ages of 15-25 at 14 events, ranging from a mini-expedition to surveying work and BBQ. However, overall attendance has been low and there are questions whether this group can be self-sustaining into the future (see case study below).

- The Nature's Tonic project, which seeks to improve participants mental health through engaging with nature through low impact social activities, has not yet started, and is programmed for year two and three of the project.

<b>Outcome: New Audiences will have been reached and engaged</b>				
Activity	3-yr target	Progress to date		Comments
General Engagement		Of the 1,822 attending 54% are new to the AONB		
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	36 people engaged		In partnership with Sunrise Diversity as delivery partner. Although 36 people have been engaged there have been no outdoor activities yet
AONB Environment Group: Environmental activities for young people aged 15-25	30 young people involved in 30 events	23 attendees at 14 events		On target but there are challenges in organising and mobilising this age range (see case study below)
Nature's Tonic: Nature on prescription	16 sessions with 96 participants	Scheduled for year two and three of the project		In partnership with Northam Burrows Country Park rangers.



## AONB Environment Group

The AONB Environment Group was set up by the FNF team to engage with young people aged 15-25. Launched in May 2023 the group has been successful in attracting young people mainly through the local sixth-form and FE colleges, but includes some older young adults.

The Environment Group has offered young people a range of hands-on activities with a mix of environmental activity, social, and conservation work. Events have 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 23 young people have taken 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.

This age group can be hard to work with, and the group has 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."

## 5.0 Discussion

In the next section we will be looking at the areas in which the project is working well, where there have been challenges, and finally areas for improvement.

### 5.1 What's Working Well

- The Project Team – Feedback from partners and participants consistently feature the project team as one of the main elements of 'what is good about the project'. There is strong praise for the team's enthusiasm, energy and expertise. Factors highlighted include being personable, well-organised, enthusiastic, and their expert knowledge. In a project like this, with a strong element of public engagement, the personal attributes of project staff can make a lot of difference in the ultimate success of the project.
- Another important feature of the project is its approach to community engagement. By focusing on working with existing community groups such as Coastwise and the Friends of Hillsborough, and facilitating new community groups such as the Hartland Nature Society the project is helping to support and strengthen existing structures which will outlast the project and embed environmental knowledge and skills in local communities (*see case study below*).
- 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 can deliver.
- As an integral part of the project, the internship has been valuable in providing young people with an opportunity to gain experience in basic environmental techniques which will hopefully be a first step towards a career in the environment. The AONB Environment Group has also helped young people in North Devon thinking of studying environmental issues or even a career in environmental science to gain a wider insight into ecology and nature conservation.

c

## Hartland Nature Society

The Hartland Peninsula is a particularly important area for wildlife within the AONB 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 AONB, 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 78 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.”*



## 5.2 Challenges

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

- Seasonality and the weather have had an impact on implementing surveys and other project activities. Surveys in particular can only be done at certain times of the year, and the weather on the day of the survey can make a significant difference on the visibility and distribution of wildlife. Weather also affected a number of other activities, particularly the extreme beach cleans, which had to be cancelled due to bad weather.
- Linked to the challenge above, since the full project team was only in place in November 2022, and that training in surveying skills had to be organised and delivered so they were competent to undertake the surveying work the surveys themselves could only really start in spring 2023.
- Working with people in the outdoors can be just as challenging. It can be difficult to coax people into the outdoors when it is wet and cold, particularly if they are new to the experience. This means there is a finite window of opportunity for public engagement activities, particularly if you want to reach new audiences, and has meant that project activities are concentrated into the summer months, stretching resources at the busiest time of the year.
- Project staffing and capacity issues: Given the size of the AONB area and the breadth of the project, the core team is relatively small and has a finite capacity. The project has only been able to achieve the projects objectives by working extensively with partners and volunteers. Although this in many ways is a positive factor, partnership working and working with volunteers requires a considerable amount of co-ordinating, liaising with and managing the different parties, which itself takes away from the team's capacity.
- Although the project has done well in engaging with community volunteers, providing training and practical experience in surveying, it has found that it takes time to build the confidence of volunteers sufficiently to undertake surveys on their own. Without such confidence, there may be a continuing role for the AONB team or other specialist environmental organisations to facilitate and support such surveys into the future.
- Many people have "quite specific interests and motivations, whether this is for a species, a habitat or a place", and it is sometimes difficult to get people interested in the wide range of species and taxa necessary to undertake a complete habitat survey.
- There is also a difficult balance to be made between wider community engagement and building a cadre of community volunteers with enough knowledge, confidence and skills to undertake sufficiently robust surveys that would be required to meet County Wildlife Site criteria, or to provide the ecological background to respond to planning applications.

## 5.3 Areas for Improvement

- There are two areas where the project is not currently meeting its targets. The first is in carrying out the surveys of County Wildlife Sites and local habitats. In interviews with partners, creating a baseline of knowledge through habitat and

species surveys was seen as a key and single most important element of the project. Therefore, it is imperative that the team makes up for lost ground over the final years of the project.

- The second area is in the partnership work in reaching new and diverse audiences. Due to a number of reasons, including capacity and issues within host organisations, this work is going slower than the team would like. Although engagement activities have taken place with users of Sunrise Diversity the project needs to move ahead with getting participants involved in outdoor activities. The Nature's Tonic project has yet to be started.
- Although it is generally accepted that there is good partnership working, in conversations with partners it is clear there is room for improvement. At times partners do not feel fully engaged with the project. In interviews the absence of regular steering group meetings and limited communications was mentioned a number of times, as well as a general wish to strengthen joint working and integrate activities.
- It is clear that the project is making great efforts to attract young people through school projects, the AONB Environment Group, and other initiatives. However, the age profile of participants and community volunteers remains stubbornly in the over 45s category, as shown by the results of the on-line questionnaire. One of the reasons for this maybe the timing of many events and activities which are scheduled when working-age people and their dependants cannot attend. Further effort could be made to ensure a range of timings of events including weekends, and summer evening activities, when younger people may be more readily able to attend.
- Further work could be done to embed evaluation and make it a natural part of all project activities. This would give the project team a better understanding of what is really going on, and help them respond to changing needs. and gain further insight into how the project is going.

## **6.0 Conclusions and Recommendations**

Finding Nature's Footprints has always been an ambitious project with many strands and multiple partners. In its first 18 months it has achieved a great deal and is well on the way to meeting its stated outcomes and targets. The project works effectively with a small core team working closely with volunteers and partners. There is an opportunity in the remaining two years to focus down on those areas that will achieve the greatest lasting benefits and to pivot from 'learning about' nature to 'acting for' nature.

As well as the areas for improvement highlighted above, we would recommend the following areas for consideration:

### **Recommendation 1: An opportunity to re-prioritise and re-focus**

- Given the limited capacity of the project team, if they are to consolidate the gains they have made and to move on to those areas of work that have not yet begun. they may need to re-prioritise and re-focus their efforts on a smaller number of activities.

It is clear that the survey and mapping work is an essential part of the project and is what distinguishes it from other environmental initiatives in the area. This is clearly a priority for the project and for partners.

On the other hand, one area to re-consider might be the amount of time and effort put into generic public engagement activities. As other local environmental groups expand their activities post pandemic, there may now be less reason for the FNF to provide these more generic events, and could leave them to other local partners.

### Recommendation 2: Focus on sustainability and legacy

- One of the main outcomes from the project will be a better understanding of the state of local habitats, and the range of specific species. However, for this knowledge to be effective as ‘action for nature’ it needs to be owned by the local communities, and embedded in local nature-recovery action plans. It is never too early to start getting communities on board with this, as it may be difficult to get local bodies – parishes or community groups - to take real ownership of these action plans. Community groups may need continuing facilitation and support if local nature recovery action-plans are going to be a sustainable way forward.
- In the same way, if community-led survey work is to continue beyond the life of the project, it is important that the survey and mapping skills are embedded as far as possible in the communities, not only through the generic community volunteers, who as we have noted above often lack the confidence or knowledge to conduct surveys on their own, but also with more specialist nature volunteers with a bit more knowledge and experience.

### Recommendation 3: Focus on practical action

- One of the original aims of the project was “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.” In the first 18 months of the project there has been a focus on ‘connection with’ and ‘knowledge about’ nature. Now would be good time to re-focus on ‘action for’ - offering opportunities for practical conservation work or signposting to other things that might be happening locally, and embedding such actions in community-level nature recovery action plans. As interviewees commented:

“People enjoy doing the survey work. They’ve seen how things are disappearing, now they want to do something about it.” *Project partner*

“I want to learn more about what can be done about all the changes we see happening. It’s important to record the changes and raise the alarm, but what can be done. And what can I practically do about it?”  
*Project participant*

## Appendix 1 – Findings from the On-line Questionnaire

*Finding Nature's Footprints' is a three-year National Lottery Heritage Fund supported project which aims to learn more about the nature in our villages, gardens, fields and shores through surveys, monitoring and mapping of wildlife including plants, mammals, insects and birds.*

*North Devon Coast AONB have teamed up with partners across North Devon to provide opportunities for new audiences in the area to connect with nature and benefit from the nationally designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.*

*We are carrying out an interim evaluation, carried out by an independent evaluator Clarity CIC, to help us plan the future years of the project. We would be very grateful if you could fill in the following form which will help us improve the project for the benefit of local wildlife.*

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

Contact with project officer	27	30.3%
Word of mouth	21	23.6%
Event publicity	12	13.5%
Through other organisations	11	12.4%
Social media	9	10.1%
AONB e-newsletter	5	5.6%
Internet search	3	3.4%
Leaflets	1	1.1%
<b>Total instances</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Over 68% of respondents had found out about FNF events and activities, through contact with the project officer, by word of mouth or through other organisations rather than from FNF publicity.

This may indicate that FNF publicity is not reaching those who are not already involved with the project, but it may also reflect the communication preferences of the respondents (see answers to Q 12).

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

No	33	52.4%
Yes	30	47.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

52% of respondents were new to North Devon AONB activities.

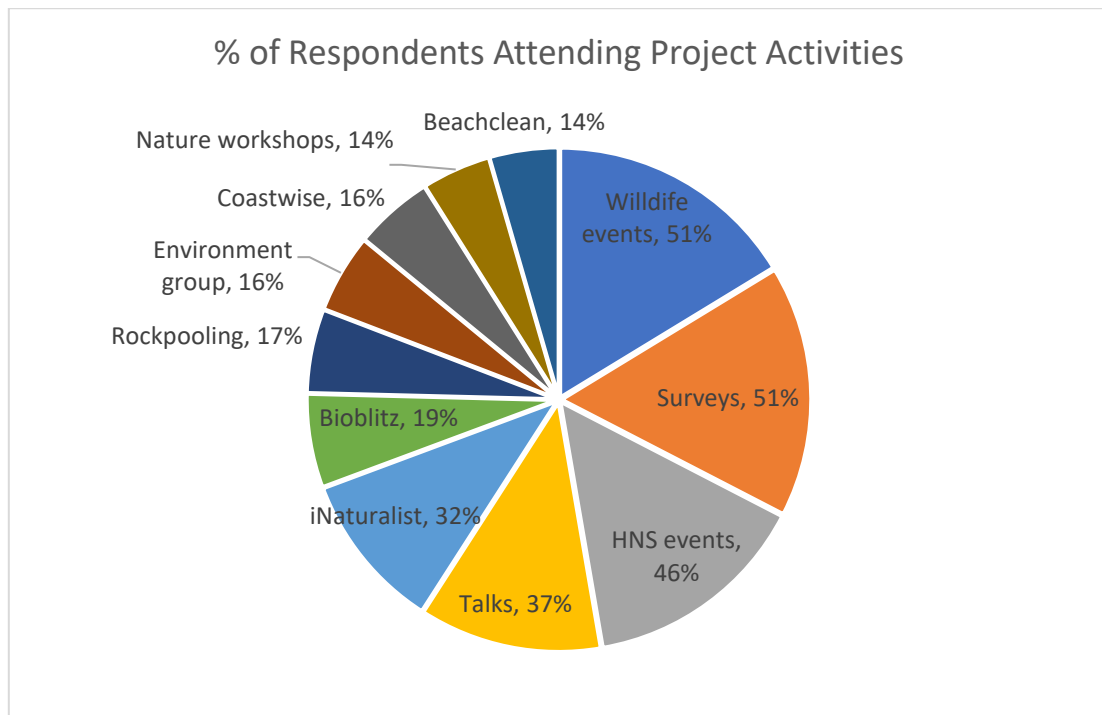
### Q3 Over the last 12 months, which of the project's activities, workshops and events have you been involved with? Please tick all that apply.

	<b>Occurrences</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
Specific wildlife events i.e. bat walk	32	51%
Wildlife or habitat surveys	32	51%
Hartland Nature Society events	29	46%
Talk or presentations	23	37%
Posting iNaturalist observations	20	32%
Bioblitz	12	19%
Rock pooling	11	17%
AONB Environment group	10	16%
Coastwise	10	16%
Nature workshops (Ilfracombe or Woolacombe)	9	14%
Beach Cleans / Litter Picking	9	14%
<b>Total occurrences</b>	<b>197</b>	

Just over 50% of respondents had attended wildlife events or taken part in surveys.

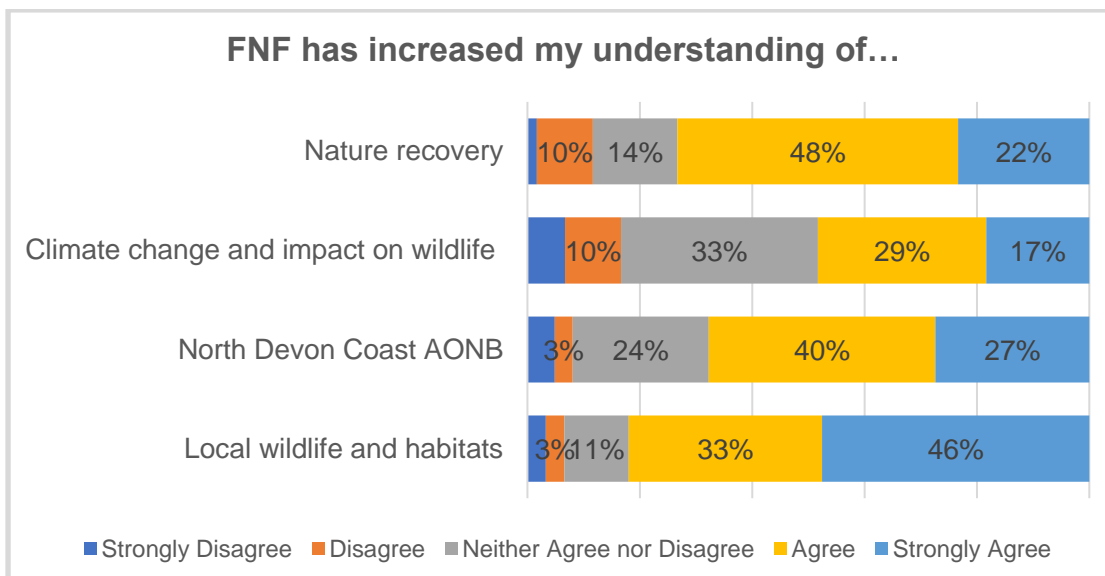
46% of respondents had attended Hartland Nature Society events. This may reflect the focus of FNF activities in the first year.

On average, respondents had attended over 3 activities.



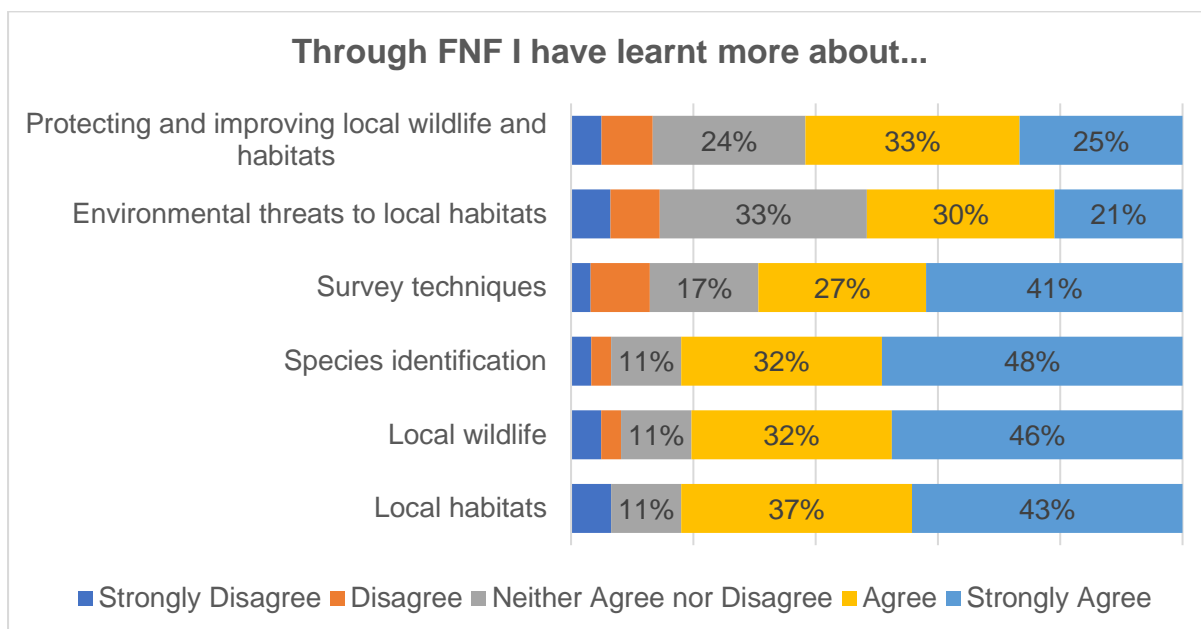
## What difference has FNF made to you

**Q4** 'Finding Nature's Footprints' has increased my understanding of.....



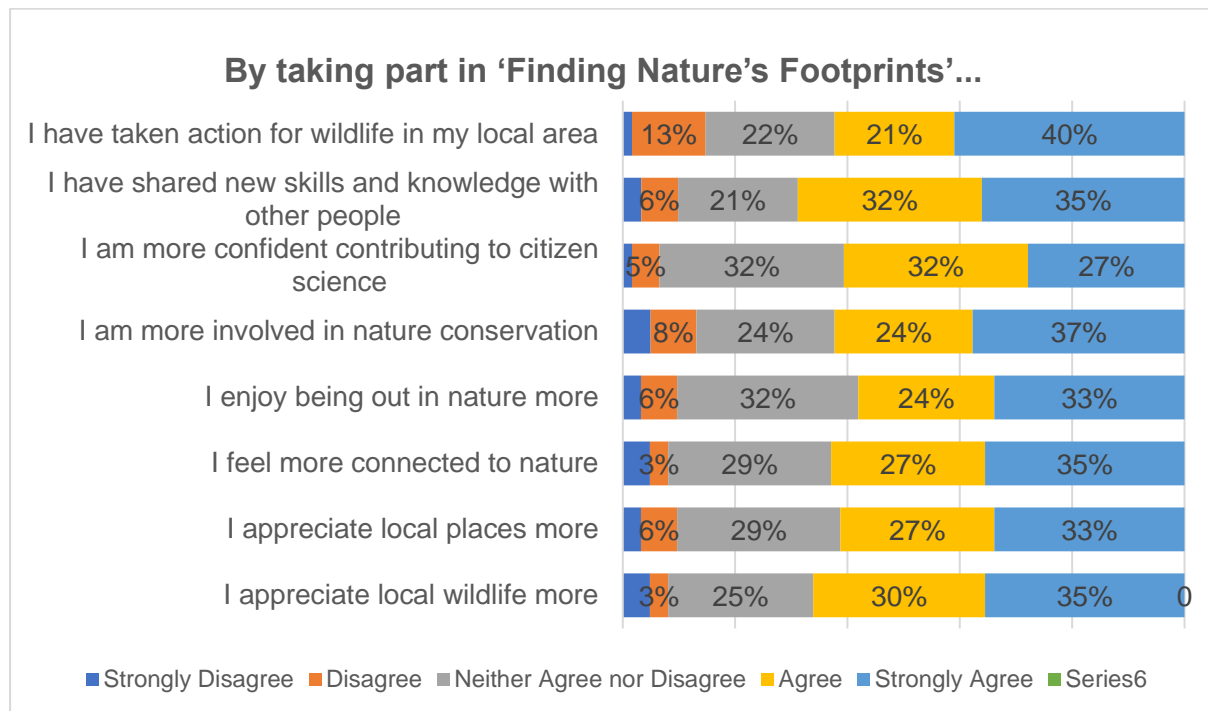
79% of respondents said that the project had increased their understanding of local wildlife and habitats, while 70% had increased their understanding of nature recovery and 67% the North Devon Coast AONB. Only 46% felt that they had increased their understanding of climate change and its impact on local wildlife.

#### Q5 Through 'Finding Nature's Footprints' I have learnt more about.....



80% of respondents felt that they had learnt more about local habitats and species identification, while 68% had learnt more about survey techniques and 58% about protecting and improving local wildlife and habitats. Only 51% felt they had learnt more about the environmental threats to local habitats, reflecting the findings in the previous question.

**Q6 By taking part in ‘Finding Nature’s Footprints’...**



It is clear from the responses, that respondents have gained a number of benefits from the project  
 The three highest benefits of the project was sharing new skills and knowledge with other people (67%) , appreciating local wildlife more (65%) and connecting with nature (62)%.

**Q7 What have you enjoyed most about Finding Nature’s Footprints activities and events?**

The elements most appreciated by the respondents have been the opportunities to learn more about local wildlife, sharing with like-minded people, and having knowledgeable experts to hand.  
 A key component of the success of the events are that they are relaxed, engaging and enjoyable.

Themes:

- Increasing knowledge and understanding of local wildlife 16
- Sharing with like-minded people 13
- Knowledgeable experts 10
- Species identification 9
- Enjoyable and engaging events 8
- Wildlife surveys 3

Quotable quotes:

I have enjoyed...”meeting like-minded young people with an equal passion for nature, as well as the outstanding knowledge and skills of the leaders.”

“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.”

“Being led on a walk by a lichen expert, open(ed) up a world of the really small!”

“Enjoying time outside in special places with other interested people.”

“Friendly engaging events”

“I have found them very educational and it has inspired me to learn further.”

**Q8 What about Finding Nature’s Footprints activities and events could be improved?**

In general people were very satisfied with the FNF activities and events, and just wanted more.

However, the timing and length of sessions was questioned, particularly as many events excluded working people and those in full-time education.

Communications and publicity was also identified as an area for improvement.

Themes:

They’ve all been pretty good	9
Alternative times and timings	6
More of the same	5
Greater promotion and publicity	6
Local	2

Quotable Quotes:

“Alternative sessions would have been useful”, “Most are on weekdays during working hours”

“Build on and expand the excellent range of activities started”

“I think that the more local the activities are, the more chance there is of local people getting involved. Involving local schools is key.”

“Linking climate change to the teaching could add extra context to the importance of the science”

“I think it could be advertised more. I only heard about it through a family friend, and feel it could have a bigger online presence, or get advertised in papers etc..”

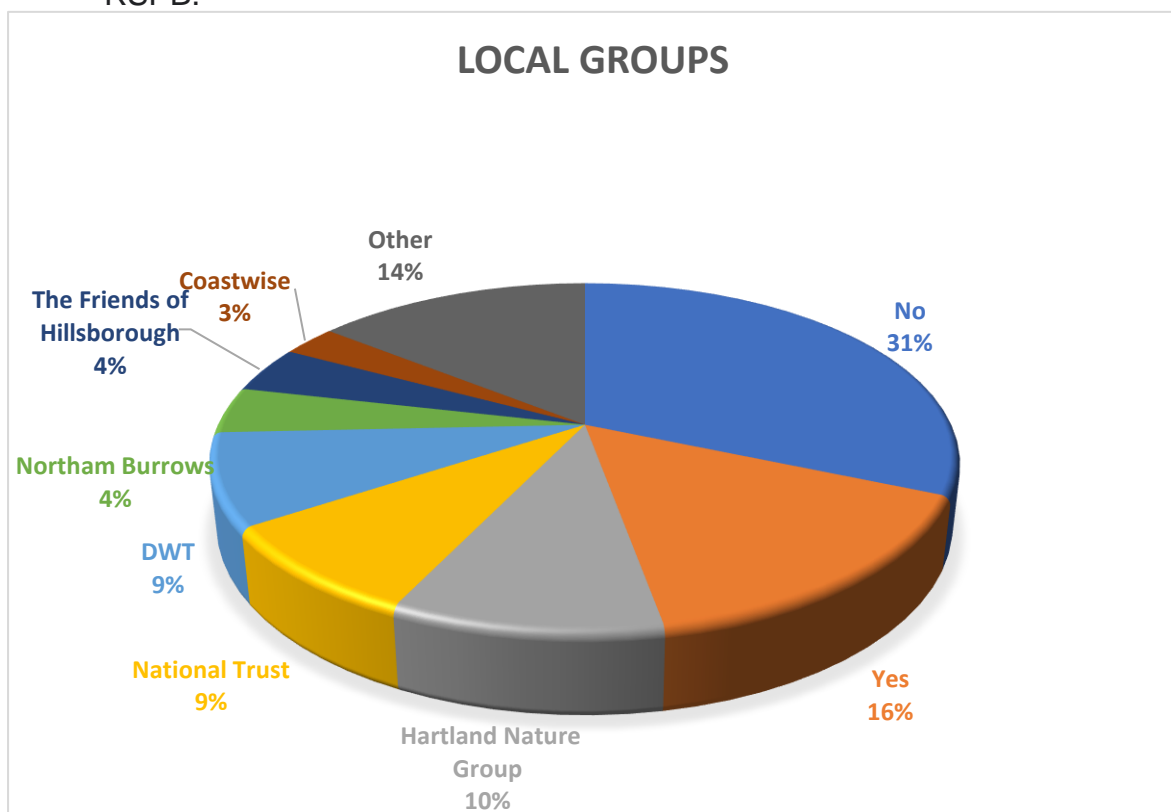
**Q9 If you could sum up your experience of Finding Nature’s Footprints in three words, what would they be?**

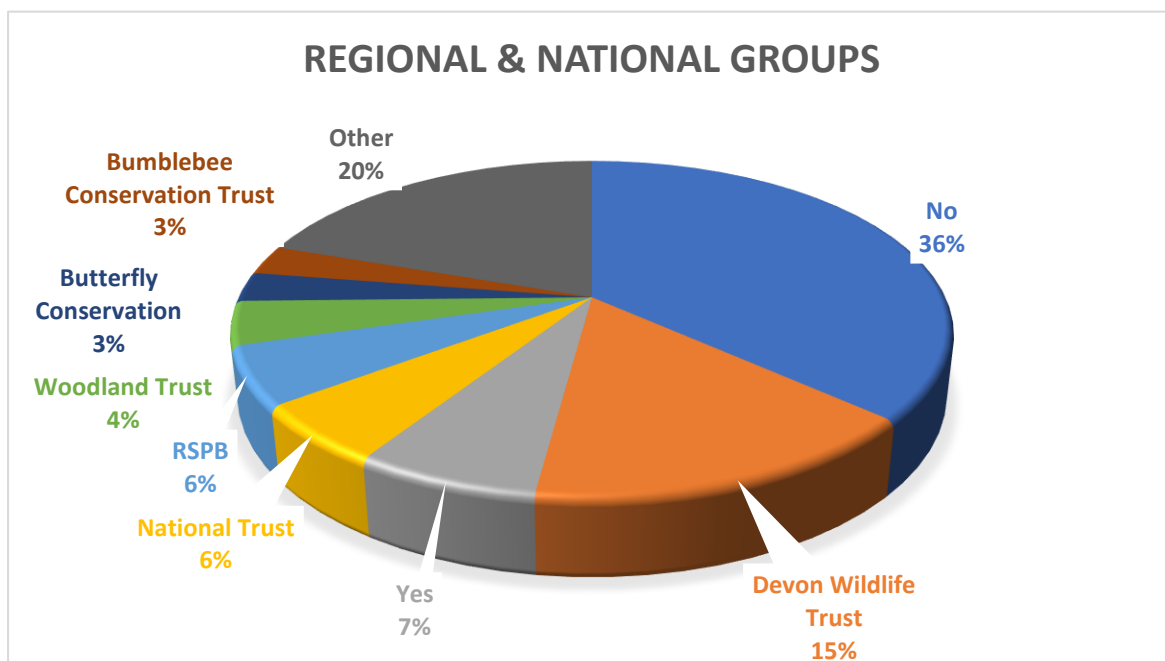




**Q10 Are you a member of a national wildlife group or charity? (RSPB, Woodland Trust, Marine Conservation Society etc.)**

69% of respondents are members of other environmental groups, both locally including Coastwise, Friends of Hillsborough and Hartland Nature Group, and regionally / nationally including Devon Wildlife Trust the National Trust and RSPB.





#### Q12 How have you found the project's communication?

(1 = very bad, 2 = not good, 3 = neither good or bad, 4 = good, and 5 = very good)

	0 I don't use this form of communication	1	2	3	4	5
Twitter	60%	5%	3%	16%	3%	0%
Instagram	54%	3%	2%	17%	10%	3%
Website	27%	0%	6%	21%	29%	11%
Facebook	35%	0%	2%	27%	16%	11%
Newsletters	22%	3%	6%	21%	19%	16%
Emails	2%	5%	2%	16%	25%	48%

- The most popular communications method is by email
- Less than a fifth of respondents used social media – Facebook, Instagram or Twitter - but that may reflect the demography of respondents.

#### Q13 Any other comments?

- I would like to know more about getting more involved
- Six formers studying Biology and Ecology would find these courses valuable.
- I used WhatsApp to communicate with others in the Environmentalist group. It was a great way of informal conversation between all of us.
- Social events where senior members can connect with the public would increase recognition and gain further involvement. If for instance you are going to a certain place to survey, having an event locally prior to the survey

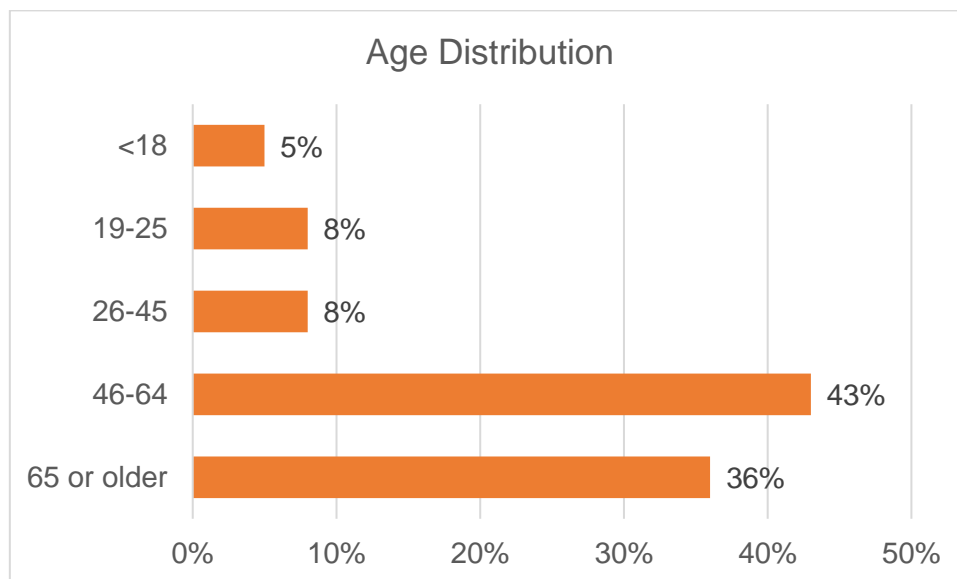
may lead to local involvement. Locals usually have better knowledge which would lead to a greater survey result.

- Your communication is great - neither too much nor too little. Just right in fact.
- I haven't seen a website or social media site related to the project.
- I THINK THIS PROJECT NEEDS TO EXTEND BEYOND THE INITIAL 3 YEAR PERIOD
- All staff leading the walks are good communicators
- Thanks for what you are doing
- All I can say is I'd want the project to be bigger and more frequent because it's brilliant
- Keep up the good work
- Please continue to thrive, expand and involve younger generations.
- Thank you
- Thank you for giving us the opportunity to learn and get involved

## About you

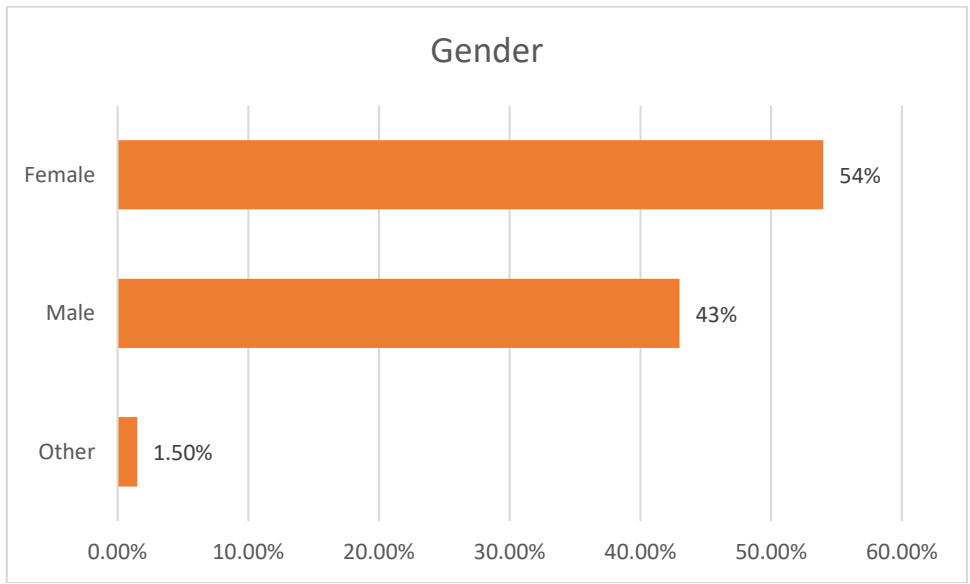
An outcome of this project is to increase the diversity of people who visit, understand and conserve the North Devon Coast AONB. Providing this information helps to monitor our progress.

### Q14 Age

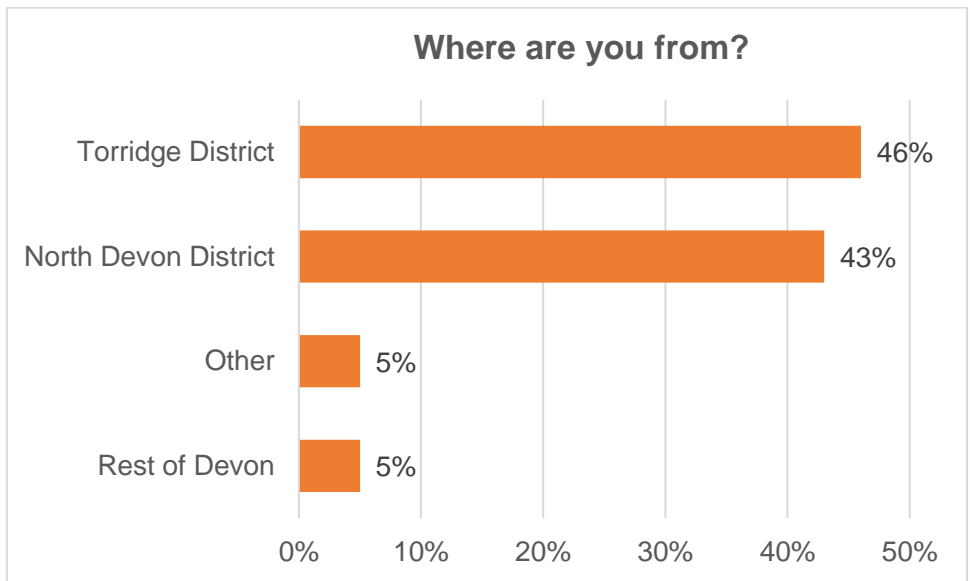


- 79% of the respondents were aged over 46.
- while under 25s make up less than 13%
- Putting this in context, data from the 2021 Census shows that of the resident population in the AONB, 60% are 45 or over, and 22% are under 25. The number in the 15-24 age range is much lower than national statistics, as many leave to find education, training or employment.

**Q15 Gender**



**Q16 Where are you from?**



## Appendix 2 – List of FNF partners, and other local environmental initiatives

The National Trust [https://www.facebook.com/NorthDevonNT/?locale=en\\_GB](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](http://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/>  
Coastwise [www.coastwisenorthdevon.org.uk](http://www.coastwisenorthdevon.org.uk)

