

WARWICKSHIRE WILDLIFE TRUST NATURE RESERVES

EXPLORING PEOPLE'S VIEWS AND SOCIAL OUTCOMES OF THE NATURE RESERVES

2024



UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
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FULL REPORT

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INTRODUCTION



Warwickshire Wildlife Trust (WWT) is one of the 64 UK Wildlife Trusts. Established in 1970 WWT is a grass roots organisation governed by 14 trustees elected from a membership of 26,000 people, 99% of whom live in the County, and supported by 700 active volunteers. WWT manages an estate covering 1,000 hectares across Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull and no one living or working in that area is more than 6 miles from one of the 64 nature reserves. To find out more about Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and the nature reserves you can visit www.warwickshirewildlifetrust.org.uk. A map with all nature reserves is available here: <https://www.warwickshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves>.

WWT nature reserves provide numerous benefits for local communities spanning from access to green space to improvements in mental and physical health. In order to capture the multiple benefits of the nature reserves for local communities, a survey was initiated to explore people's views on the WWT nature reserves as part of the project FIDELIO. FIDELIO is a project funded by the European Research Council exploring social outcomes of protected areas across several sites in Europe. The project is grounded on key theories of environmental sociology and environmental psychology capturing the interactions of society with the natural environment. During the project a large amount of qualitative and quantitative social data have been collected in over 20 European Protected Areas aiming to:

- understand the complexities of socio-ecological systems in Protected Areas across space and time
- explore the key obstacles (from a socio-economic perspective) in achieving biodiversity conservation targets
- develop a guide on social impact assessment for European Protected Areas.

METHODS



In order to explore people's views on the nature reserved we used an adapted version of the Social Impact Assessment Tool for Protected Areas (SOCIAT) which has been developed by researchers at the University of Warwick and the University of Cambridge in collaboration with several park authorities across Europe. This consists of a structured questionnaire including 19 questions covering a variety of topics capturing the social value of protected areas. Further information on SOCIAT can be found here: www.warwick.ac.uk/fidelio/tools.

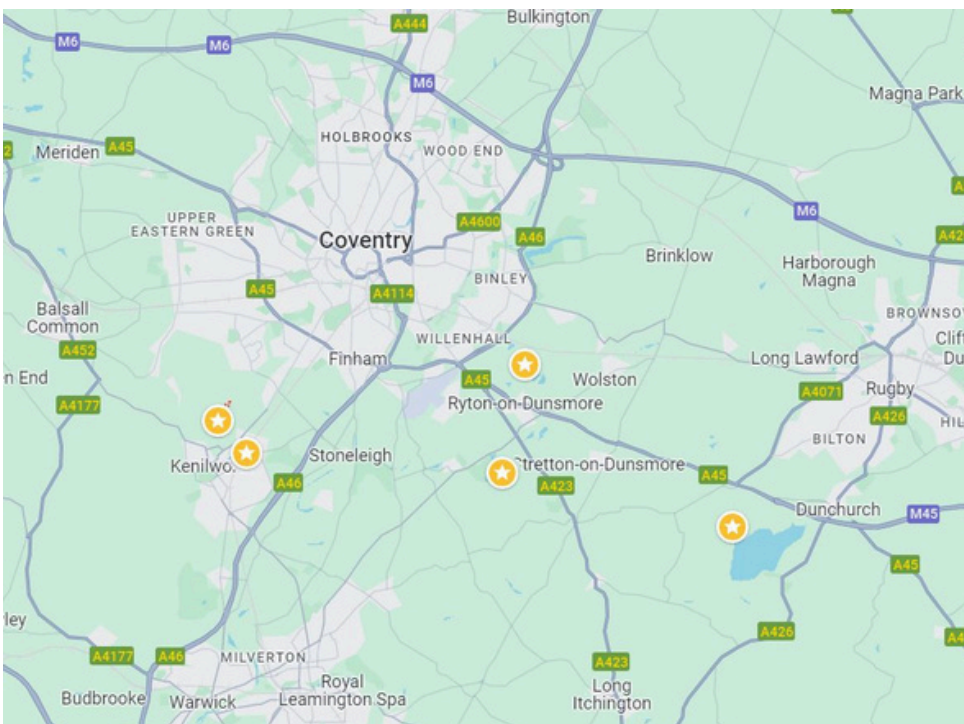
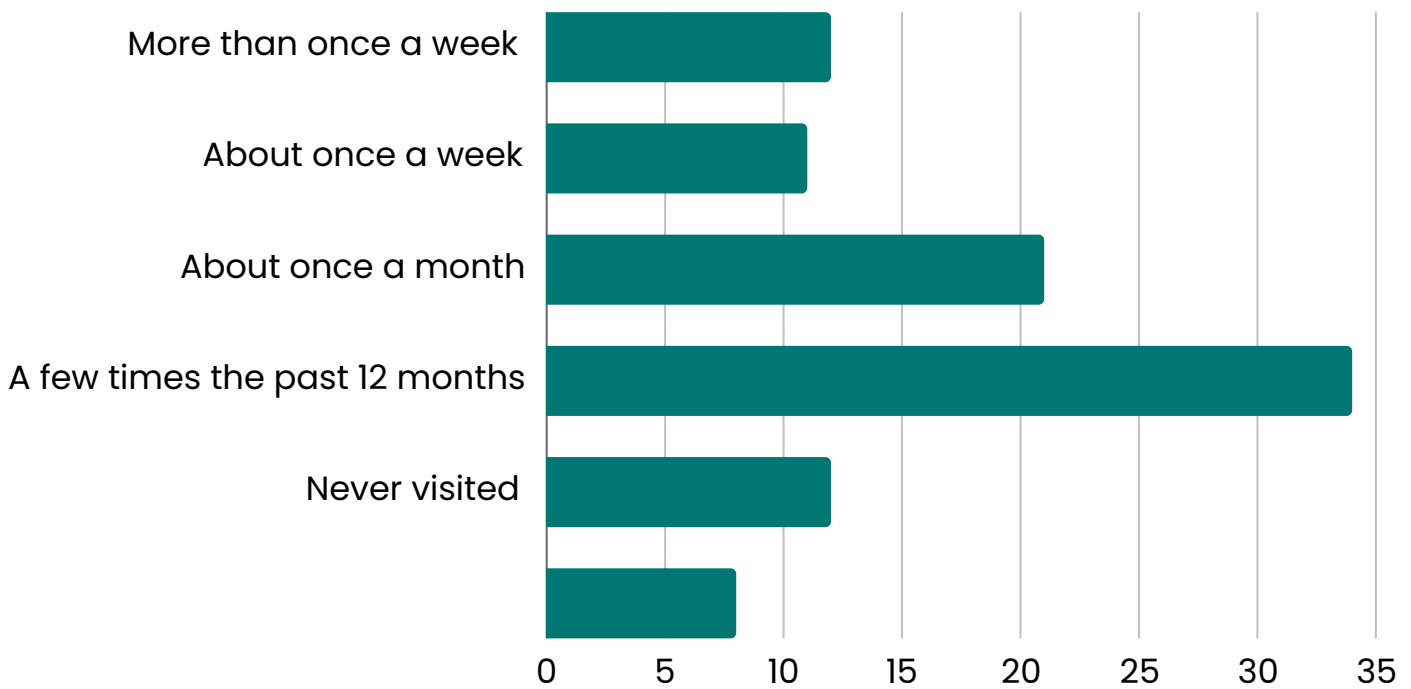
The questionnaire was distributed using Qualtrics from December 2023 until June 2024 to local communities living within 5km of the 64 nature reserves. A postcard was initially sent to a random sample of 9,000 households. The postcard explained the main aims of the survey and invited people to access the survey via a link which directed them to a Qualtrics page. After checking the main characteristics of the sample additional respondents were approached face to face and via additional postcards to ensure the appropriate geographical distribution of the sample.

In total, 180 responses were recorded which was a relatively low rate compared to other SOCIAT surveys. All respondents were permanent residents in the area. 22.7% of respondents live in the area between 21 and 30 years and 21.2% have lived in the area 31-40 years. 47.6% of respondents were female and 45.4% male. 2.8% had completed primary education, 38.7% had completed secondary education and 32.5% higher education. 9.4% had completed postgraduate studies.

RESULTS

VISITS AT THE NATURE RESERVES

Respondents were asked how often they visit nature reserves. 34% stated that they have visited them a few times the past 12 months and 21% that they visit about once a month. 11-12% said that they visit either more than once a week or about once a week. 12% of the sample also mentioned that they have never visited a WWT nature reserve.



Most visited nature reserves were Ryton Wood (25%), Kenilworth Common (30%), Brandon Marsh (38%), Draycote Meadows (26%) and Crackley Wood (20%).

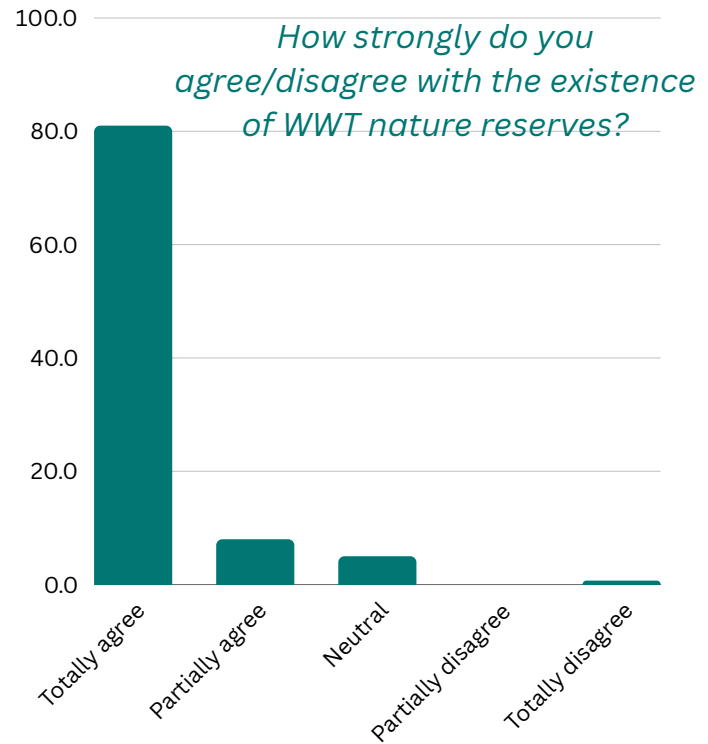
SUPPORT FOR THE NATURE RESERVES

Respondents were asked how strongly they agree or disagree with the existence of WWT nature reserves. An overwhelming majority (90%) support the existence of the nature reserves. The level of support for the nature reserves was closely linked with their multiple social outcomes for local communities. Six main categories of positive social outcomes were identified through the survey.

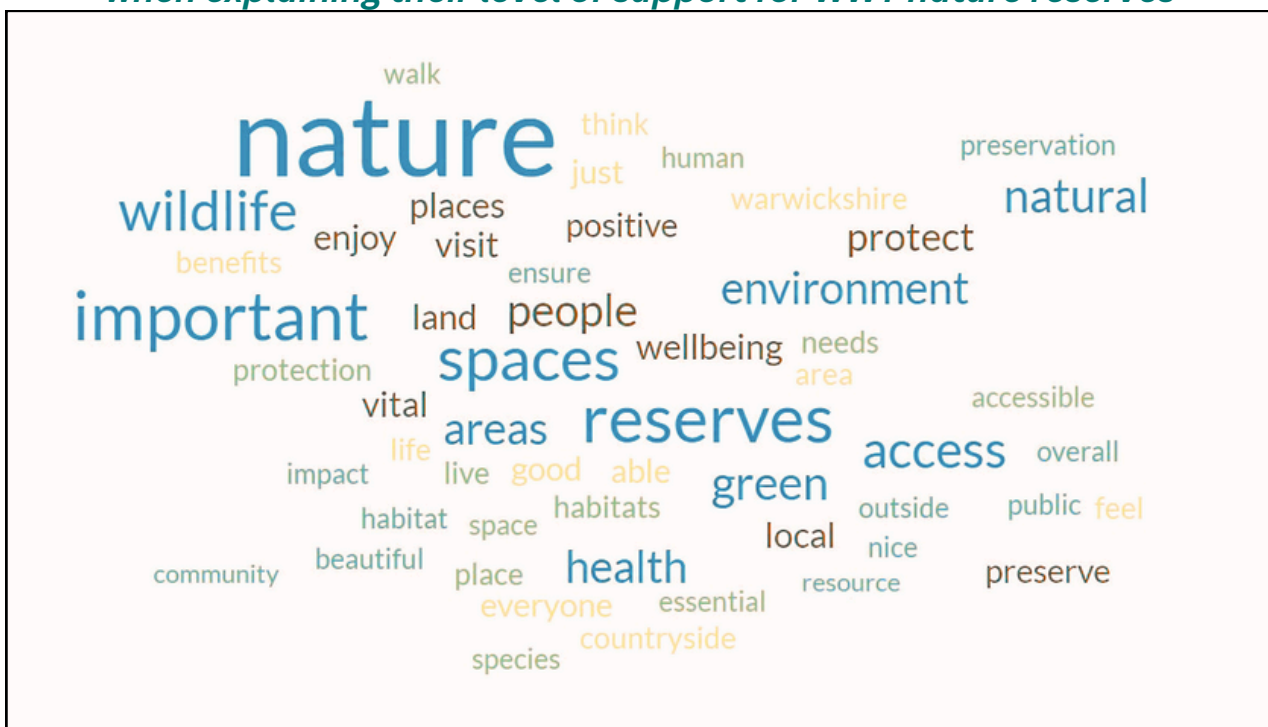
Social benefits of WWT nature reserves

- Accessibility and Inclusivity
- Mental and Physical Health Benefits
- Community and Educational Value
- Public Awareness and Engagement
- Quality of Life Enhancement
- Biodiversity Conservation

While nature reserves offer numerous benefits some challenges were also mentioned by respondents. Accessibility issues were mentioned as a concern, especially for people with disabilities, restricting access to nature areas. Additionally, there was some criticism regarding management practices, such as tree cutting.



The word cloud presents the most frequent words mentioned by participants when explaining their level of support for WWT nature reserves



REASONS OF SUPPORT

Accessibility and Inclusivity

A number of respondents highlighted that WWT Nature reserves provide essential access to green spaces, especially in urban areas, such as Coventry and Birmingham, where green spaces are limited. They offer free and inclusive environments where everyone, including low-income families and individuals, can relax and enjoy nature. Increased publicity and awareness are needed to ensure more people can benefit from these natural areas. Access to these spaces was considered crucial as countryside access is often restricted in the England.

Mental and Physical Health Benefits

Several respondents mentioned the importance of WWT nature reserves in enhancing physical and mental health. WWT nature reserves offer a peaceful retreat where individuals can relax, unwind, and escape the stresses of daily life. Regular visits to nature reserves contribute positively to overall wellbeing, providing a necessary balance to a fast-paced, urban lifestyle. The mental health benefits are particularly noteworthy, as nature reserves offer a sanctuary for reflection and rejuvenation.

Community and Educational Value

Nature reserves offer immense community and educational value by providing local resources that benefit both nature and people. They serve as platforms for environmental education, helping young people and the wider community understand and appreciate nature. Partnerships with local charities enhance the educational impact, fostering a sense of community involvement and responsibility. WWT reserves connect families and children with nature, enriching their experiences and broadening their understanding of the natural world.

REASONS OF SUPPORT

Accessibility and Inclusivity

Nature reserves significantly enhance the quality of life for residents by offering serene, green spaces for recreation and relaxation. These areas provide opportunities for walking, enjoying nature, and escaping the hustle and bustle of urban life. They contribute to the overall well-being of the community, offering calming environments that counteract the negative effects of urbanization. The preservation of green spaces ensures that residents can continue to enjoy these benefits, making areas with nature reserves more desirable places to live.

Public Awareness and Engagement

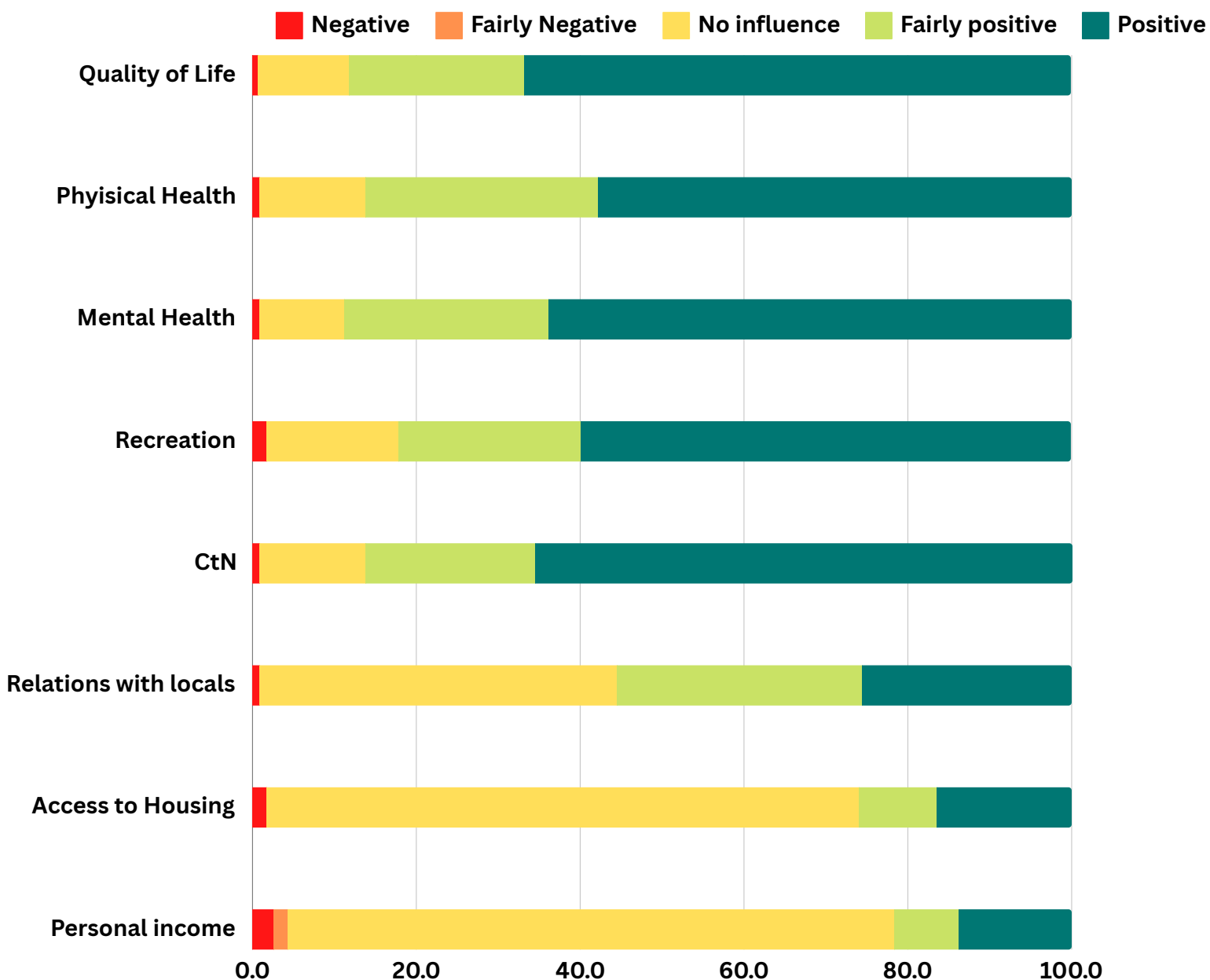
Public awareness and engagement with nature reserves are crucial for their success and sustainability. Many people were unaware of the existence and locations of local nature reserves, highlighting the need for better publicity and outreach. Increased awareness would encourage more visits and support for these natural areas, creating a stronger connection between the public and the environment. Engagement with nature reserves not only benefits individuals but also promotes collective efforts to protect and preserve these valuable spaces.

Biodiversity Conservation

Nature reserves play a vital role in environmental protection and conservation. They help preserve the natural environment, safeguard biodiversity, and maintain essential green spaces against the pressures from urban development. Several respondents highlighted that protecting WWT nature reserves is crucial for sustaining wildlife and ensuring a balanced ecosystem. Conservation efforts in nature reserves are fundamental to preventing the loss of precious natural habitats and ensuring the survival of diverse species.

SOCIAL OUTCOMES

From our analysis it is clear that the WWT nature reserves provide numerous benefits for local communities and nature. Through the questionnaire we also explored how important are selected social outcomes evaluated on a 5 point scale ranging from negative to positive. **Connectedness to nature (CtN)** and **Improvement of Mental Health** were the most beneficial social outcomes of WWT nature reserves according to respondents. The positive outcomes of the reserves were also evident in a number of other aspects such as physical health, quality of life and recreation. The impact of the nature reserves on people's income was more neutral with 74.1% of participants stating that it had no influence. Opportunities for accessing housing was also relatively neutral with over 70% of respondents mentioning that the nature reserves had no influence on this aspect. In the graph below percentages (with no missing answers) are presented.

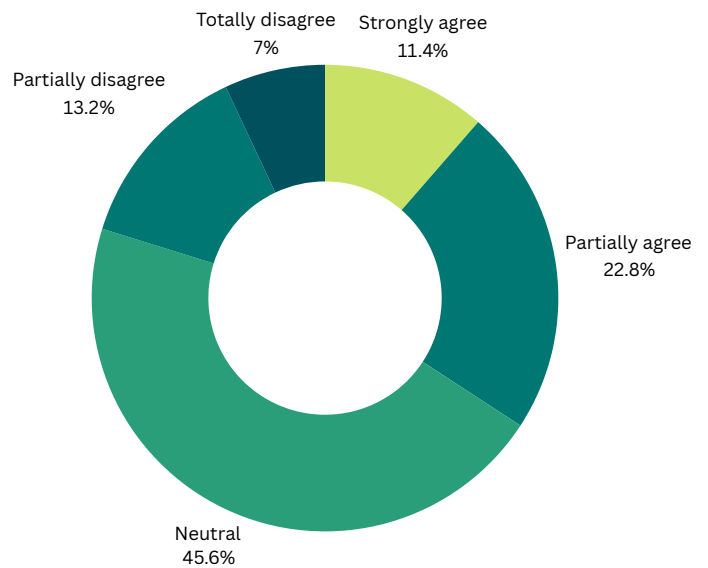


GOVERNANCE & TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS

Approximately 10% of participants said that they have volunteered in an activity that assists in the protection of WWT nature reserves in their local area in the past 5 years. Respondents were asked whether they feel they have enough time, money and opportunities to engage with such activities supporting the park. Volunteering activities mentioned included litter picking and helping out at woods. 36.7% said that they would be willing to volunteer in the future to support WWT.

Level of agreement: I have enough opportunities to get involved in initiatives for the protection of local nature reserves

34.2% of respondents felt that they have enough opportunities to get involved in initiatives for the protection of their local nature reserves



Over 80% of participants trust (fully or partially) Warwickshire Wildlife Trust



Respondents were also asked how much they trust three institutions involved directly or indirectly in the management of the nature reserves. This was measured on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 representing the lowest and 5 the highest level of trust. Trust for Warwickshire Wildlife Trust was very high (average score of 4.04). Trust in the UK government was significantly lower (average 2.02).

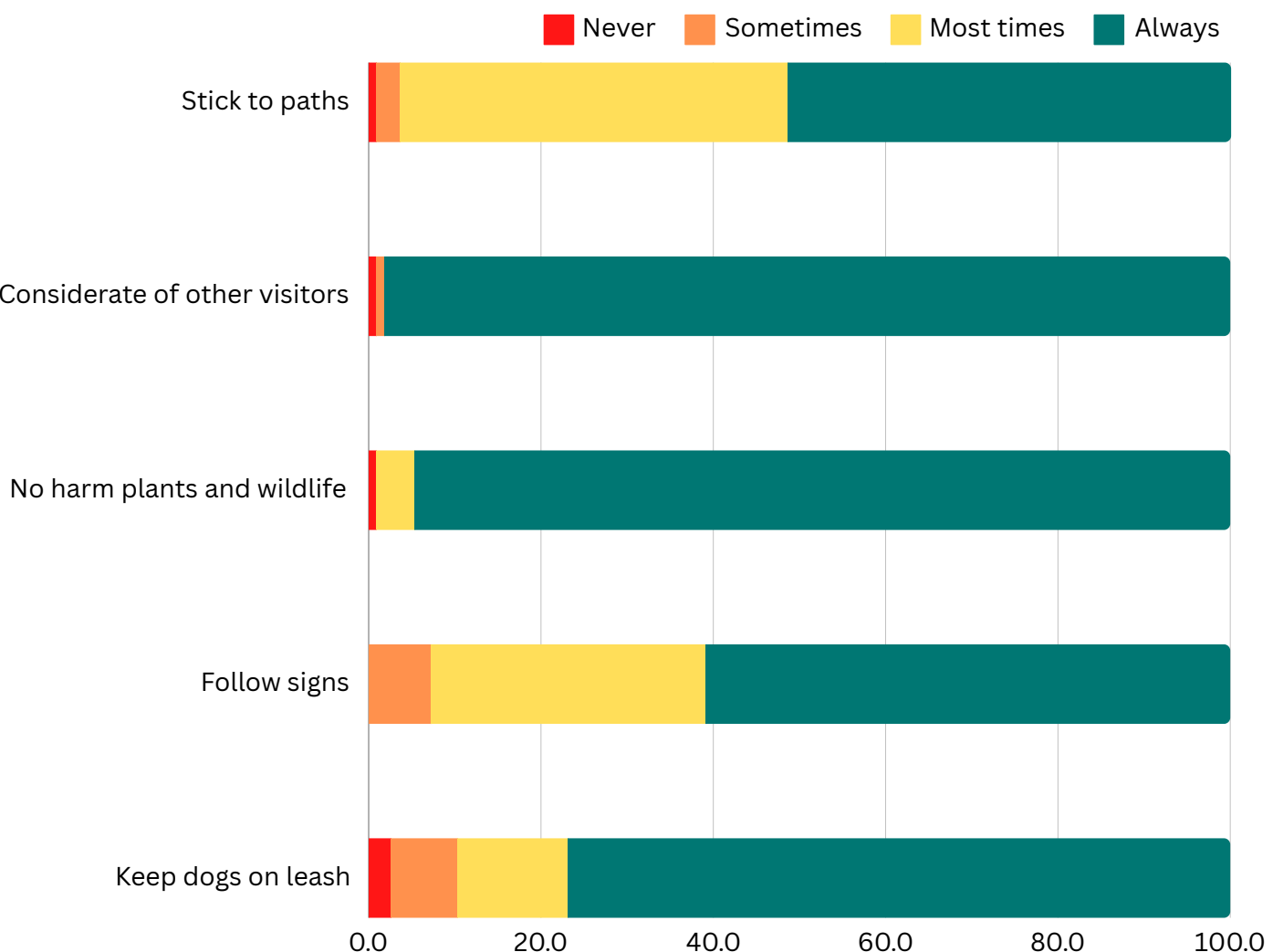
ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOUR

31.4% of participants mentioned that in the past 12 months they have noticed irresponsible behaviour in the WWT nature reserves from other users.

As a response to irresponsible behaviour of other users, participants mentioned several actions including confronting the other person, reporting them and collecting the rubbish they found in the nature reserves.

When asked about their own behaviour the majority of respondents stated that they are 'always' considerate of other users of the nature reserves. However, only half of respondents 'always' stick to paths and 60% always follow the signage during their visits in the nature reserves.

How often participants do the following when in WWT nature reserves?



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Below we provide some policy recommendations inspired by the input from participants in this survey aiming to maximise the social and environmental benefits provided by the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust nature reserves.

Enhance Public Awareness and Accessibility:

- Increase awareness about the existence and benefits of WWT nature reserves through targeted publicity campaigns.
- Improve signage and information dissemination to ensure the public can easily locate and access the nature reserves.

Support for Mental and Physical Health:

- Promote the use of nature reserves as spaces for mental and physical well-being.
- Develop programs and partnerships with local health organizations to integrate nature reserves into public health strategies.

Community Engagement and Participation:

- Foster community involvement by encouraging local residents to participate in the management and preservation of nature reserves.
- Expand volunteer programs and create opportunities for community-led initiatives to enhance local engagement.

Preservation and Conservation Efforts:

- Strengthen efforts to preserve and protect the biodiversity and natural habitats within the nature reserves.
- Implement sustainable management practices and monitor environmental impacts to ensure the long-term health of the reserves.

Educational Outreach and Activities:

- Develop educational programs and activities for schools and families to raise awareness about the importance of nature conservation.
- Use the nature reserves as living laboratories for environmental education and research.

Partnerships with Local Organizations:

- Collaborate with local charities, such as Coventry and Warwickshire MIND, to promote the use of nature reserves for therapeutic and recreational purposes.
- Build partnerships with other conservation and community organizations to leverage resources and expertise.

Infrastructure and Accessibility Improvements:

- Improve Green Infrastructure networks within the nature reserves to make them more accessible to people with disabilities and those with limited mobility.
- Ensure that pathways, facilities, and amenities are well-maintained and accessible to all visitors.

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