

## Recreational use of forests and wildlife interactions

Forest managers increasingly need to balance recreational and wildlife management objectives; however the impacts of recreation on wildlife are not well understood. This study explored these issues, with a particular focus on amphibians. It found little recorded evidence of recreational impacts on amphibians occurring in the UK but concluded that such impacts are possible. A majority of the respondents supported management to address the issue and were willing to receive more information about how they could reduce their impacts. Further research into this topic is recommended.



“involving people is an important one; it is quite hard to enforce education; the more people are interested in it, the better it is” (Interviewee)

### Background

UK forests are home to many species of wildlife and host a wide range of recreational activities. As such forest managers increasingly need to balance recreational use and wildlife management objectives. The consequences of recreation for wildlife, particularly amphibian species, are not well known. Little is also understood about the knowledge and attitudes of recreationists, regarding their potential impacts, particularly in the UK.

### Objectives

The objective of this study was to develop understanding of the potential impacts of forest recreational activities on amphibians and to assess recreationists' attitudes to their potential impacts on wildlife.

### Methods

A literature review identified the potential impacts of recreational activities on wildlife with a focus on amphibians. Semi-structured interviews with experts explored knowledge and attitudes to recreational effects on wildlife. Finally, a survey of visitors to two forest sites in Scotland explored the level of knowledge visitors have of wildlife and especially amphibians, how they value them as part of the forest, and their recreational experience. The survey also explored recreationists' perceptions of their impact on wildlife and how they would react to any potential limitations on their activities.



## Findings

The literature provided little evidence of recreational impacts on amphibians occurring in the UK, although it suggested that recreational activities could have consequences for amphibians in UK. According to the experts interviewed, the level of impact in the two forests used in this study is relatively low. They regarded dog walking without a leash as the most significant recreational source of impact. Recreationalists surveyed estimated that off-road vehicle use, dog walking and camping were the activities impacting the most on amphibians. Around 48% of the recreationalists surveyed thought their activities had none or not much influence on amphibians. This relatively low level of awareness by recreationalists of their potential impacts on wildlife has been found in other studies. Most recreationalists surveyed felt a lack of knowledge was the main barrier preventing them adjusting their behaviours to reduce negative affects on wildlife. Most were willing to receive information about how they could reduce their impacts and said they supported management actions aimed at better protecting wildlife from recreational activities.

## Recommendations

This report provides a preliminary analysis of recreational impacts on wildlife and especially amphibians. A further interrogation of the data obtained in this study, to determine the relationships between the diverse answers and groups of recreationists, is necessary in order to better understand how to manage the impact of recreational activities on species of wildlife.

Empirical data on amphibian impacts related to harm, disturbance and damage should be also assessed in further in order to better understand how recreationists are affecting wildlife. Further research on the behaviour and perceptions of recreationalists would also assist the development of strategies to manage recreational activities and their impacts on wildlife.

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Marzano, M. Dandy, N. (2012) Recreationists use of forests and the disturbance of wildlife: A literature review [www.forestry.gov.uk/publications](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/publications)