

# Forestry Statistics 2021

## Chapter 6: Social

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## Introduction

This chapter contains statistics on the number and profile of visits to all woodlands from household surveys.

The statistics in this chapter need to be viewed in the context of broader changes in the UK population, with an increasing and ageing population.

More recently, the Covid-19 pandemic has affected visits to the outdoors. Some information on visits to forests and woodlands from the 2021 Public Opinion of Forestry surveys is provided in this release and there is further information on visits to the outdoors more generally in the following:

- [www.forestresearch.gov.uk/research/engagement-nature-and-during-covid-19-restrictions/](http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/research/engagement-nature-and-during-covid-19-restrictions/);
- [www.gov.uk/government/collections/people-and-nature-survey-for-england](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/people-and-nature-survey-for-england) (see monthly indicators);
- [gov.wales/national-survey-wales-monthly-and-quarterly-survey](http://gov.wales/national-survey-wales-monthly-and-quarterly-survey)
- [www.nature.scot/doc/naturescot-research-report-1255-enjoying-outdoors-monitoring-impact-coronavirus-and-social](http://www.nature.scot/doc/naturescot-research-report-1255-enjoying-outdoors-monitoring-impact-coronavirus-and-social) and
- [www.outdoorrecreationni.com/news/revealed-outdoor-recreation-people-nature-and-health-survey-results/](http://www.outdoorrecreationni.com/news/revealed-outdoor-recreation-people-nature-and-health-survey-results/).

Geographical coverage for social statistics varies. Estimates are presented at country level and, where possible, UK or GB totals are included. Further information on the data sources and methodology used to compile the figures is provided in the Sources chapter.

Most of the statistics presented in this chapter have been previously released, either by Forest Research or by other organisations. Figures for earlier years have not been revised from those previously published. For further details on revisions, see the Social section of the Sources chapter.

The frequency with which the estimates in this chapter are updated varies depending on the data sources used. Whilst some of the information presented is now several years old, it represents the latest available data and has been included to provide a more rounded picture of the social use of forests in the UK.

Previous editions of Forestry Statistics have included data on day visitors to Northern Ireland Forest Service sites where an admission charge was made. However, as charging at forest car parks was suspended for much of the year, it is not possible to provide comparable estimates for 2020-21 and this section has been dropped from the 2021 edition.

In addition, as there are have been no new estimates of visitors to Scotland's national forest and lands (formerly known as the National Forest Estate in Scotland) (from All Forests Surveys that ran in Scotland in 2004-2007 and 2012-13, with an update to the estimated total in 2016), the section on on-site surveys has been dropped from this edition.

A copy of all social tables can be accessed in spreadsheet format from the Data Downloads web page at [www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/data-downloads/](http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/data-downloads/).

## Key findings

The main findings are:

- Around two thirds (69%) of respondents to the UK Public Opinion of Forestry Survey 2021 had visited forests or woodlands in the last few years. Of those, 36% reported an increase in the number of visits in the last 12 months.
- Around one half (51%) of respondents to the UK Public Opinion of Forestry Survey 2021 who had visited forests or woodlands in the last few years reported an increase in their level of happiness when in forests and woodlands as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions that had been in place since March 2020
- There were an estimated 368 million visits to woodlands in England in 2018-19.
- Around one half (49%) of visits to woodlands in England in 2018-19 were within 2 miles.
- "Health and exercise" and "fresh air or to enjoy pleasant weather" were important reasons for visits to woodlands in England and Wales.
- Walking was the most common activity on visits to woodland in England.

## 6.1 Visits to woodland - household surveys

The information shown below in Table 6.1 has been obtained from the following general population household surveys.

- Scottish Recreation Survey (2009 to 2012)
- Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey (2011, 2014)
- Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (England, 2009-10 onwards)
- Scotland's People and Nature Survey (2013, 2017/18)

It is likely that differences in survey design and methodology have contributed to a considerable proportion of the differences in results between these surveys. The figures in Table 6.1 should not be interpreted as time trends but instead as separate results from each survey. Further information on the differences between surveys is provided in the Recreation section of the Sources chapter.

In common with all sample based surveys, the results from each survey are subject to the effects of chance, depending on the particular survey method used and the sample achieved, thus confidence limits apply to all results from these surveys.

Results from the Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment 2018-19 estimate a total of 368 million visits to woodlands in England (Table 6.1). This is a statistically significant decrease from the 2017-18 figure of 437 million visits.

The Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey 2014 estimated a total of 68 million visits to woodlands by Welsh residents. This is a statistically significant decrease from the estimated total of 86 million in 2011, but similar to the 2008 estimate (64 million).

Scotland's People and Nature Survey 2017/18 reports an estimated total of 117 million visits to woodlands in Scotland. This is a statistically significant increase from the 2013 estimate of 90 million visits.

Table 6.1 Number of visits to woodland by journey starting point

million visits

Year	England	Wales	Scotland
2009	317	..	57
2010	326	..	63
2011	358	86	65
2012	357	..	62
2013	378	..	90
2014	417	68	..
2015	446	..	..
2016	439	..	..
2017	437	..	117
2018	368	..	..
2019	..	..	123

Sources:

England 2009 - 2018: Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE), carried out by TNS;

Wales 2011, 2014: Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey carried out by TNS;

Scotland 2009 - 2012: Scottish Recreation Survey (ScRS), carried out by TNS;

Scotland 2013, 2017, 2019: Scotland's People and Nature Survey (SPANs), carried out by TNS.

Notes:

1. MENE covered trips taken in England, including those from holiday bases, by respondents living in England. Results relate to 12 month periods from March to February. The survey has now been replaced by the People and Nature Survey for England.
2. The Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey totals shown are for trips with woodland as the main destination.
3. The Scottish Recreation Survey ran from July 2003 until December 2012. It was replaced by Scotland's People and Nature Survey that ran from March 2013 to February 2014, from May 2017 to April 2018 and from May 2019 to March 2020. Both surveys covered visits to the outdoors for leisure and recreation in Scotland by people living in Scotland. The total shown is for all trips that included a visit to woodland.
4. In each survey, visits to overseas destinations are excluded.
5. .. Denotes data not available.



These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.

## 6.1.1 England

### Household surveys in England

In March 2009 fieldwork commenced on the Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey, which includes collecting information on visits to the outdoors in England. Further information on the survey, including copies of annual reports and online data viewers to access more detailed results, is available at [www.gov.uk/government/collections/monitor-of-engagement-with-the-natural-environment-survey-purpose-and-results](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/monitor-of-engagement-with-the-natural-environment-survey-purpose-and-results).

Tables 6.2a to 6.2e shows the main characteristics of visits to woodlands over the most recent 5 years.

In 2018-19, walking was the main mode of transport for almost one half (47%) of visits to woodland.

**Table 6.2a Mode of transport to visit woodlands - England 2014-15 to 2018-19**

Main mode of transport	per cent of respondents				
	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
On foot	60	60	54	53	47
Car / van	36	36	42	44	45
Bicycle	2	2	2	1	1

Source: Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE), Natural England.

Notes:

1. All trips that included a visit to woodland.

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.

Around one half (49%) of visits to woodland were within 2 miles.

**Table 6.2b Distance travelled to visit woodlands - England 2014-15 to 2018-19**

per cent of respondents

<b>Distance travelled (one way)</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2018-19</b>
Less than 1 mile	39	32	28	29	25
1 to 2 miles	25	31	28	27	24
3 to 5 miles	19	20	21	23	26
6 to 10 miles	9	8	11	11	10
Over 10 miles	9	10	12	10	16

Source: Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE), Natural England.

Notes:

1. All trips that included a visit to woodland.

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.

Health or exercise was the most popular reason for visiting woodlands in England in 2018-19 (70%).

**Table 6.2c Motivation for visits to woodlands - England 2014-15 to 2018-19**

per cent of respondents

<b>Motivation for visit</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2018-19</b>
For health or exercise	53	60	55	56	70
To exercise your dog	66	65	60	53	53
For fresh air or to enjoy pleasant weather	39	41	39	41	46
To relax and unwind	35	42	37	37	40
To enjoy scenery	32	38	34	36	34
To be somewhere you like	23	26	25	26	29
For peace and quiet	22	27	33	26	29
To enjoy wildlife	27	30	28	28	28
To spend time with family	17	14	15	16	28

Source: Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE), Natural England.

Notes:

1. All trips that included a visit to woodland.
2. Excludes other reasons for visiting, each reported by fewer than 20% of respondents in 2018-19.
3. Respondents were able to select more than one option, so results do not sum to 100%.

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.

Walking (with or without a dog) was the most popular activity on visits to woodland in England in 2018-19.

**Table 6.2d Activities on visits to woodlands - England 2014-15 to 2018-19**

per cent of respondents

<b>Activities during visit</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2018-19</b>
Walking without a dog	22	23	31	56	56
Walking with a dog	68	66	59	36	36
Playing with children	6	6	8	10	15
Eating or Drinking Out	5	6	8	10	15
Cycling/ mountain biking	4	3	6	4	6

Source: Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE), Natural England.

Notes:

1. All trips that included a visit to woodland.
2. Excludes other activities, each reported by fewer than 5% of respondents in 2018-19.
3. Respondents were able to select more than one option, so results do not sum to 100%.

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.

Most visits to woodlands in England (62%) lasted up to 2 hours in 2018-19.

**Table 6.2e Duration of visits to woodlands - England 2014-15 to 2018-19**

per cent of respondents

<b>Duration of visit</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2018-19</b>
Up to 1 hour	51	50	43	45	39
1+ to 2 hours	28	29	29	26	23
2+ to 3 hours	8	9	11	12	18
Over 3 hours	12	12	16	17	20

Source: Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE), Natural England.

Notes:

1. All trips that included a visit to woodland.
2. Results might not sum to 100% due to rounding.

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.

## 6.1.2 Wales

### Household surveys in Wales

The National Survey for Wales began in March 2016 and replaced a number of separate surveys of households in Wales, including the Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey (WORS). The survey is completed by around 12,000 people each year and covers a wide range of topics. Further information on the survey, including copies of reports and data, is available at [gov.wales/national-survey-wales](http://gov.wales/national-survey-wales).

Table 6.3 shows the reasons provided for their visit to the outdoors by respondents who stated that the main destination of the visit was woodland. “Health and exercise” and “fresh air or to enjoy pleasant weather” were the most important reasons reported for visits to woodlands in Wales.

**Table 6.3 Reasons for visit to woodland or forest – Wales**

Reason for visit	per cent of respondents	
	2016-17	2018-19
For health or exercise	47	55
For fresh air or to enjoy pleasant weather	50	47
For pleasure / enjoyment	42	42
To spend time with family	39	41
To relax and unwind	34	41
To enjoy scenery and wildlife	38	39
To exercise the dog	38	30
For peace and quiet	22	29
To spend time with friends	16	22

Source: National Survey for Wales (Welsh Government).

Notes:

1. Visits where the main destination was woodland.
2. Respondents were able to select more than one option, so results do not sum to 100%.
3. Excludes other reasons for visiting, each reported by fewer than 20% of respondents in 2018-19.

### 6.1.3 Public Opinion of Forestry Survey - Woodland visitors

The Public Opinion of Forestry Survey obtains people's attitudes to forestry and forestry-related issues, including visits to woodland.

The 2021 surveys were run in February/March 2021 and were impacted by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in two ways. Firstly, the restrictions in place in early 2021 led to a change in methodology for the surveys, with the 2021 surveys being run online or by telephone for the first time (previously, face-to-face interviewing had been used). Secondly, requirements to stay at home (with people only being allowed outdoors for one hour a day in order to undertake exercise) and requirements to stay in local areas, both of which were in force for some of the year leading up to the survey, may have resulted in changes to the responses provided to the survey. It is not possible to quantify the extent to which any changes observed in the survey are a result of COVID-19 restrictions (either on the survey design or on the behaviour of respondents).

Copies of reports, providing further information on the survey, and accompanying tables are available at [www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/statistics-by-topic/public-opinion-of-forestry/](http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/statistics-by-topic/public-opinion-of-forestry/).

The results shown in Tables 6.4 to 6.6 and Figures 6.1 and 6.2 have been taken from the UK and country reports on the latest surveys in 2021 and from surveys in earlier years.

In the UK 2021 survey, over two thirds (69%) of respondents said that they had visited woodland in the last few years for walks, picnics or other recreation (Table 6.4).

Table 6.4 Woodland visitors<sup>1</sup>

per cent of respondents

Year	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	UK
2003	66	62	64	77	67
2005	65	69	50	67	65
2007	76	79	75	62	77
2009	77	..	57	..	77
2010	..	..	..	72	..
2011	68	68	75	..	67
2013	65	64	76	..	66
2014	..	..	..	75	..
2015	55	64	78	..	56
2017	62	72	84	..	61
2019	63	77	..	78	63
2021	69	63	86	..	69

Source: UK/GB, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland Public Opinion of Forestry Surveys

Base: UK/GB = 4,000 respondents (2003 to 2007), 2,000 respondents (2009 to 2019), 5,000 respondents (2021);

Scotland and Wales = 1,000 respondents each;

Northern Ireland = 120 respondents (2003), 1,000 respondents (all other years).

Notes:

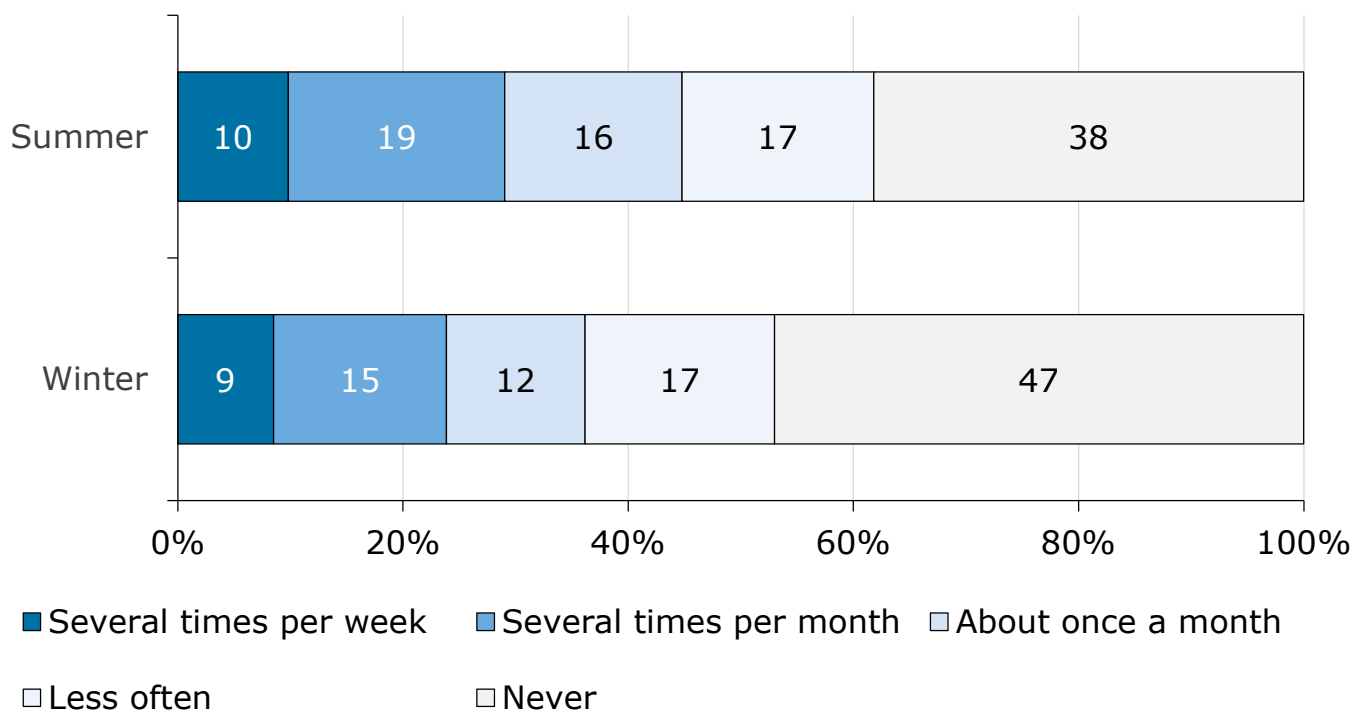
1. Those stating that they had visited woodland in the last few years. Data for Wales from 2015 and for Scotland from 2017 relates to visits in the last 12 months.
2. The range of uncertainty around any result should be no more than  $\pm 4.6\%$  (for surveys with around 1,000 respondents) and  $\pm 2.1\%$  (for around 5,000 respondents). To compare results over time, a difference of at least 5 percentage points (for surveys each with around 2,000 respondents) and at least 7 percentage points (for surveys each with around 1,000 respondents) is required to indicate that there is a significant difference.
3. .. Denotes data not available (survey not run that year or question not asked).

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.



Survey respondents were asked how frequently they had visited during the previous summer and winter. Figure 6.2, which presents UK results for the 2021 survey, shows that respondents visited much more often during the summer, with 45% of respondents visiting at least once a month in the summer compared to 36% in the winter.

Figure 6.1 Frequency of visits to woodlands



Source: UK Public Opinion of Forestry Survey, 2021.

Base: All respondents (approximately 5,000).

Notes:

1. The range of uncertainty around any result should be no more than  $\pm 2.1\%$ .

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.

In the UK 2021 Public Opinion of Forestry survey, 77% of respondents aged 16 to 34 said that they had visited woodland in the last few years for walks, picnics or other recreation (Table 6.5). This compares with 71% of respondents aged 35 to 54 and 62% of those aged 55 or over.

**Table 6.5 Woodland visitors<sup>1</sup> by age group**

per cent of respondents

<b>Year</b>	<b>Aged 16 to 34</b>	<b>Aged 35 to 54</b>	<b>Aged 55 and over</b>	<b>Total</b>
2003	71	72	60	67
2005	66	74	56	65
2007	79	82	69	77
2009	78	84	69	77
2011	65	74	63	67
2013	62	75	60	66
2015	54	62	53	56
2017	60	68	55	61
2019	61	71	56	63
2021	77	71	62	69

Source: UK and GB Public Opinion of Forestry Surveys, 2003 to 2021.

Base: 4,000 respondents (2003 to 2007); 2,000 respondents (2009 to 2019); 5,000 respondents (2021).

Notes:

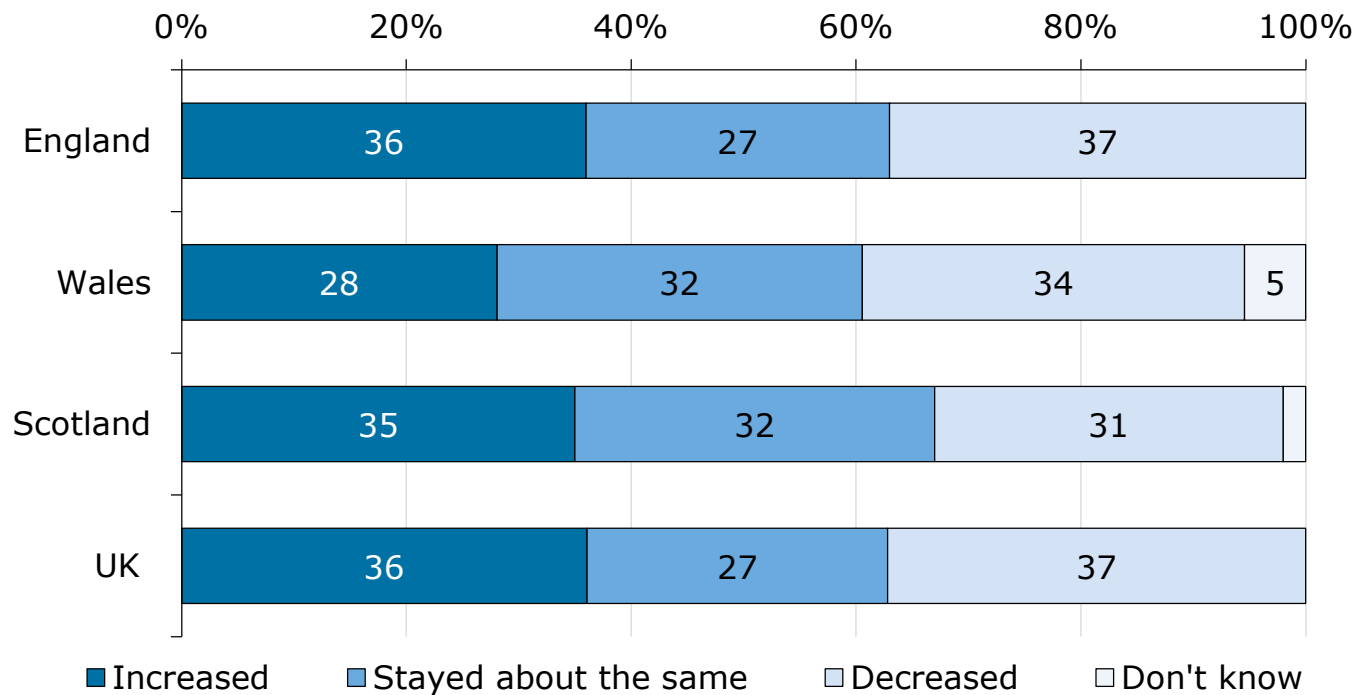
1. Those stating they had visited woodland in the last few years.
2. The range of uncertainty around any result should be no more than  $\pm 3.5\%$  (for surveys with around 2,000 respondents) and  $\pm 2.1\%$  (for surveys with around 5,000 respondents). To compare results over time, a difference of at least 5 percentage points (for surveys each with around 2,000 respondents) is required to indicate that there is a significant difference.

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.

The 2021 Public Opinion of Forestry surveys included new questions related to the impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

In all 3 surveys, respondents were asked how the number of visits to forests and woodlands had changed in the last 12 months. 36% of respondents to the UK survey (who had visited woodlands in the last few years) reported an increase in the number of visits they had made, 27% reported no change and 37% reported a decrease.

Figure 6.2 Change in number of visits to woodlands over last 12 months



Source: UK, Scotland and Wales Public Opinion of Forestry Surveys, 2021.

Base: All respondents to Wales and Scotland surveys (approximately 1,000 respondents); respondents to the UK survey who had visited woodlands in the last few years (approximately 3,500).

Notes:

1. The range of uncertainty around any result should be no more than  $\pm 3.5\%$  (Scotland and Wales),  $\pm 2.7\%$  (England) and  $\pm 2.5\%$  (UK).

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.

The UK survey in 2021 also asked how views on forests and woodlands had changed in the last 12 months.

When asked about their feeling of connection to forests and woodlands, 43% of respondents who had visited woodlands reported an increase, 40% reported no change and 13% reported a decrease.

Around one half of respondents who had visited woodlands (51%) reported an increase in their level of happiness when in forests and woodlands. Around one third (35%) reported no change and 10% reported a decrease.

Around one half of respondents who had visited woodlands (48%) reported an increase in the amount of time they had taken to appreciate forests and woodlands. Around one third (33%) reported no change and 15% (in the UK and in England) reported a decrease.

**Table 6.6 Change in views of forests and woodlands due to pandemic**  
per cent of respondents

	<b>Significantly increased</b>	<b>Some increase</b>	<b>Stayed the same</b>	<b>Some decrease</b>	<b>Significantly decreased</b>
Your feeling of connection to forests and woodlands	17	27	40	8	5
Your level of happiness when in forests and woodlands	21	30	35	6	4
The amount of time you take to appreciate forests and woodlands	19	29	33	7	7

Source: UK Public Opinion of Forestry Survey 2021.

Base: All respondents who had visited woodlands in the last few years (approximately 3,500).

Notes:

1. The range of uncertainty around any result should be no more than  $\pm 2.5\%$ .

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.

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