

Forestry Statistics 2023

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. In recent years, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has affected visits to the outdoors.

Some information on visits to forests and woodlands from the Public Opinion of Forestry 2023 surveys is provided in this release and there is further information on visits to the outdoors more generally in the following:

- The [People and Nature Survey](#) for England;
- The [National Survey for Wales](#);
- [Scotland's People and Nature Survey](#); and
- The [People in the Outdoors Monitor for Northern Ireland](#).

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.

A copy of all social tables can be accessed in spreadsheet format from the [Data Downloads page](#).

Key findings

The main findings are:

- Around three-quarters (74%) of respondents to the UK Public Opinion of Forestry Survey 2023 had visited forests or woodlands in the last few years. Of those, 22% 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 2023 who had visited forests or woodlands in the last few years reported an increase in their level of happiness when in forests and woodlands from before the start of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.
- There were an estimated 123 million visits to woodlands in Scotland in 2019/20.
- There were an estimated 507 million visits to woodlands in England in 2021/22.
- Around 63% of visits to woodlands in England in 2021/22 were within 2 miles.
- “For physical health and exercise” and “To get fresh air” were important reasons for visiting woodlands in both England and Wales.
- Walking was the most common activity on visits to woodland in England.

6.1 Outdoor recreation and environmental attitude surveys

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

- [Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment](#) (England, 2009/10 to 2017/18),
- [People and Nature Survey](#) (England, 2020/21 to present),
- [Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey](#) (2011, 2014),
- [National Survey for Wales](#) (2012/13 to present)
- [Scottish Recreation Survey](#) (2009 to 2012),
- [Scotland's People and Nature Survey](#) (2013, 2017/18, 2019/20).

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 latest People and Nature Survey estimate a total of 4.0 billion visits to green and natural spaces in England in 2021/22. Of these, an estimated 507 million visits included forests or woodlands (Table 6.1).

The Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey estimated a total of 68 million visits to woodlands by Welsh residents in 2014/15.

Scotland's People and Nature Survey reports an estimated total of 123 million visits to woodlands in Scotland in 2019/20 (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 Number of visits to woodland by journey starting point, Great Britain, 2012/13 to 2021/22

Year	million visits		
	England	Wales	Scotland
2012/13	357	[x]	62
2013/14	378	[x]	90
2014/15	417	68	[x]
2015/16	446	[x]	[x]
2016/17	439	[x]	[x]
2017/18	437	[x]	117
2018/19	368	[x]	[x]
2019/20	[x]	[x]	123
2020/21	600	[x]	[x]
2021/22	507	[x]	[x]

Sources:

England 2012/13 to 2018/19: Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE), Natural England, carried out by TNS;

England 2020/21 to 2021/22: People and Nature Survey (PaNS), Natural England, carried out by Kantar;

Wales 2014/15: Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey carried out by TNS;

Scotland 2012/13: Scottish Recreation Survey (ScRS), carried out by TNS;

Scotland 2013/14, 2017/18, 2019/20: 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.
2. PaNS covers all trips to green and natural spaces in England where forest or woodland was the main destination of their most recent visit in the last 14 days. Results relate to 12-month periods from April to March.
3. The Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey totals shown are for trips with woodland as the main destination.
4. 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.

5. In each survey, visits to overseas destinations are excluded.
6. [x]: data not available.

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

6.1.1 People and Nature Survey (PaNS) for England

In April 2020, fieldwork commenced on the [People and Nature Survey \(PaNS\)](#), which includes collecting information on visits to green and natural spaces in England.

Tables 6.2a to 6.2e show the main characteristics of visits to woodlands in 2020/21 and 2021/22. In 2021/22, walking was the main mode of transport for around one half (51%) of visits to woodland (Table 6.2a).

Table 6.2a Proportion of respondents who visited woodland by their main mode of transport, England, 2020/21 to 2021/22

Main mode of transport	per cent of respondents	
	2020/21	2021/22
On foot	60	51
Car/van/motorbike	32	39
Bicycle	2	5
Public transport (e.g., train, bus)	4	3
Mobility aid (e.g., wheelchair)	1	[low]

Source: People and Nature Survey (PaNS), Natural England.

Notes:

1. Trips where forest or woodland was the main destination of the most recent visit to green and natural spaces in the last 14 days.
2. Respondents that answered "Other" are not shown in the table.
3. [low]: less than 0.5%.

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

Around 63% of visits to woodland were within 2 miles (Table 6.2b).

Table 6.2b Proportion of respondents who visited woodland by distance travelled, England, 2020/21 to 2021/22

per cent of respondents

Distance travelled (one way)	2020/21	2021/22
Less than 1 mile	39	38
1 to 2 miles	26	25
3 to 10 miles	22	26
11 to 50 miles	5	9
More than 50 miles	8	1

Source: People and Nature Survey (PaNS), Natural England.

Notes:

1. Trips where forest or woodland was the main destination of the most recent visit to green and natural spaces in the last 14 days.
2. Respondents that answered "Don't know" are not shown in the table.

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

“For physical health and exercise” (57%) was the most popular reason for visiting woodlands in England in 2021/22 (55%), followed by “To get fresh air” and “For mental health and wellbeing” (37%).

Table 6.2c Proportion of respondents who visited woodland by motivation for visit, England, 2020/21 to 2021/22

per cent of respondents

Motivation for visit	2020/21	2021/22
For physical health and exercise	65	57
To get fresh air	68	55
For mental health and well being	41	37
To walk a dog	33	32
To connect with nature/watch wildlife	26	29
To get a break from TV/other electronic devices	9	9
To look after children/other family members	5	8
To help someone else get outside	3	7
To learn something new/challenge myself/explore	5	6
To take a lunch break/break from work	5	6
Because I was advised to spend time outdoors by GP or other health professional	2	3
For other reasons	1	3

Source: People and Nature Survey (PaNS), Natural England.

Notes:

1. Trips where forest or woodland was the main destination of the most recent visit to green and natural spaces in the last 14 days.
2. Respondents that answered “Prefer not to say” and “Don’t know” are not shown in the table.
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 undertaken on visits to woodland in England in 2020/21 and 2021/22 (Table 6.2d).

Table 6.2d Proportion of respondents who visited woodland by activity, England, 2020/21 to 2021/22

Activity	per cent of respondents	
	2020/21	2021/22
Walking (including dog walking)	81	75
Wildlife watching	32	34
Picknicking	15	14
Playing with children	15	12
Cycling or running	13	10
Visiting an attraction	11	8
Appreciating scenery from a car	8	5
Sports and games	8	4
Boating, water sports or swimming	5	4
Fishing	7	3
Shooting/hunting	5	2
Horse-riding	5	2
Other	2	2

Source: People and Nature Survey (PaNS), Natural England.

Notes:

1. Trips where forest or woodland was the main destination of the most recent visit to green and natural spaces in the last 14 days.
2. 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 (80%) lasted up to 2 hours in 2021/22 (Table 6.2e).

Table 6.2e Proportion of respondents who visited woodland by duration of visit, England, 2019/20 to 2021/22

Duration of visit	per cent of respondents	
	2020/21	2021/22
Up to 30 minutes	13	14
Over 30 minutes and up to 1 hour	28	34
Over 1 hour and up to 2 hours	38	32
Over 2 hours and up to 3 hours	12	12
Over 3 hours and up to 5 hours	5	5
Over 5 hours	5	3

Source: People and Nature Survey (PaNS), Natural England.

Notes:

- Trips where forest or woodland was the main destination of the most recent visit to green and natural spaces in the last 14 days.

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

6.1.2 National Survey for Wales (NSfW)

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.

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 Proportion of respondents who visited woodland by motivation for visit, Wales, 2016/17 to 2018/19

Motivation 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. Trips where forest or woodland was the main destination.
2. Respondents were able to select more than one option, so results do not sum to 100%.

6.1.3 Scottish People and Nature Survey (SPANS)

The [Scottish People and Nature Survey](#) (SPANS), carried out by NatureScot, gathers information on outdoor recreation and the use, value and enjoyment provided by the natural environment in Scotland. The survey ran in 2013/14, 2017/18 and 2019/20 (with approximately 12,000 people each year), replacing the Scottish Recreation Survey which was conducted annually between 2003 and 2012. In 2019/20, 21% of respondents reported visiting woodlands and forests on their most recent visit to the outdoors.

6.1.4 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 latest surveys (for the UK and England, for Wales, for Scotland and for Northern Ireland) were run in February/March 2023.

All surveys run until 2019 were conducted using face-to-face interviewing. The restrictions in place across the UK in early 2021 as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic led to a change in methodology for the 3 surveys conducted that year. The 2021 survey in Scotland changed to use telephone interviews, whilst the surveys across the UK and in Wales changed to use an online methodology. For the 2023 survey, Scotland and Northern Ireland changed to an online methodology, meaning all four surveys in 2023 were conducted online. 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).

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 2023 and from surveys in earlier years.

In the UK 2023 survey, almost three-quarters (74%) 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 Proportion of respondents who visited woodland¹, UK, 2003 to 2023

Year	per cent of respondents				
	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	[x]	57	[x]	77
2010	[x]	[x]	[x]	72	[x]
2011	68	68	75	[x]	67
2013	65	64	76	[x]	66
2014	[x]	[x]	[x]	75	[x]
2015	55	64	78	[x]	56
2017	62	72	84	[x]	61
2019	63	77	[x]	78	63
2021	69	63	86	[x]	69
2023	74	72	79	83	74

Source: Public Opinion of Forestry 2023: UK and England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland
 Base: UK = 4,000 respondents (2003 to 2007), 2,000 respondents (2009 to 2019), 5,000 respondents (2021); 11,100 respondents (2023); Wales and Scotland = 1,000 respondents (all years); Northern Ireland = 120 respondents (2003), 1,000 respondents (all other years).

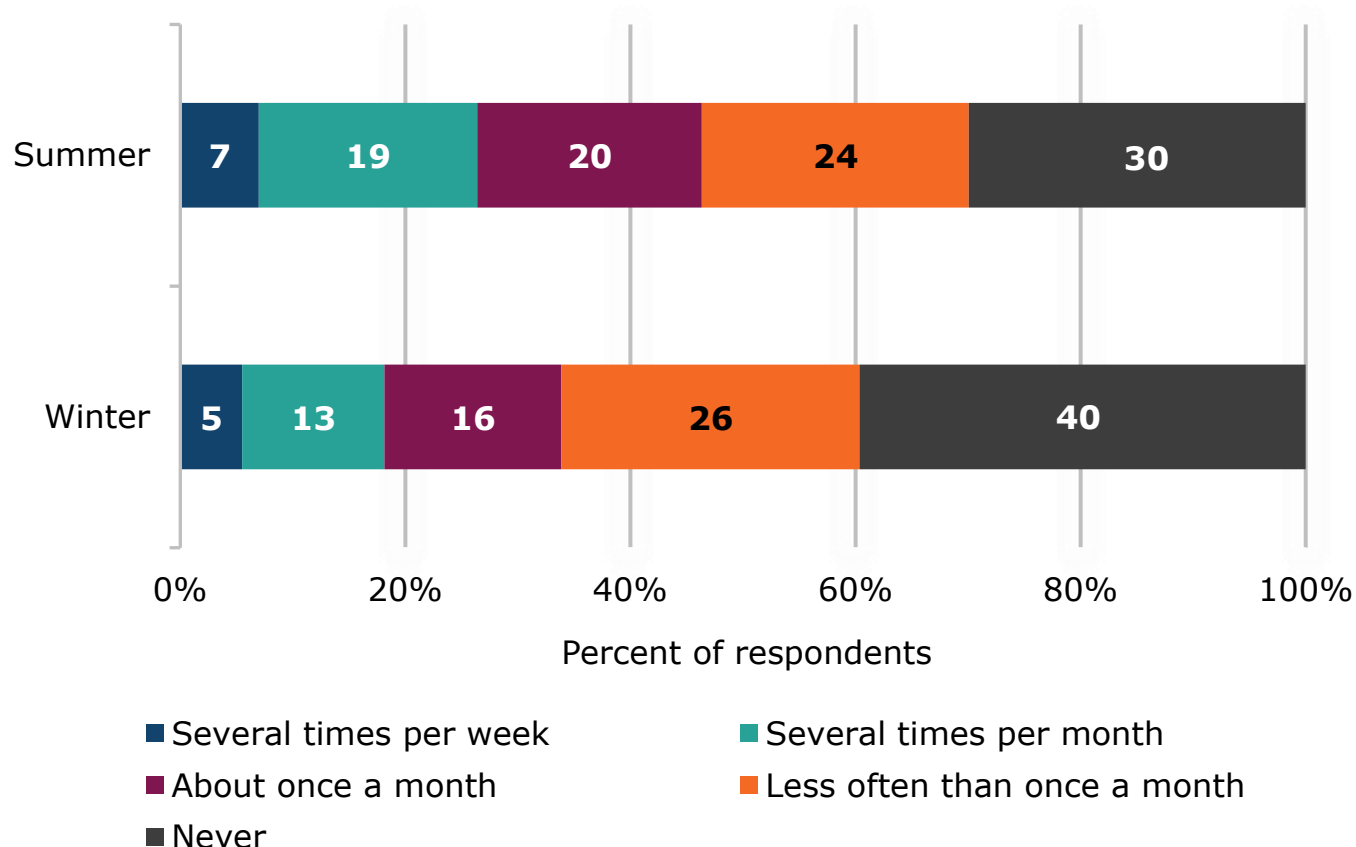
Notes:

1. UK, England and Northern Ireland: visits in the last few years. Wales (from 2015) and Scotland (from 2017): 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, $\pm 2.1\%$ for around 5,000 respondents and $\pm 1.6\%$ for around 11,000 respondents.
3. 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.
4. [x]: 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 6.1, which presents UK results for the 2023 survey, shows that respondents visited much more often during the summer, with 46% of respondents visiting at least once a month in the summer compared to 34% in the winter.

Figure 6.1 Proportion of respondents and frequency of visits to woodlands in the last few years, UK, 2023



Source: Public Opinion of Forestry Survey 2023: UK and England.

Base: approximately 11,100 respondents.

Notes:

1. The range of uncertainty around any result should be no more than $\pm 1.4\%$.

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

In the UK Public Opinion of Forestry survey in 2023, 75% 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 77% of respondents aged 35 to 54 and 70% of those aged 55 or over.

Table 6.5 Proportion of respondents who visited woodland by age group¹, UK, 2003 to 2023

per cent of respondents

Year	Aged 16 to 34	Aged 35 to 54	Aged 55 and over	Total
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
2023	75	77	70	74

Source: UK Public Opinion of Forestry surveys, 2003 to 2023.

Base: 4,000 (2003 to 2007); 2,000 (2009 to 2019); 5,000 (2021), 11,100 (2023).

Notes:

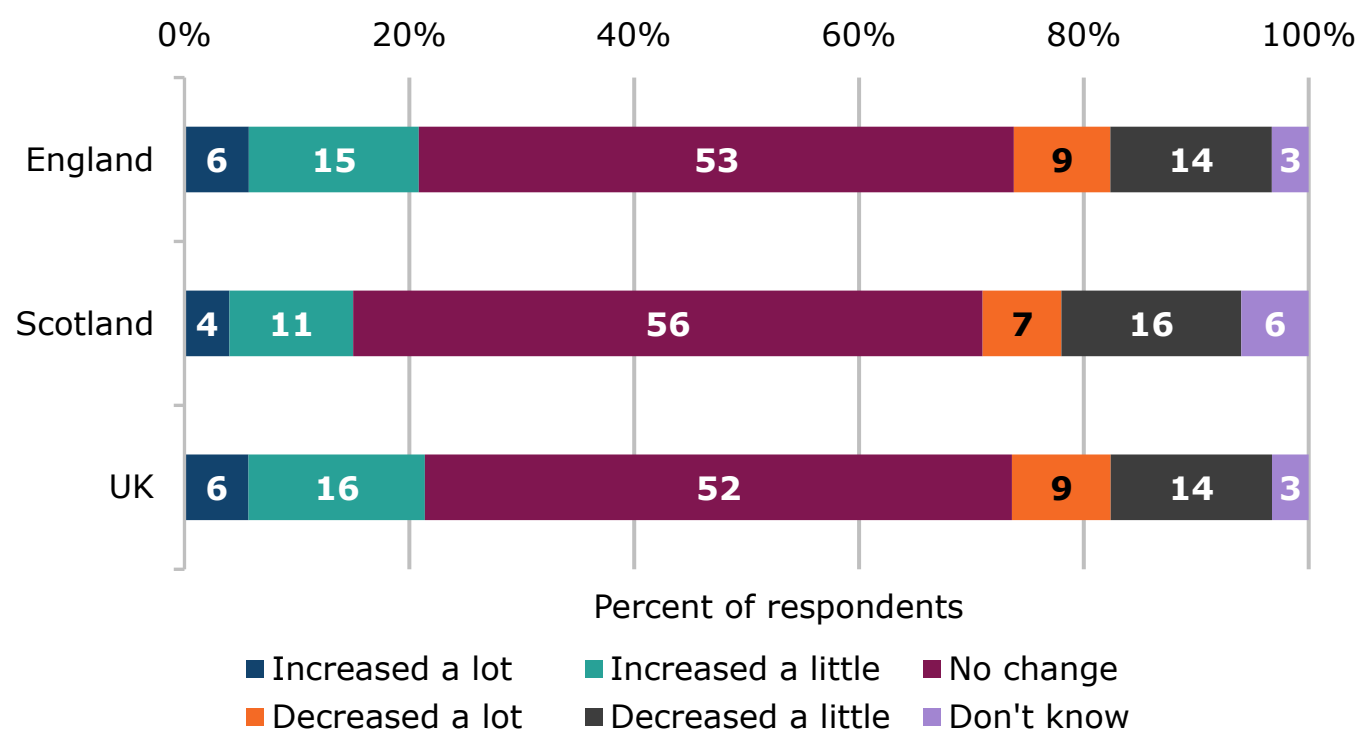
1. The range of uncertainty around any result should be no more than $\pm 3.5\%$ for surveys with around 2,000 respondents, $\pm 2.1\%$ for surveys with around 5,000 respondents and $\pm 1.6\%$ (for surveys with around 11,100 respondents).
2. To compare results over time, a difference of at least 5 percentage 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 2023 Public Opinion of Forestry surveys included questions on how the number, duration and distance travelled to forests and woodlands had changed over the last 12 months.

In the UK/England and Scotland surveys, respondents were asked how the number of visits to forests and woodlands had changed in the last 12 months. Twenty-two percent (22%) 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, 52% reported no change and 23% reported a decrease (Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2 Change in number of visits to woodlands over last 12 months, UK, 2023



Source: Public Opinion of Forestry Surveys 2023: UK and England, and Scotland.

Base: all respondents to Scotland survey (approximately 1,000 respondents); all respondents to the UK survey who had visited woodlands in the last few years (UK: approximately 8,200; England: approximately 6,800).

Notes:

1. The range of uncertainty around any result should be no more than $\pm 4.6\%$ (Scotland), $\pm 1.8\%$ (England) and $\pm 1.6\%$ (UK).

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

The UK survey in 2023 also asked how views on forests and woodlands had changed since before the COVID-19 pandemic.

When asked about their feeling of connection to forests and woodlands, 45% of respondents reported an increase, 52% reported no change, and 3% reported a decrease.

Around one half (51%) of respondents who had visited woodlands reported an increase in their level of happiness when in forests and woodlands. Almost one half (47%) reported that their level of happiness stayed about the same while few reported a decrease (2%).

When asked about the amount of time they had taken to appreciate forests and woodlands, 50% of respondents reported spending more time appreciating forest and woodlands compared with before the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost one half (45%) reported no change and 5% reported a decrease.

Table 6.6 Proportion of respondents and views of forest and woodlands since before the coronavirus pandemic, UK, 2023

percent of respondents

Statement	Significantly increased	Some increase	Stayed the same	Some decrease	Significantly decreased
Your feeling of connection to forests and woodlands	17	28	52	2	1
Your level of happiness when in forests and woodlands	21	30	47	1	1
The amount of time you take to appreciate forests and woodlands	20	30	45	3	1

Source: Public Opinion of Forestry Survey 2023: UK and England.

Base: All respondents who had visited woodlands in the last few years (approximately 8,200).

Notes:

1. The range of uncertainty around any result should be no more than $\pm 1.6\%$.

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

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