

The public, visits to the countryside, and biosecurity

Questionnaire results

January 2024

Clare Hall, Elliot Colley, Toni Clarke, Sophie
Zawadzki, with edits by Ella Furness.

Forest Research



Defra's Plant Biosecurity Strategy for Great Britain (2023 to 2028) includes an Accord which describes how the public can 'play a part in protecting plants and trees from the threat of pests and diseases'



To contribute to delivering in line with the Accord, Forestry Commission (FC) want to understand how best to communicate with members of the public about biosecurity.



In 2023 FC (Defra) commissioned Forest Research to deliver a questionnaire with the general public in England. This report describes the findings of the questionnaire.

Thirty organisations have signed up to the 'Public Engagement in Plant Health Accord', which says:

We are working together to promote positive behavioural change to safeguard the health of our plants and trees and the benefits they provide for society, the environment and the economy. We believe that considering plant health and good biosecurity practice should be normal for anyone buying and caring for plants, when traveling or spending time in nature, and we will work together to ensure this happens. (Annex C of the Plant Biosecurity Strategy for Great Britain: Public Engagement in Plant Health Accord)

To read the Accord or the Strategy in full, please click [here](#)

The study aimed to inform activities to communicate matters of biosecurity with the public, particularly those who visit the countryside and greenspace.

The aim has been met through an online questionnaire with a sample of the English public representative by age, gender and English region (n=2000) conducted in January 2023.

The questionnaire featured 35 questions covering the following topics:

- *Public awareness and understanding of tree and plant pests and diseases, biosecurity and non-native invasive species.*
- *Public perceptions of threats to the countryside and the perception of risks to trees from pests and diseases.*
- *Public use of, and trust in, media channels, information sources and organisations for information relating to the environment.*
- *Public engagement with positive environmental behaviours and biosecurity actions.*
- *Visits to the countryside (frequency, activities, reasons for visits, who they visit with).*

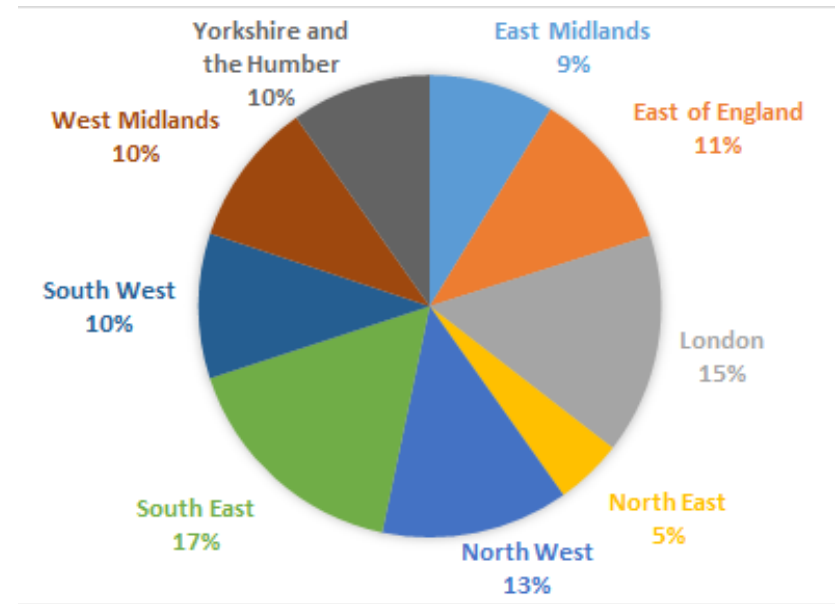
2000 responses

Which gender do you identify with?	%	n
Female	52%	1034
Male	48%	959
Non-binary or alternative identity	0%	5
Prefer not to say	0%	2

How old are you?	%	n
18 to 24	10%	209
25 to 34	17%	343
35 to 44	17%	333
45 to 54	17%	337
55 to 64	16%	319
65 and over	23%	459

Which of the following best describes your ethnic group?	%	n
White - UK (British, Scottish, Northern Irish, Welsh, European or non-European)	89%	1789
Asian or Asian British (e.g. Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Other Asian background)	4%	77
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups (e.g. White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian, Any other mixed or multiple ethnic background)	3%	68
Black - (e.g. Black/African/Caribbean/Black British etc.)	2%	45
Other Ethnic Group - (Arab, other)	0%	7
Prefer not to say	1%	14

Where do you live?	%	n
East Midlands	9%	175
East of England	11%	226
London	15%	309
North East	5%	94
North West	13%	262
South East	17%	333
South West	10%	203
West Midlands	10%	202
Yorkshire and the Humber	10%	196

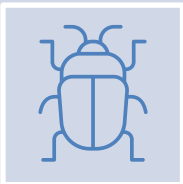


WE ASKED: Do you have a garden where you live? If you have a shared communal garden, please select yes

88% have a garden

WE ASKED: What do you think are the greatest threats to the countryside in England? [Select up to three options]

- Climate change perceived to be biggest threat – selected by 49% of respondents
- Pests & diseases in the environment selected by 17% of respondents
- Non-native / invasive species selected least frequently (13% of respondents selected this as one of the greatest threats)



	Total %	Total n
Climate Change	49%	970
Development (E.g., construction of buildings, roads)	40%	809
Loss of biodiversity (Plants, insects, birds, wildlife)	39%	784
Water pollution	28%	568
Visitor impact (E.g., erosion, litter, noise)	21%	418
Extreme weather events	20%	396
Pests and diseases in the environment	17%	330
Forestry activities (e.g., felling)	16%	315
Agricultural practices	14%	283
Non-native / Invasive species	13%	253
Other (please specify)	0%	6
N/A; no threats in particular / I don't know	5%	100

WE ASKED: How concerned, if at all, are you about the threat to trees from pests and diseases? On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is 'Not at all concerned' and 10 is 'Extremely concerned'.



- **The average score across all respondents was 6.32**
- **As this average score is greater than the mid point of the scale, this means that, on average, people are more likely to be 'concerned' than 'not concerned'.**
- **Those over 55 were more concerned (a higher average score) and those under 24 less concerned (a lower average score).**

	Total	18 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 44	45 to 54	55 to 64	65 and over
Average	6.32	5.55	6.10	5.84	6.28	6.71	6.96



WE ASKED: How concerned, if at all, are you about the threat to trees from pests and diseases? (On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is 'Not at all concerned' and 10 is 'Extremely concerned')

- **As reported in the previous slide, the average score across all respondents was 6.32**
 - **We analysed the data to see how the average level of concern varied between different socio-demographic groups**
 - Region – Those in London had a significantly lower score than people in the other English regions
 - Employment status – Those working full time had a significantly lower score; and those retired, higher
 - Garden - Those with a garden had a higher level of concern
 - Ethnicity - 'Mixed or multiple ethnic groups' (e.g. White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian, Any other mixed or multiple ethnic background) – had a lower concern



WE ASKED: What would you say is your level of knowledge of tree & plant pests and diseases



- **Women more likely to say they have a low level of knowledge of P&D**
- **Men more likely to say they have a reasonable level of knowledge of P&D**

What would you say is your level of knowledge of tree & plant pests and diseases? by Gender

	Total	Female	Male
High level of knowledge	1%	1%	2%
Reasonable level of knowledge	22%	17%	26%
Low level of knowledge	58%	61%	55%
No knowledge	19%	21%	17%



WE ASKED: Have you heard of the term 'biosecurity'?

- **34% said yes**
- **66% said no**

The Word Cloud below represents the most frequent words respondents used to describe 'biosecurity'. (based on the top 100 words)





WE ASKED: Prior to taking this survey, had you heard of or seen any of the following campaigns? (These are all about protecting the countryside from invasive species and pests and diseases)

	I have heard about this and seen this	I have heard about this but not seen it	I have not heard about nor seen this	N/A; I don't know
Keep it Clean	25%	22%	45%	8%
Don't risk it	13%	17%	61%	9%
Be plant wise	13%	20%	58%	9%
Check, clean, dry	12%	17%	62%	9%



Don't give tree pests and diseases an easy ride





*WE ASKED: Where have you mostly seen or heard information about environmental issues?
[Select up to three that are most applicable for you]*

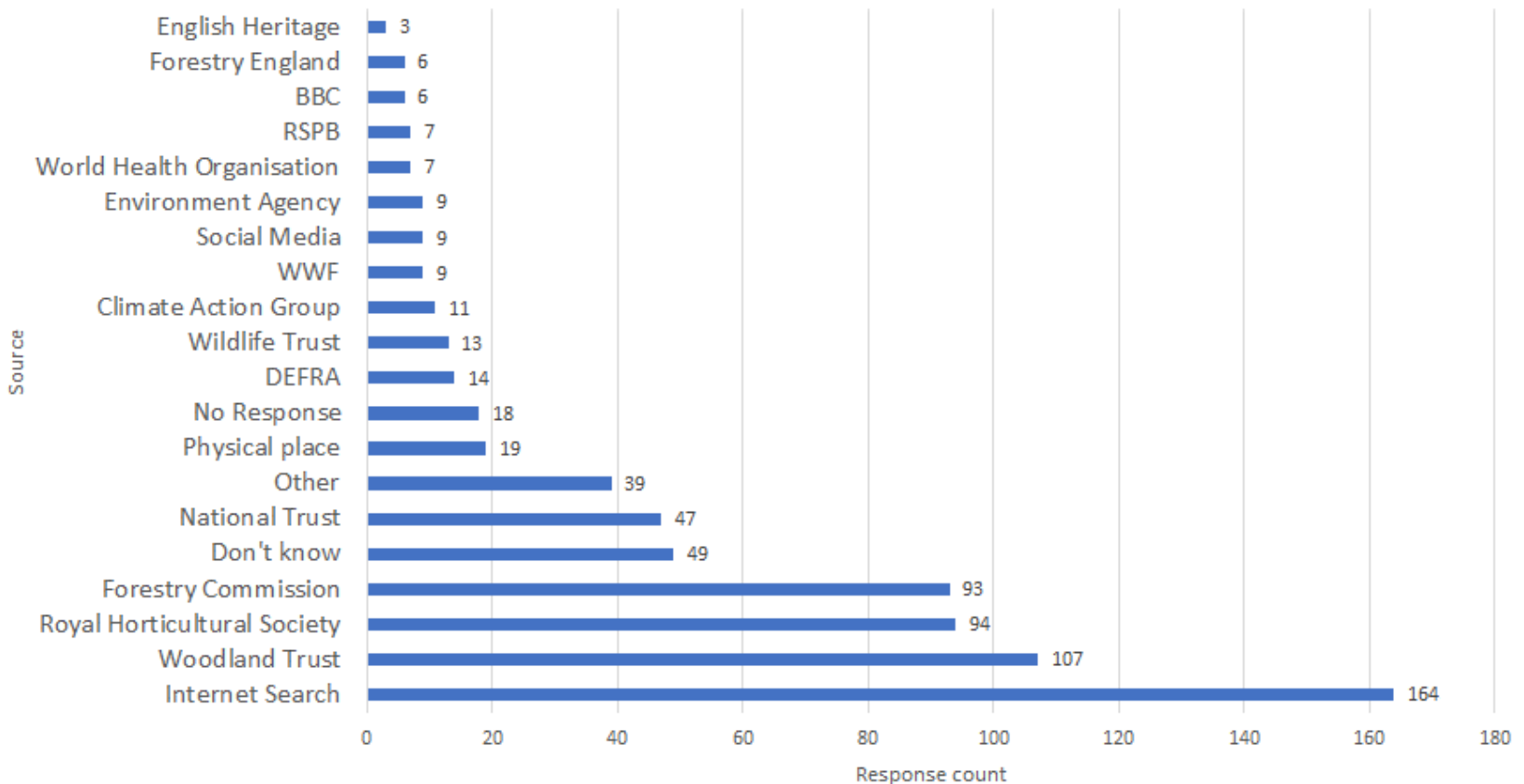
Information source	%
TV	51%
Online (websites) (inc. online newspapers, magazines)	29%
Social media	26%
Newspapers (paper copies)	18%
Radio	15%
Friends/family/neighbours/colleagues	13%
Magazines (paper copies)	8%
Information sent directly to you from membership organisation	8%
Posters at places you might visit	8%
Through the post (leaflets, letters etc)	6%
At events	5%
Other	1%
N/A; nowhere in particular/I don't know	12%

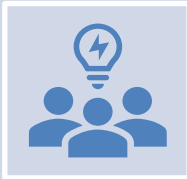
We analysed the data to see if there were differences between socio-demographic groups and where they had mostly seen or heard information about environmental issues

We found that:

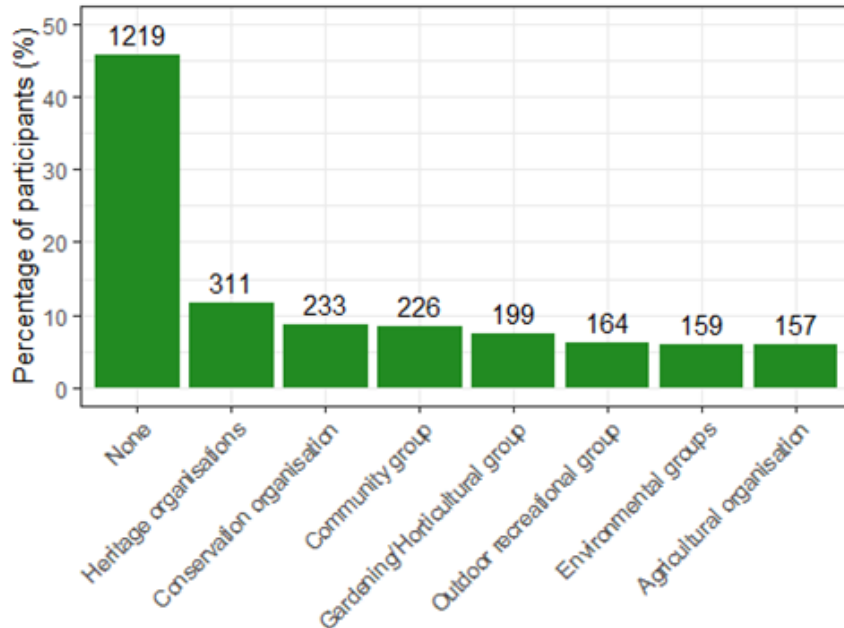
- TV & newspapers were more commonly mentioned by older age groups as a source of information about environmental issues
- Social media was more common for younger age groups as a source of information about environmental issues
- Newspapers & radio were more common for men than women as a source of information about environmental issues
- TV was less common in London than in other regions as a source of information about environmental issues

WE ASKED: If you wanted to know something about plants or trees, is there a particular organisation you might go to?





WE ASKED: Are you a member of any of the following types of organisation? [Select all that apply]

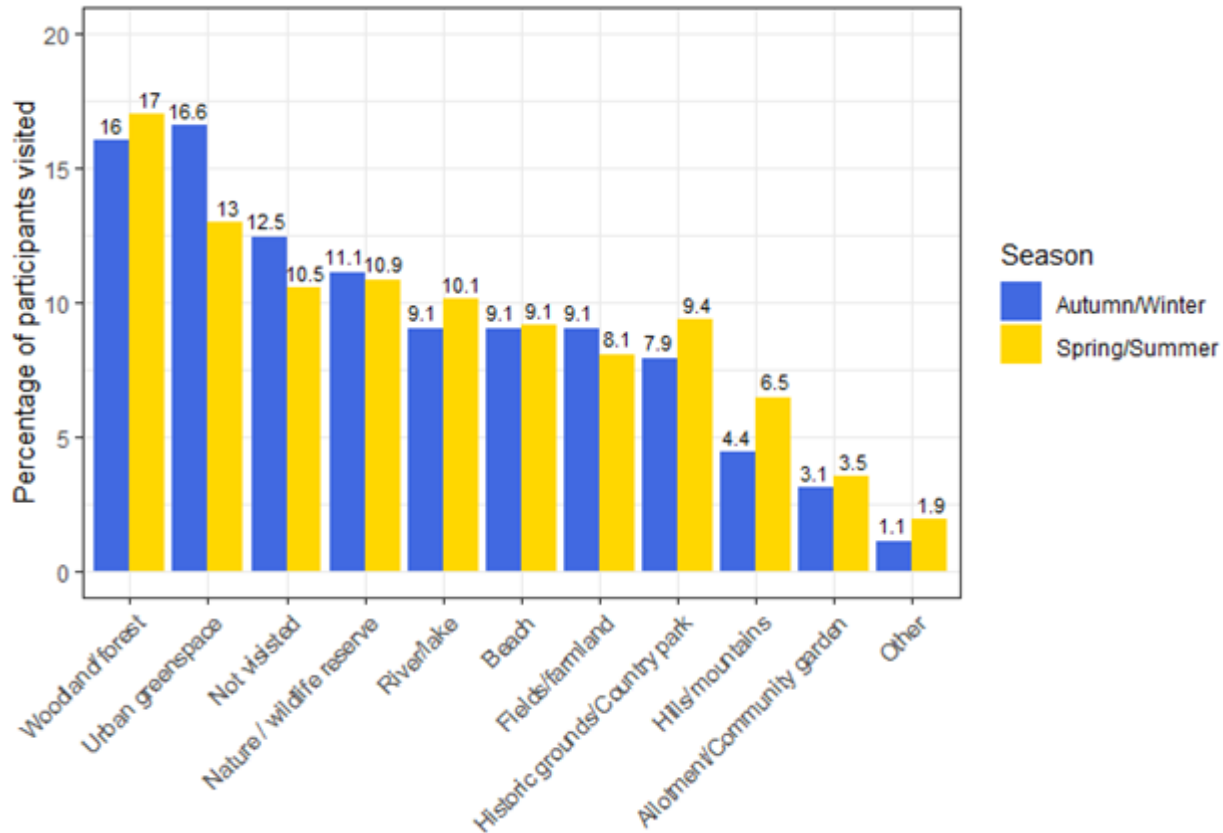


We analysed the data to find out if membership of these types of environmental organisations differed between socio-demographic groups.

- **Younger age** groups are more likely than **older age** groups to have membership of organisations
- **Men** are more likely to be members of any type of organisation than **women**
- Respondents from **London** are significantly different to **other regions** – they are more likely to be members of organisations
- People **working full time** are far more likely to be members of all types of organisations
- **People without gardens** are less likely to be members of any organisation
- **Black people** are more likely to be member of local community group
- People of **mixed ethnic background** are more likely to be a member of any group

WE ASKED: Think of one specific typical visit that you have made to the countryside or an area of greenspace (excluding your own garden, if you have one). Which of the following best describes that place?

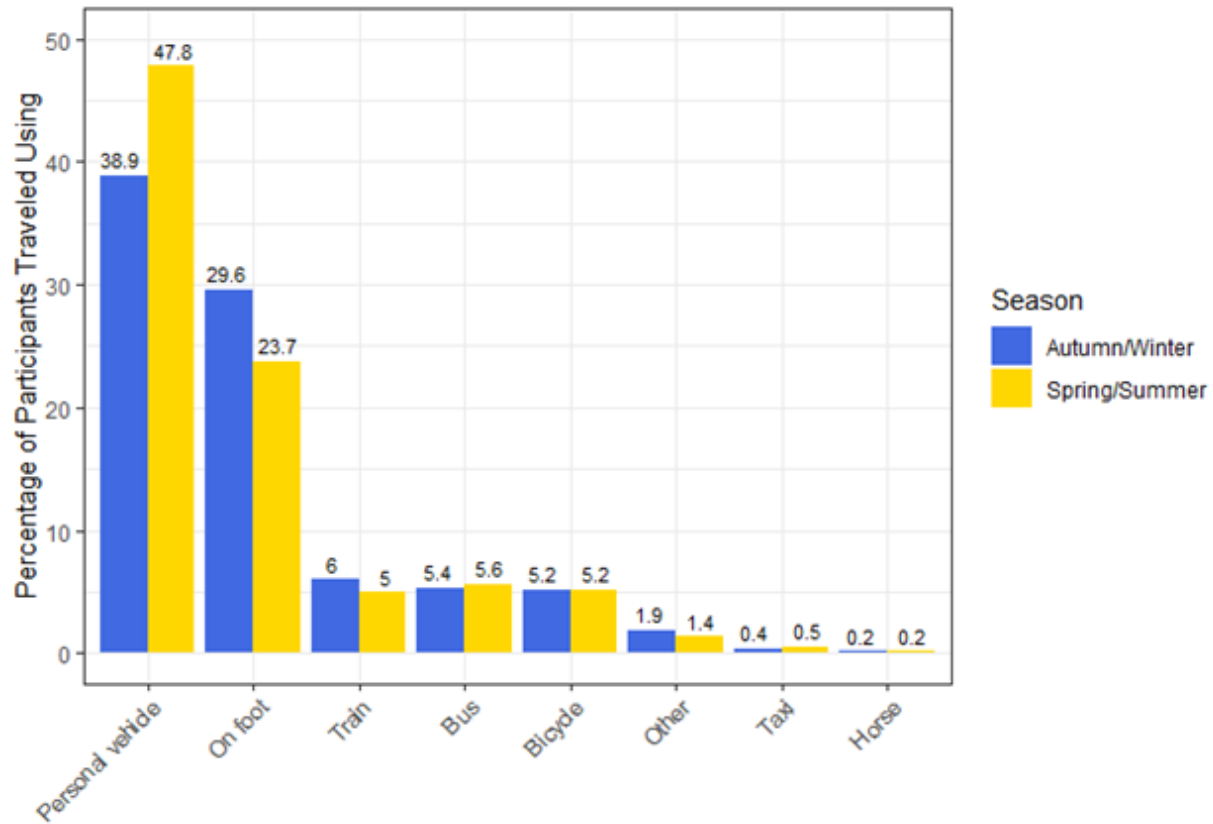
Half of the respondents were asked to think of a visit during the autumn / winter period; the other half were asked to think of a visit during the spring / summer period.





WE ASKED: How do you travel to the countryside?

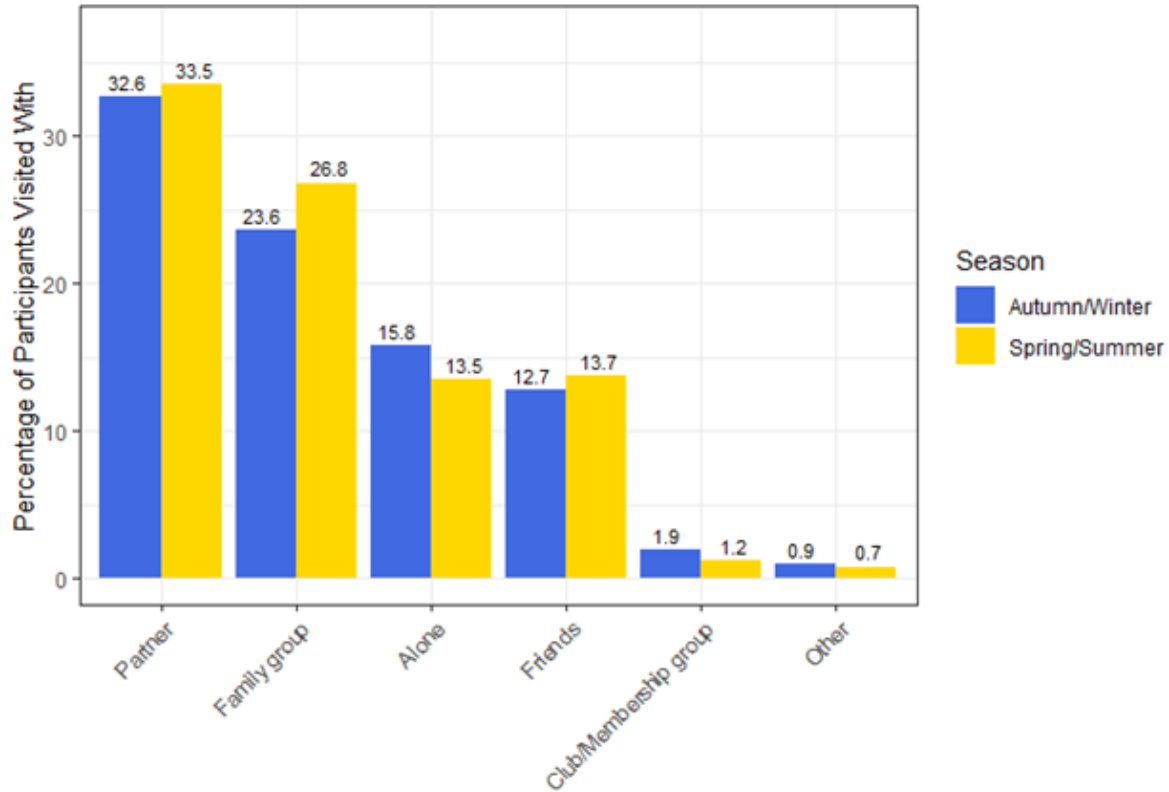
Most people typically travelled by car or walked to their destination.





WE ASKED: Who do you visit with?

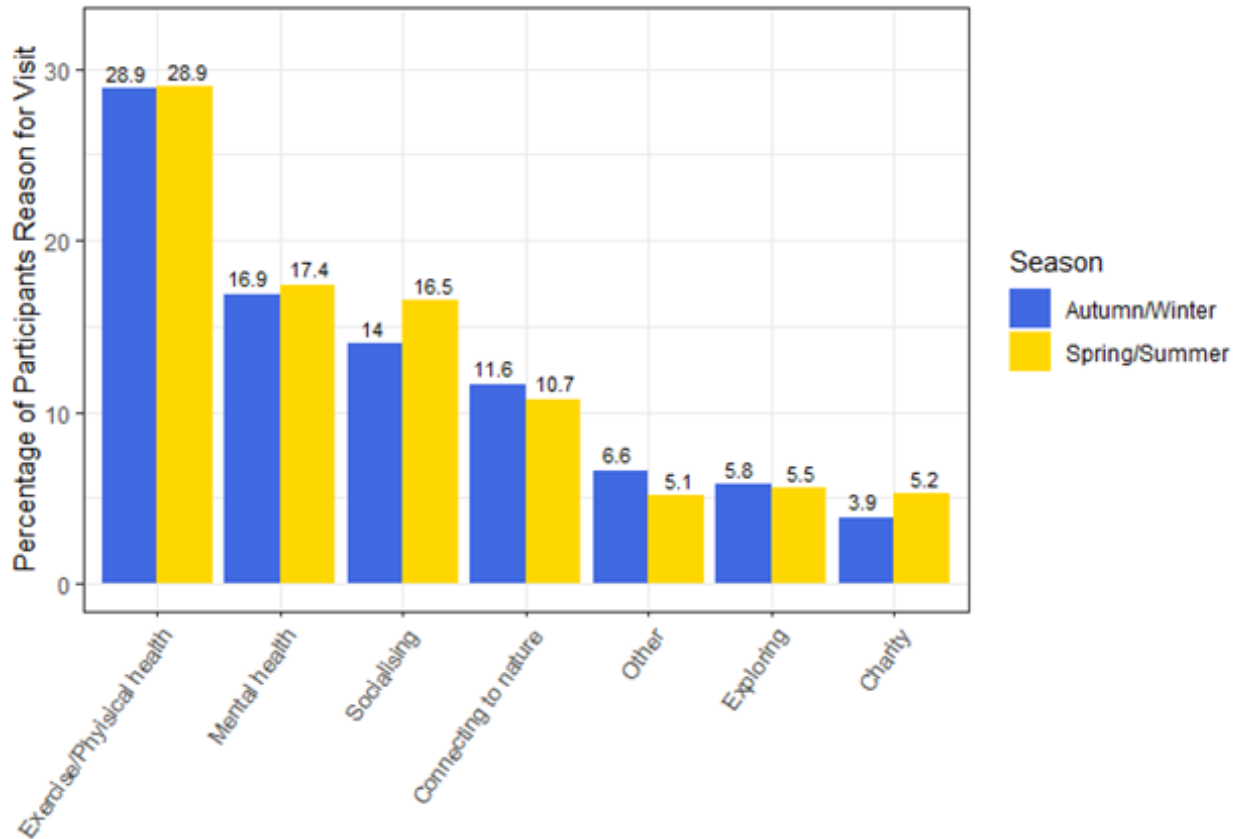
Most people visited with their partner or family.





WE ASKED: what people's reasons were for visiting

Physical and mental health, socialising and connecting to nature were all important reasons.

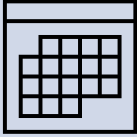




WE ASKED: What activities do people do during their countryside or greenspace visit?

The majority said walking.

	%
Walking (including taking a dog for a walk)	63%
Eating or drinking out / picnicking	25%
Wildlife watching	24%
Photography	19%
Playing with children	15%
Visiting an attraction	13%
Sports and games	7%
Running	7%
Fishing	6%
Cycling	6%
Boating, water sports or swimming outdoors	6%
Climbing	5%
Orienteering	4%
Horse-riding	4%
Shooting / hunting	4%
Other	3%



WE ASKED: On average, in the last 12 months, how often have you visited the countryside or a greenspace?

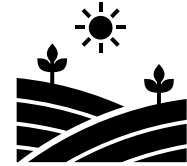
	%	
More than once every week	17%	Regular
Once every week	16%	Regular
A few times a month (more than twice)	20%	Semi-regular
Once or twice a month	14%	Semi-regular
Once every 2-3 months	13%	Semi-regular
Once every 4-6 months	5%	Infrequent
Once or twice through the year	9%	Infrequent
Never	8%	Infrequent

For analysis we re-grouped these response options as follows:

- ‘Infrequent’ (Never/Once or twice throughout the year/Once every 4-6 months),
- ‘Semi-regular’ (Once every 2-3 months/Once or twice a month/A few times a month (more than twice)),
- ‘Regular’ (Once every week/More than once every week).

How do respondents differ?: We analysed the data about visiting the countryside to see if there were differences between socio-demographic groups.

We found that:

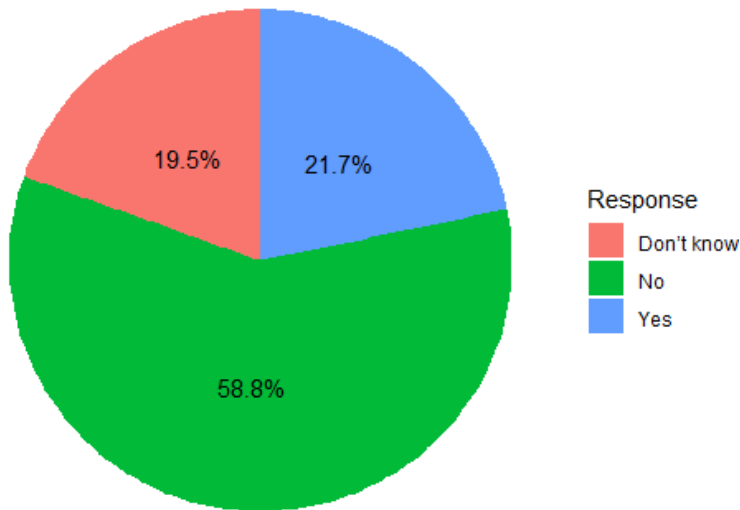


- People from ethnic minority backgrounds were more likely to be infrequent visitors; white respondents were far more likely to be regular visitors.
- People who said they had high levels of knowledge of tree and plant pests & diseases were more likely to be regular visitors to the countryside.
- People who regularly visit the countryside are more likely to get information about environmental issues from the radio, newspapers and online.
- Infrequent visitors are less likely to select pests & diseases in the environment as one of the main threats to the countryside; the same result was found for the threat of non-native / invasive species (refer to slide 6).
- People who are members of environmental/conservation organisations are more likely to be regular visitors to the countryside. Infrequent visitors are more likely not to be members of organisations



WE ASKED: In the last 12 months have you visited a Forestry Commission/Forestry England forest?

22% of participants had visited an FC/FE forest, the remainder of participants had not, or were not sure if they had.

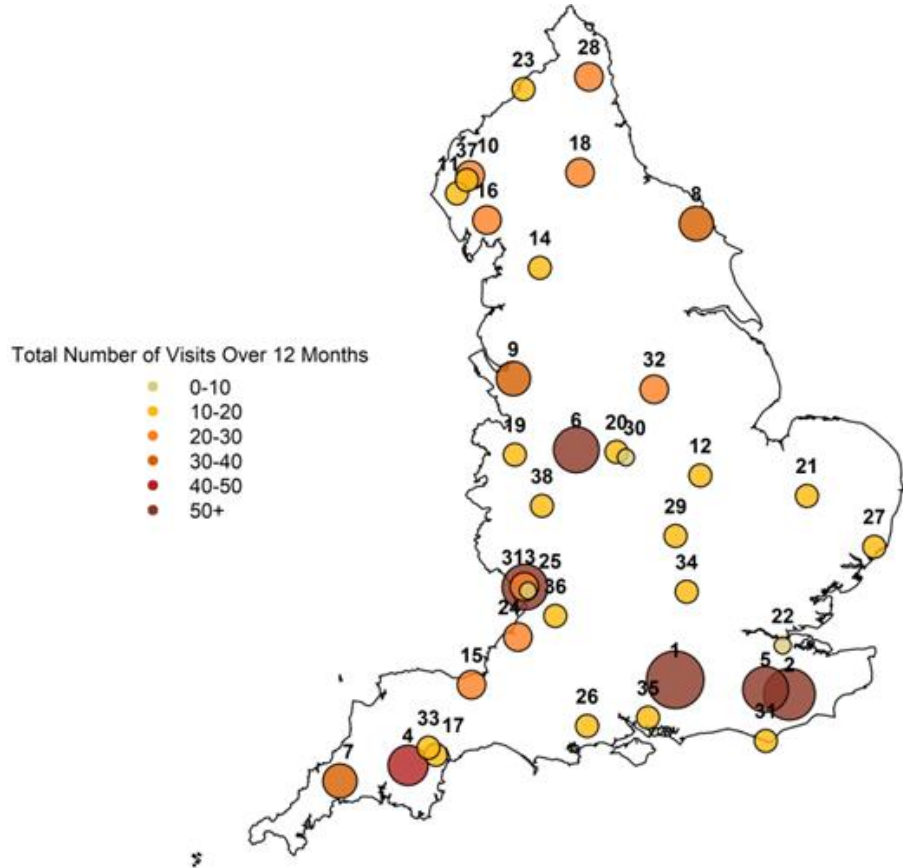


- **We analysed the results to see if there were differences between socio-demographic groups**
- Participants who worked full time were more likely to have visited an FC/FE site in the past 12 months compared to those who were currently unemployed.
- Participants who lived in London were less likely to have visited an FC/FE forest compared to most other regions.
- Knowledge about pests and diseases was significantly associated with having visited an FC/FE site in the past 12 months – the higher the level of self-reported knowledge, the more likely they are to have visited.

Which forests did people visit?

10% or more of respondents had visited these forests

• Alice Holt	18%
• Bedgebury	17%
• Beechenhurst	15%
• Cannock	14%
• Birchden Wood	13%
• Bellever	12%
• Dalby	10%



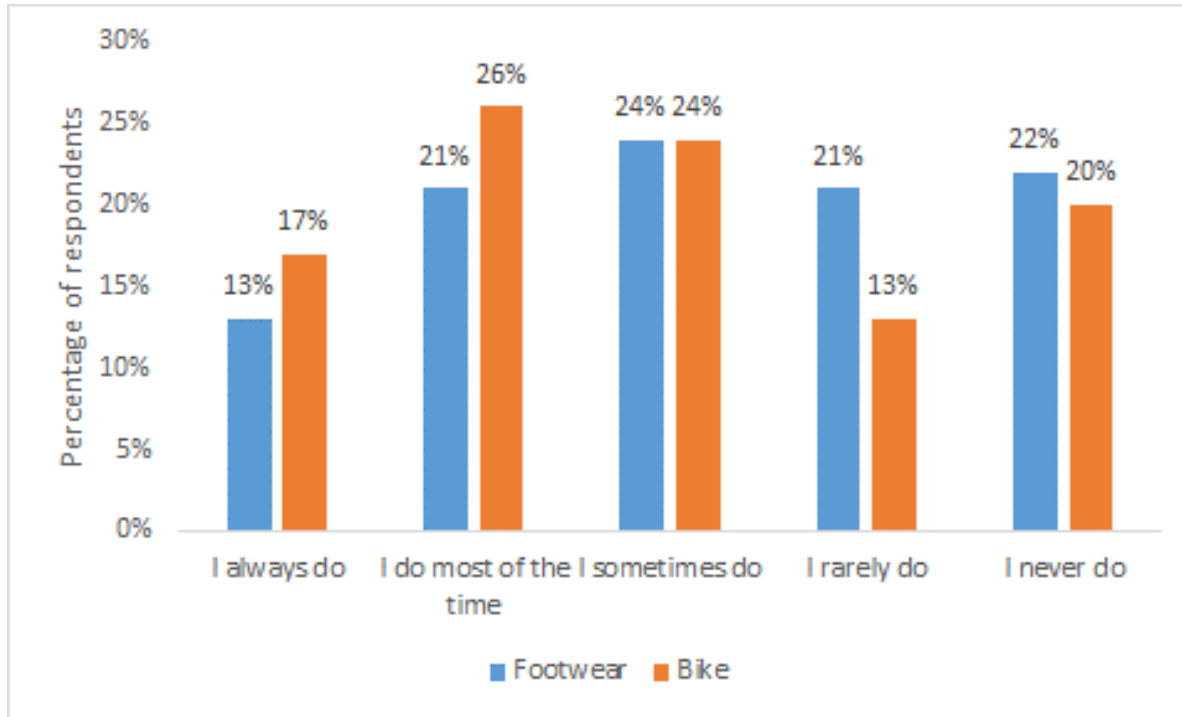
Key	Site	Key	Site	Key	Site
1	Alice holt	14	Gisburn	27	Rendlesham
2	Bedgebury	15	Great Wood	28	Rothbury
3	Beechenhurst	16	Grizedale	29	Salcey
4	Bellever	17	Haldon	30	Sence Valley
5	Birchden wood	18	Hamsterley	31	Seven Sisters
6	Cannock	19	Haughmond Hill	32	Sherwood Pines
7	Cardinham	20	Hicks Lodge	33	South Devon
8	Dalby	21	High Lodge	34	Wendover
9	Delamare	22	Jeskyns	35	West Walk
10	Dodd Wood	23	Kielder	36	Westonbirt
11	Ennerdale	24	Leigh Woods	37	Whinlatter
12	Fineshade	25	Mallards Pike	38	Wyre
13	Forest of Dean Cycle Centre	26	Moors Valley		



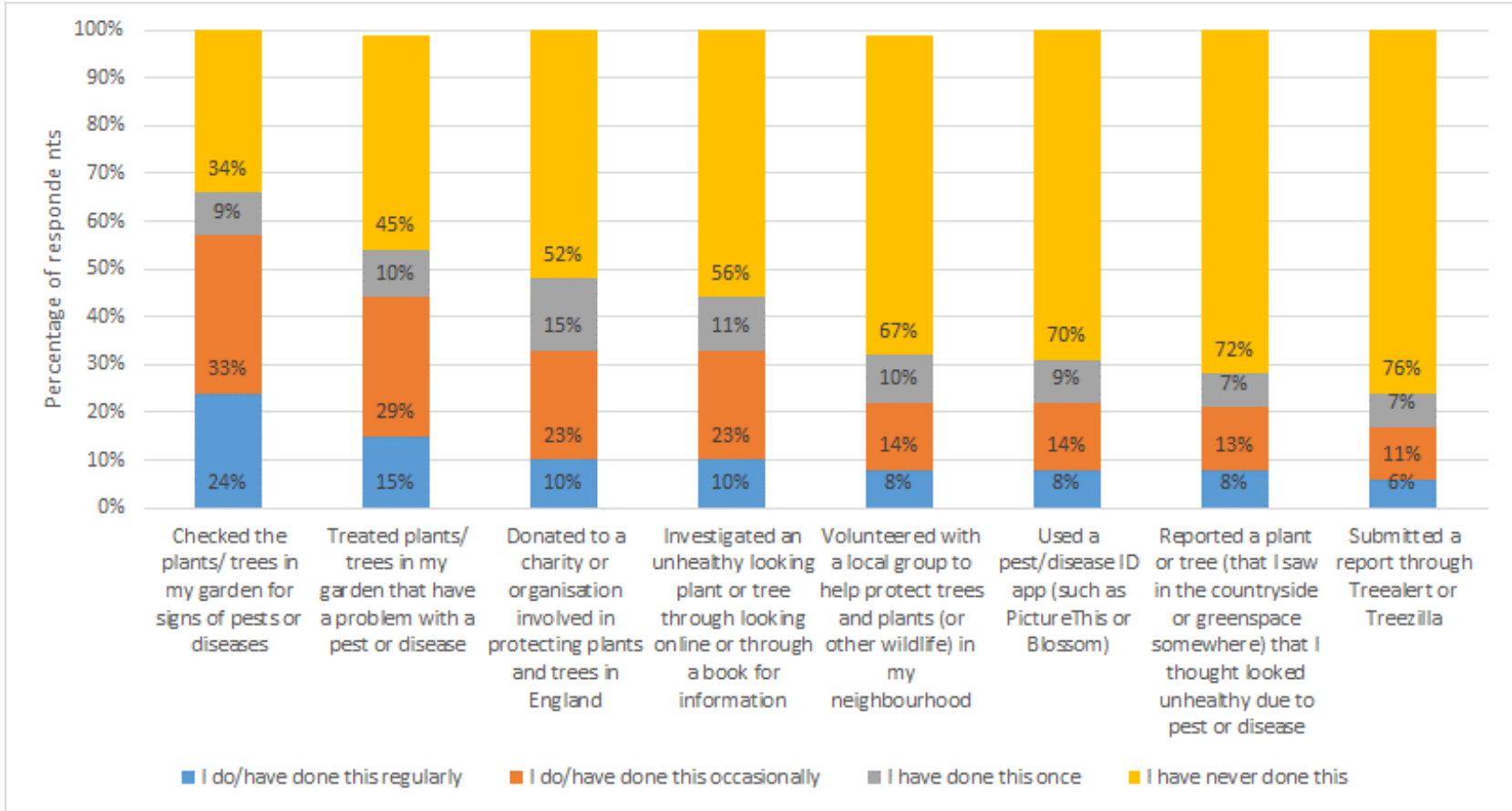
WE ASKED:

How often do you clean your footwear between visits to the countryside?

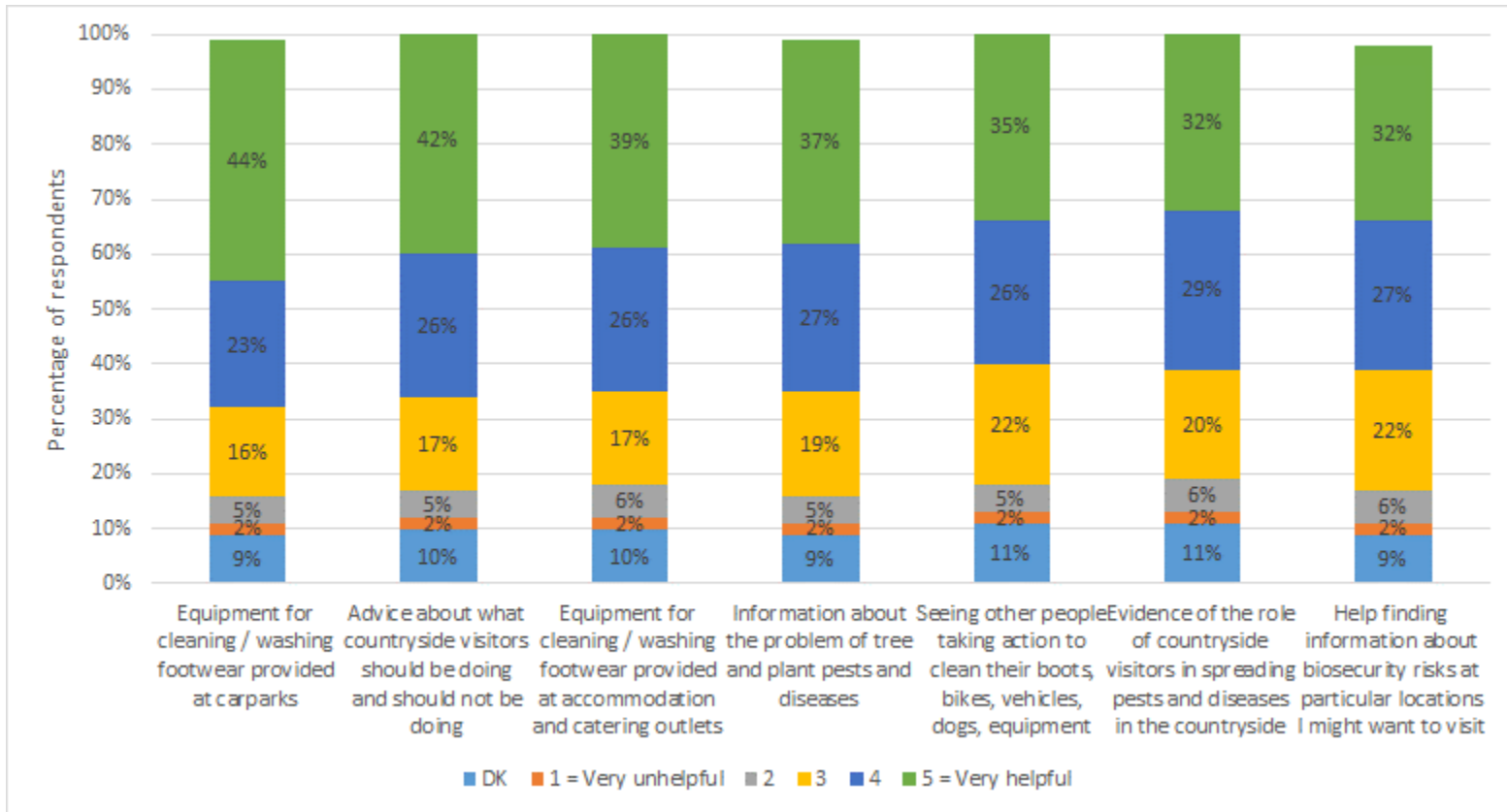
How often do you clean your bike between visits to the countryside?



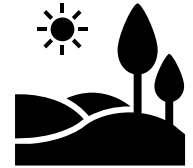
WE ASKED:
How often, if at all, have you...



WE SAID: We need countryside and greenspace visitors to play a part in stopping the spread of tree and plant pests and diseases through the countryside, for example by cleaning boots and other equipment. Such actions are “biosecurity behaviours”. WE ASKED: What would help or encourage you to take action?



Concluding points



- The results from this study provide a baseline understanding of the general public's knowledge, awareness and behaviours relating to biosecurity in the countryside, as at January 2023.
- All respondents were resident in England at the time of study.
- Understanding the places they visit, what information sources they use and what organisations they are members of is important for targeting information about biosecurity.
- Understanding current knowledge of the issue and concerns about threats to the countryside can be used in messaging and information campaigns.
- The intention is to repeat the study following a targeted programme of information for the general public and visitors to the countryside using 'Keep it Clean'

