

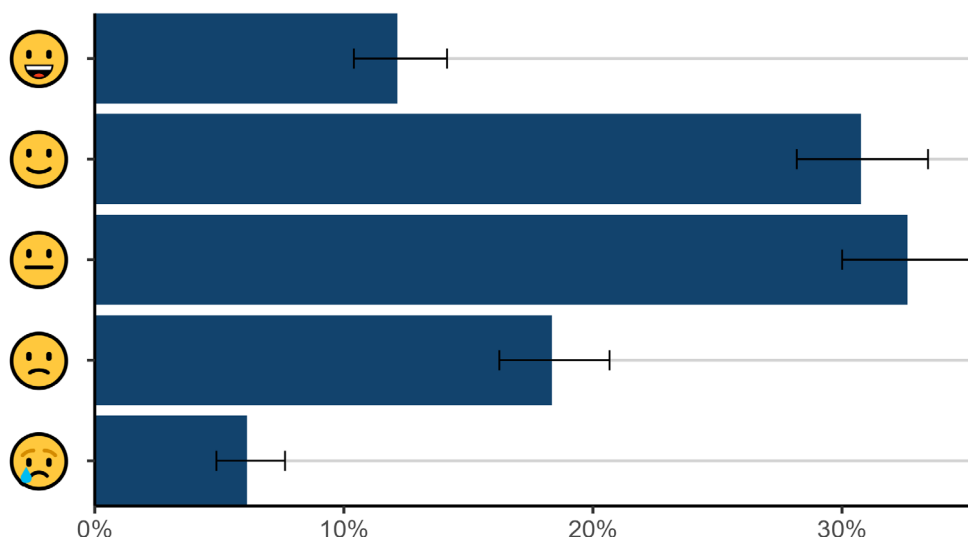
Dead and decaying trees in the landscape: What do visitors think about them?

Dead and decaying trees are important for biodiversity and many other reasons, but site managers are often unsure what visitors think about them. We surveyed 1177 visitors across three locations to understand what they thought about dead and decaying trees in the landscape. Respondents were surveyed in a place where at least one dead or decaying tree was visible. The three locations varied in how 'formal' or 'natural' they were, from the landscaped Stowe Gardens in Buckinghamshire, to wood pastures at Rydal in the Lake District, and the rewilding project at the Knepp Estate in West Sussex.

How do visitors feel about dead and decaying trees?

Three-quarters of respondents felt neutral, happy, or very happy when asked how they felt about a visible dead or decaying tree. Visitors to the most formal site felt the least positive, but were still more positive than negative overall.

Responses to the question: 'Can you point to how this tree makes you feel?'



What do visitors notice?

In our survey, 90% of visitors said they noticed deadwood, dead trees, and decaying trees. Visitors were most likely to notice their shape, and structure or patterns, along with regrowth, things growing on the trees, and how they contrasted with living or healthy trees. Negative attributes were less likely to be noticed. Nearly half of respondents agreed that such trees made them feel creative and inspired.

The results from our survey should reassure site managers that leaving dead and decaying trees in place, and even celebrating them, will positively contribute to visitor experience.

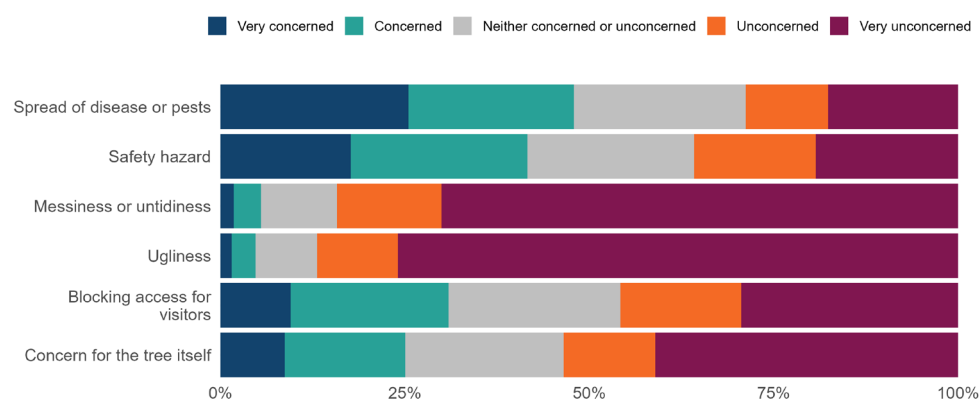


Visitors are less concerned about leaving trees to decay in place than you might think

Of the visitors surveyed, 63% thought more dead and decaying trees should be left in the landscape to decay in place. However, three-quarters of these reported their answer would change depending on the reasons for the tree death/decay.

Only 5% thought the visible dead/decaying tree should be removed and 16% thought it depended on the context (e.g. why it had died, whether it posed a hazard). The vast majority (79%) of visitors didn't think it should be removed. Visitors to less formal, wilder sites and those who had a stronger relationship to nature¹ were less likely to believe the tree should be removed.

When asked about specific concerns they had about dead and decaying trees being retained in the environment, respondents were most concerned about the spread of diseases or pests to other trees (48% concerned or very concerned) and safety hazards (42%). Very few were concerned about the trees being ugly (5%) or messy/untidy (6%).



The level of knowledge visitors hold affects their values and attitudes

Visitors were most aware of the biodiversity or wildlife benefits of dead and decaying trees. Other benefits mentioned included benefits to insects and birds, and the importance of such trees to the soil or nutrient cycle through decomposition. Nearly a quarter of visitors mentioned three or more environmental benefits.

However, 16% of respondents were not able to list any environmental benefits. Those with the least knowledge were more likely to feel negatively about dead and decaying trees, to be concerned about the risks they pose, and to believe that such trees should be removed. Knowledge levels also affected what people noticed about dead/decaying trees, how much they valued them, and what they valued about them.

Our findings suggest that investing in communication with those least knowledgeable about dead and decaying trees could have a big impact on visitor support for leaving trees to decay in place.

Research contacts:

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For the full report and more information about how people value trees outside of woodland more generally, visit our [project webpage](#).

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¹See full report for details of how we measured relationship to nature.