



Notes from interactive workshop discussion Knowledge Fair 2020

Workshop one: Accessing new audiences

Questions considered:

- What audiences are currently being accessed and how are they being accessed?
- What outreach activities exist to engage new audiences in schools?
- How to increase access to younger audiences, approaches, methodology and how to find them?

Discussion:

During the workshop it was accepted that there is value in engaging with youths for a variety of reasons. Engaging the youngest demographics through school talks and on-site visits helps to instil from an early age a connection with nature and an understanding of the perils invasive species can cause. Interaction with this demographic can also be an avenue to engaging with parents who are more able to assist with practical tasks.

It was noted that the Natural History Society - who manage grey squirrels on their Gosforth Park Nature Reserve - have a formal scheme for crediting young people for their contributions. For example, credits can be gained for practical tasks, or for writing a piece for publication in an appropriate outlet (e.g. local newspapers or conservation magazines). Similar schemes which help to build the credentials of young naturalists are offered through Scout badges (e.g. Naturalist Activity Badge) offered for ages 6 – 18, and through CREST awards aimed at ages 5 to 16+ (crestawards.org). Exploring the potential to incorporate such recognition into volunteering activities and approaching groups with these opportunities could potentially increase involvement among this demographic.

A small number of groups reported benefitting from the contributions of university students, whose projects may require engagement with a real-world conservation project. Despite the potential value of this demographic, it was also noted that those between 18-25 years old tend to be more transient, meaning that any investment in training for a particular role may be lost if the individual moves away from the area (e.g. for employment purposes after graduating from university). This is considered largely unavoidable given desires to find paid employment to compensate for their growing experience and skills. However, it was suggested that an established relationship and recurrent engagement with student bodies or course leaders could allow for a rolling replacement of students as new cohorts enter the university system. In addition to these strategies, one young volunteer from Merseyside noted their efforts to raise awareness of her group's work among her contemporaries via Instagram, which is thought to be among the most popular social media platform for those under 20 years of age. Use of other social media beyond Facebook, such as YouTube, Twitter and Pinterest could also be useful in reaching new, younger audiences.

Workshop Two: Messaging and communication workshop

The aim of the workshops was to discuss how groups can approach messaging and communications with different audiences. Some of the topics that were asked to be discussed included how to deal with misinformation that is publicised, for example by animal rights groups or regarding pine martens.

Stephen Trotter introduced the session and asked everyone if they had any experiences they would like to share. A few people had experienced difficulties communicating with individuals. Rachel Cripps shared experiences of dealing with a local animal rights group. 20+ protestors turned up at one event and were very threatening and hostile.



Somebody suggested there is a lot that squirrel groups can learn from the Countryside Alliance when it comes to messaging and communication as they receive a lot of attention from animal rights activists. It was suggested that when speaking to an individual being personal can help as they then see you as a human!

The group discussed when it is worth getting into discussion with someone and recognising when you going to hit a brick wall. Also, the importance of ensuring those people who are sat on the fence do not just hear the misinformation from the protest groups. We must work hard to ensure the good news stories and the facts are heard. This led us onto the Framing Nature toolkit. A few copies were handed out for the group to look through and details given on where to find it online. This is a very useful free resource that provides guidance on messaging and communications specifically in a conservation/wildlife context. The sections we highlighted were 'avoiding the traps', 'effective communication' 'your words or theirs' and 'a fresh perspective.' The session ended with a discussion around the importance of engaging younger generations, but in particular giving them an opportunity to gain skills and knowledge for future careers.

Workshop Three: Early Warning and Rapid Response (EWRR)

Early warning and rapid response systems are important both for detecting incursion of greys (other IAS) but also for visual disease monitoring among red squirrels. This workshop consisted of two tables of participants discussing different practises of EWRR, sharing experience and discussing improvements need to current systems.

Questions considered:

- What early warning systems do you have in place in your area and what does this consist of? i.e. camera traps, visual surveillance, public reporting sightings etc
- How do you respond to incursion detection or reports of sick red squirrels?
- How could these be improved or strengthened?

Discussion:

Participants heard from a mix of local groups, volunteers and government workers about a range of approaches to early warning. Local groups reported that early warning methods that worked well were centrally coordinated, often with a single point of contact to collate and disseminate information. This required a proactive person to collate data and to communicate with often large numbers of people. Knowledge of the landscape is also needed and often this contact will know where access is and is not permitted. Volunteers commented that they needed to know who to be in contact with and a single point of contact was useful. There was frustration across all sectors that there is no coordinated system to collate sightings data to be used for early warning and rapid response.

The government experience considered contingency planning for rapid response and the example of the Asian Hornet was given. The methods used in Northern Ireland for rapid response were discussed and the main concern is that these are time consuming requiring repeated monitoring via camera traps before trapping or shooting. This makes the method difficult to use at the same time as running traps in another woodland. Volunteer squirrel groups were very concerned about disease transfer as many work in areas that have red populations. All knew of best practise with regards to disinfecting and removing feeding stations when disease had been detected. There were general comments about the activity in one area being repetitive/ futile when there was no control in neighbouring regions. It was felt more could be done to recruit interest groups in these areas, indicating that a wider landscape scale approach to grey squirrel management was needed.