

Diversifying Volunteer Engagement with Citizen Science in the Chilterns

What is the need for this piece of research?

Throughout the Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Landscape Partnership Scheme, it has been noted by citizen science coordinators that the range of volunteers engaged in various Chilterns National Landscapes projects could be more diverse.

The following research was conducted by Support Staffordshire to explore ways in which the current Chilterns National Landscape citizen science projects could diversify their volunteer audience.

What did we ask in the research brief?

1. To research other citizen science projects and to understand what is offered by other organisations, as well as to suggest if the Chilterns National Landscape projects could approach their work differently to reach their objectives for equality, diversity and inclusion.
2. Summarise existing research into the barriers and motivations for participation in citizen science and national landscapes and use this research to advise on best practices for diversifying audience participation with citizen science.
3. Review current volunteering with Chilterns National Landscape citizen science projects.
4. Summarise the findings, pull out the main strategic insights and deliver a workshop for Chilterns National Landscape staff to present findings and recommendations.

Methodology

Throughout July and August 2024, the following workshops and events were conducted:

1. Workshops with citizen science co-ordinators to understand the existing projects led by Chilterns National Landscape, current volunteer recruitment and retention practices, what staff mean when using the term 'diversity' and "What does good look like" with regards to ambitions for volunteer diversity.
2. Workshops with community organisations in the Chilterns to understand what other communities are running citizen science activities, what is understood by the term 'citizen science', what the audience diversity is among wider organisations and the potential for joined up working between community groups and the Chilterns National Landscape.
3. Engagement with the wider public at a Family Fun Day event to understand what engagement with wildlife exists among the wider public, what is understood by the term 'citizen science' and what citizen science projects are known by the general public in the Chilterns.
4. A reflection workshop with Chilterns National Landscape staff to discuss findings of research and how the suggested recommendations could be implemented within projects and strategy.

What did the research find?

From literature review:

- The most effective projects which engaged different audiences have done so in partnership with community groups.
- Many citizen science projects across the UK are reporting a lack of diversity among participants as well as demonstrating a pathway of engagement, beginning with low commitment and easy activities, through to an increase of skills and knowledge, to reach the required skills to contribute to formal wildlife surveys.

From co-ordinator workshop:

- Existing projects are based on very strong scientific-led methodology and rigorous data collection.
- Clear desire to widen the diversity of volunteers.
- Staff time and capacity is the biggest barrier to doing more of this work.

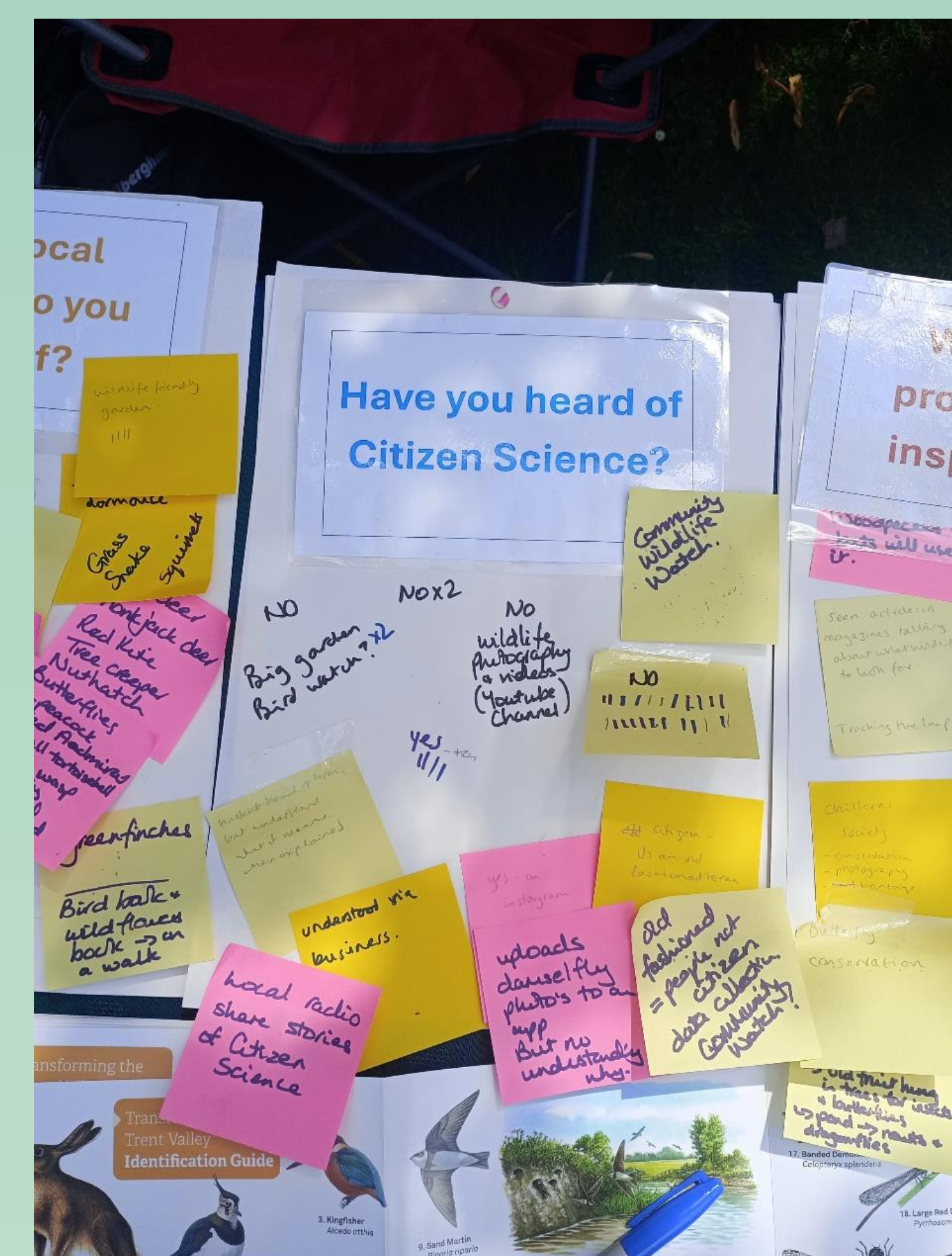
From community workshop:

- There are lots of smaller projects in the Chilterns with an interest in recording local wildlife, many wanting to partner up with each other to share knowledge and skills.
- 'Citizen science' – people who are already involved like and identify with the term – but don't use it with new people!
- Some smaller groups also struggle with audience diversity, particularly with regards to age.

From public event:

- Attracted a more diverse audience than the above workshops
- "Citizen Science" – only 6 people confidently understood and identified with the term, however, many people could identify examples of citizen science projects once the term was explained – most popular were 'Big Garden Birdwatch' and 'Big Butterfly Count'.
- There is a strong interest in wildlife among the general public.

Poster advertising community online workshop



Support Staffordshire collecting data from general public at Chilterns Chairs Family Fun day at end of July

What's next?

The research has provided us with recommendations to implement in the short-term, mid-term and long-term. We will disseminate the report to partners and the Chilterns National Landscape, as well as other organisations who will hopefully take on the recommendations from this research and look to implement them to support their Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy, to ensure that people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds have a fair chance to take part in nature and heritage activities or volunteering opportunities

Find out more at www.chilterns.org.uk/chalkcherrieschairs