

# People and Nature in a Pandemic: Interactive Online Event Dec 2020

## Workshop Report

December 2020



Birgitta Gatersleben Caroline Scarles, Kayleigh Wyles, Tracy Xu  
Sarah Golding, Emma White, George Murrell

*University of Surrey*

Beth Brockett, Cheryl Willis

*Natural England*

Contact: [b.gatersleben@surrey.ac.uk](mailto:b.gatersleben@surrey.ac.uk)

#PeopleNaturePandemic #PeopleAndNature

Visit

[People and Nature in a Pandemic](#)

[People and Nature Survey](#)



## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Participants.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The Workshop .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Day 1 – Sharing Ideas &amp; Experiences.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Day 2 – Methods.....</b>	<b>8</b>

## Introduction

On 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020, the UK went into lockdown in response to the Covid-19 threat. As a result, many people’s engagement with natural environments will have changed substantively, something which is likely to have had significant impact on their wellbeing.

On 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> December 2020, an online interactive workshop was held to bring together researchers, policy makers and practitioners to share ideas, challenges and experiences with respect to nature engagement, wellbeing and Covid-19. The event was organised by The University of Surrey and Natural England as part of a new UKRI-funded research project that aims to understand changes in nature engagement and wellbeing during and post the pandemic.

## Participants

The online workshop took place over 2 mornings in December 2020. Across the two days, almost 70 participants registered for the event, from a range of academic and non-academic institutions; 45 people attended on Thursday and 37 on Friday. During registration, participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire to help us organise the workshop and to help establish networks of interested parties. Tables 1 – 4 summarise the findings of some of the key questions asked in this survey. Attendees came from a range of different backgrounds, although academics were represented slightly more frequently than other groups (Table 1). Interests in different types of environments and populations groups varied (Tables 2 and 3). An interest in health and wellbeing was ranked highest by the participants and an interest in pro-environmental behaviour was ranked lowest (Table 4), which is likely to be a result of the focus of the workshop on nature engagement and wellbeing.

**Table 1.** Which of these categories best describes your professional interests in this event? (Tick as many as apply)

Role	% of Responses
Academic researcher	62%
Non-academic researcher	23%
Policy maker	21%
Educator	6%
Environmental NGO	4%
Landscape manager	3%
Other practitioner	3%
Parks manager	1%
Other	7%

N=71

**Table 2.** Which of the following environment types or environmental features are you most interested in? (Tick 3 that interest you most)

Environment Type/Features	% of Responses
Urban/peri-urban green space	66%
Blue space	47%
Biodiversity	41%
National parks/AONB's and other protected areas	35%
Gardens	30%
Countryside (managed/unmanaged)	28%
Animals/wildlife	23%
Landscape assessment /planning	18%

N=71

**Table 3.** Which of the following population groups are you most interested in? (Please select 1-3 that interest you most)

Population Groups	% of Responses
General population	56%
Vulnerable marginalised groups	52%
Children and young people	30%
Different cultures	25%
Older adults	16%
All	35%

N=71

**Table 4.** Which of the following outcomes or impact of nature engagement are you most interested in? (Please rank them in order of interest from most (1) to least (5))

Outcomes/Impacts	Median	Mode
Health & wellbeing	2	1
Outdoor activities	3	2
Diversity of access	3	2
Nature connectedness	3	3
Pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours	3	5

N=71

## The Workshop

The workshop took place over 2 days. Day 1 focused on network building and sharing ideas and experiences. Day 2 focused on methodological issues.

### Day 1 – Sharing Ideas & Experiences

At the start of the workshop participants were asked to indicate what – for them – was the best thing about nature during lockdown. Responses were captured in a wordcloud, shown in Figure 1.



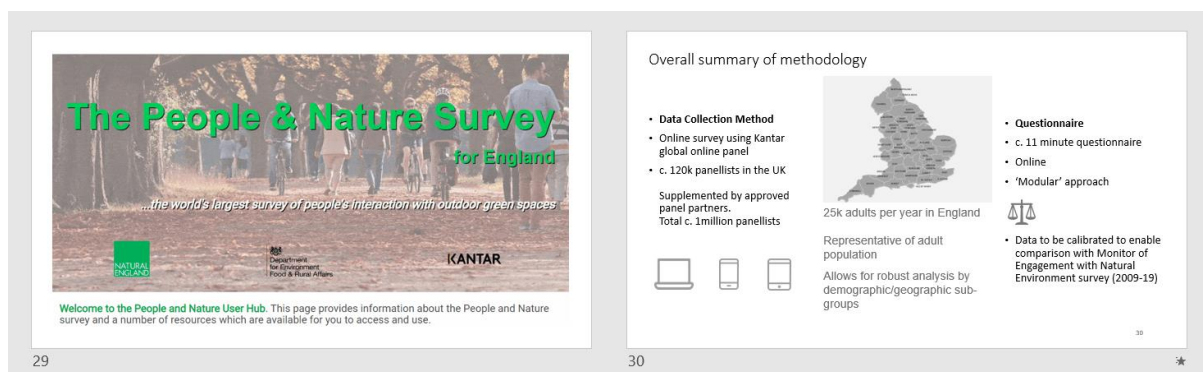
**Figure 1.** The best thing about nature during lockdown

### Introductions to research by Surrey and Natural England

The day continued with a summary of the UKRI funded research project: An 18-month research programme conducted by researchers at the University of Surrey and Natural England. This project aims to understand changes in nature engagement and wellbeing in the UK before, during and after lockdown, and help understand what Government and Statutory Bodies can do to ameliorate the impact of Covid-19 on wellbeing now and as part of the Green Recovery from Covid-19. The project contains several empirical studies: a social media analysis, in-depth qualitative interviews, and quantitative longitudinal studies following the same respondents over a year (Figure 2). It also includes secondary data analyses of Natural England’s People and Nature (PAN) survey, which was presented by Beth Brocket from Natural England (Figure 3).



**Figure 2.** Screen shots from the Nature-engagement during Covid project presentation



**Figure 3.** Slides from the PAN survey presentation

### Interactive discussions

Following the presentations, an interactive session was held where participants were split into subgroups of around 9-13 participants based on their topical interests, as indicated by the pre-workshop survey. After introductions, group members discussed what is already known and what the key practical and research questions are in relation how Covid-19 and the related restrictions have impacted upon: 1) how people engage with the natural environment; 2) people’s accessibility to nature (has it disadvantaged/advantaged particular groups); and 3) people’s connection with nature.



**Figure 4.** The interactive workshop

The topics discussed in these groups can be summarised as follows:

- Engaging with nature:
  - For health and wellbeing: importance of exercise, alternative spaces and uses of nature, importance of proximal spaces, beyond assumptions/stereotypes of quality of nature and the location of these
  - Politics of nature and environmental behaviour (physical and virtual encounters)
  - Subjectivities of engagement: different for different people at different times, individual and collective engagements with nature
  - Importance of longitudinal data on behaviour
  - From Watercolours and House plants to Wilderness and Habitats:
  - What spaces of nature? Geographical: Urban/rural/coastal, proximities to wider conceptualizations and subjective perceptions of what and where nature is?
- Accessibility
  - Quality versus quantity: beyond stereotypes, subjectivity in perceptions/value of nature, quantifying green spaces
  - From joy to fear: understanding emotion, perception and need: attending to the nuanced and multiple ways of being in nature, one size does not fit all
  - Inequalities in access to nature – influence of gender, different socio-economic groups/demographics, geographical location, who is using nature (why/why not/barriers to access in different groups)
  - Gatekeepers/facilitating stakeholders: community groups, associations and networks supporting disadvantaged groups,
  - Importance of infrastructure: amenity provision, transport infrastructure, pathways/maintenance
  - Understanding where nature is absent: heath impacts, isolation in remote/natural areas
  - Keeping space for nature: reconfiguring nature and nature engagements post-Covid-19, the temporality of nature engagements and accessibility
  - Understanding nature in different residential settings (from private homes to long-term residential care homes)
- Connectedness to Nature
  - Forced closures and finding alternatives: creating new spaces of connection (physical, virtual), new relationships to mediate connection, and new means of connecting (language, action, behaviour)
  - Understanding reconfigured ‘values’ of nature
  - Not seeing the woods for the trees: liminal and subliminal connections with nature, recognising the presence, saliency and value of nature in self and society
  - Retrofitting and maintaining new-found connections beyond Covid-19: lifestyles, infrastructure design and socio-cultural/economic/political/technological investments in nature relations
- Methods and Methodology:
  - Importance of mixed methods to fully uncover the impacts

- Importance of longitudinal data in understanding short AND longer-term effects of Covid-19 and relationships to and with nature, health impacts, deepening social inequalities, etc
- Importance of considering both the positive and negative impacts
- Importance of utilising and combining existing datasets (e.g. data NGOs hold combined with the PANS data)
- How do we determine baseline measures for connection to nature, accessibility and engaging with nature pre-Covid-19?
- Need to know the pathways/mechanisms
- Nuances and insights from qualitative research: need to know the detail of the 'lived experience'

## Conclusion and reflections

Day 1 ended by asking participants what they felt are the key questions in relation to nature engagement and the pandemic. The responses were gathered via PollEverywhere and can be found in Table 5.

**Table 5** What do we need to know about (changes in) nature engagement during the pandemic?

Responses
During the early restrictions there was a strong social media and wider focus on nature, if this tails off and people can do more things mean that they weren't allowed to - will then strong engagement continue
Will some people be relieved that they no longer have to go out into nature to get away after this is over?
Is it more useful/policy relevant to measure more objective changes rather than nature connection per se?
We need to look carefully from different frames of reference. It's highly subjective down to individual level and we're inevitably participants in the pandemic and nature connection experience
How we take the interest in nature and press for change to a greener and fairer society as argued for in the All party parliamentary group report on a Green New Deal
Social media data can be difficult to access, due to Facebook restriction. How have you solved this problem
Are more people engaging more with nature simply as a 'venue' - do they actually value it more?
How can we make the positive changes and engagement continue (in a fair and equal manner)?
Socioeconomic disparities in access to nature exacerbated by Covid?
Whether people will continue to access nature to help their wellbeing as a potentially new tool for them

## Recovery for frontline workers

How have individuals, communities, care for nature, changed (if they have)!

## Can we capitalise on behaviour change

Are increases/decreases in engagement maintained over time - and does this lead to sustained changes in health?

## Patterns of change

What do people want to stay the same? What have they enjoyed in nature during the lock downs and how can we continue this?

## Spatial inequality

Changes about engagement and views of nearby nature to further away nature

## Which changes will stick?

How long responses last?

## Noticing nature more?

Will it have a long term effect on environmental attitudes?

## Care homes??

Potential inequal impacts

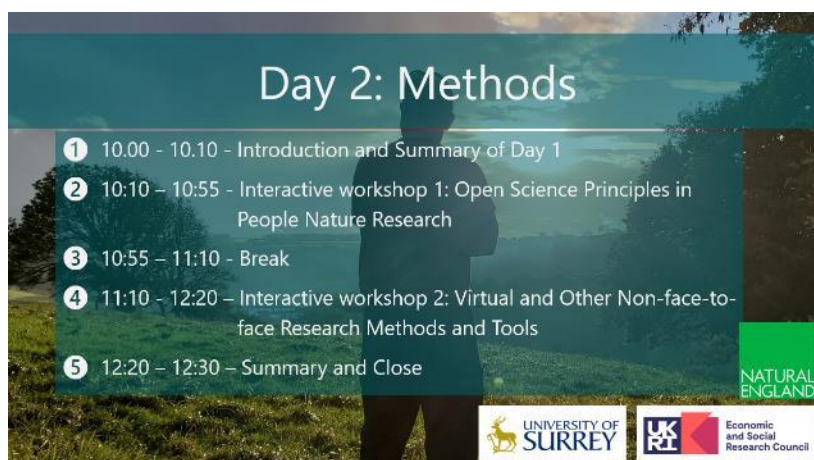
Are people valuing nature more because of the pandemic and the difficulties in access?

## Inequalities & intersectionality

## Longevity

## Day 2 – Methods

Day 2 focused on research methods and processes and centred around three presentations focusing on two research topics: 1) open access data and; 2) online and other methods to engage with participants during the pandemic. Each session started with a presentation(s), which was followed by a panel discussion in which an academic and non-academic perspective was presented on these topics (Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** Overview of day 2 - methods



## Workshop 1: Open science for understanding nature-engagement and wellbeing

Workshop 1 opened with a presentation by Emma Norris (Brunel University London), who provided an overview of different aspects of the open science movement, including tips for incorporating more open practices at different stages of research projects (see Figure 6).

This was followed by a panel discussion, in which panellists Ben Wheeler (University of Exeter) and Joelene Hughes (RSPB) shared their reflections on Emma's presentation and the open science movement from both an academic and non-academic research perspective.



**Figure 6.** Introduction slides to Emma Norris's presentation on open science

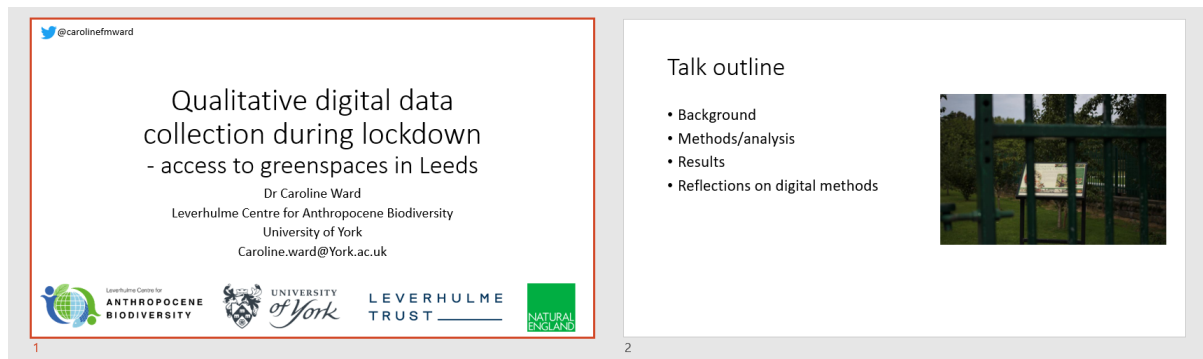
## Workshop 2: Virtual and other non-face-to-face research methods and tools: engaging diverse participants and audiences in research and application during COVID-19

Workshop 2 consisted of two presentations by Caitlin Hafferty (University of Gloucestershire; Figure 7) and Caroline Ward (University of York; Figure 8) who shared their experiences in working with virtual and other non-face-to-face research methods and tools.

In the panel discussion that followed Sarah Golding (University of Surrey) and Lauriane Chalmin-Pui (RHS) shared their opinions on (1) the barriers and challenges we face while we are solely/predominantly relying on digital research methods during the current pandemic; and (2) how digital research methods will have a significant role to play in future social research.



**Figure 7.** Introductory slides from Caitlin Hafferty's talk.



**Figure 8.** Introductory slides from Caroline Ward’s talk on qualitative digital data collection.

### Summary, conclusions and next steps

At the end of the workshop, participants were asked (via PollEverywhere) what, if anything, the workshop had inspired them to do next. The responses can be found below (Table 6). It was evident from the responses that participants felt inspired to learn more, ask new questions and connect with more people.

**Table 6.** What have the last 2 days inspired you to do next?

Responses
Open science!
Discuss research methods and ideas with others in various fields
Keep the discussion going
Engage with the People and nature group
Read about others' work, RESEARCH! So many questions
Talk to lots more people
Connect with some new people and explore PANS!
Check out the people and nature survey in more detail
Learning new ideas
Keep talking and sharing ideas
Work collaboratively with others & learn from their experiences!
Find out more about PANS and use it as a resource to shape our work
Share this great work with colleagues at NE
Think more about how we can position and develop participatory research as interventions to increase nature engagement (as well as inform design of interventions)
Catch up on yesterday's video as sounds like I missed brilliant session
Collaborate!
Try to keep up with more of the latest research on engaging diverse communities with nature
Keep engaging with the PaN user group
Collaborate!

Participants were also asked to complete a follow up feedback form. Seventeen participants completed the form, which was overwhelmingly positive. Participants particularly appreciated learning about the work of others and developing connections. All of those who completed the form said they would join another meeting if we held one.

The workshop generated a lot of interesting discussion and questions. It brought together a lot of people with shared interests in understanding people-nature engagement and wellbeing both from a research and a practical perspective. Our workshop feedback activities suggest that there is great interest in such an event.