



SOUTH EAST DEVON
HABITAT REGULATIONS
PARTNERSHIP

South East Devon Habitat Regulations Executive Committee

South East Devon Wildlife Communications Report

Anne Mountjoy, Communications Officer
April 2022



Exeter
City Council



Legal comment/advice:

There is no direct comment to be made in relation to this report, each and any individual issue will need to be considered as it arises.

Finance comment/advice:

The financial implications are set out in the report.

Public Document:	Yes
Exemption:	None
Review date for release	None

Recommendations

It is proposed that the Executive Committee:

1. Notes the results of the communications report for the period August 2021 – February 2022, further to earlier communications report for this period.
2. Will receive future communications reports on an annual basis with the next report due in March 2023.

Equalities impact: Low

Risk: Low. This report provides the results of the communications report for August 2021 – February 2022.

1. Summary

1.1 South East Devon Wildlife (SEDW) is the public facing brand for the South East Devon Habitat Regulations Partnership.

1.2 Key performance indicators (KPIs) enable evaluation as measures of success.

1.3 Six agreed KPIs reflect the business plan objectives:

1. Website page views
 2. Website time spent on site
 3. Website average number of pages/session
 4. Website referrals
 5. Website top referral channel
 6. Number of people signing up to newsletters
- In addition, social media engagement is being monitored:
7. Social media engagement – facebook, twitter, instagram

1.4 Collecting this data on a monthly basis means officers are able to monitor and evaluate it to understand how project delivery, stakeholder engagement and communications efforts are impacting on our overall goals.

1.5 As previously stated, a communications officer role is providing only 1 day per week support, which limits direct delivery. Engagement and communications is delivered by the Wildlife Wardens as part of their work in the limited time available while performing a range of duties.

1.6 During the busy summer and autumn months the wardens are spending more time on site engaging directly with visitors, which means less time spent on communications including social media and writing articles for partners' newsletters. International travel was limited in 2021, which led to a significant increase in visitor pressure from staycationing and UK based holidays.

1.7 Staff changes have had a significant impact on engagement and communications as already reported with a reduction in staff resource from November 2021 until February 2022. One new member of staff started as a Wildlife Warden in February, with a maternity cover Wildlife Warden starting in March 2022.

1.8 Appendix 1 shows figures for the KPIs for the period from August 2021 – February 2022. Comparing average figures with the previous report we can see a significant increase on the last period.

2. Current website

2.1 Overall average website statistics are much higher than last reported on in July 2021 (for the period Feb 21- July 21). Fresh content is paramount to encourage visitors to the website, which has been the case.

2.2 In addition, there are a number of factors driving new visitors: Previously organic search was the most effective way visitors found the website. However, with more targeted content, the top referral channel for web traffic has been through email newsletters – especially in November 2021 and February 2022 focussing on car park improvements updates on the Pebblebed Heaths. This topic was the most read content on the website for the months November 2021, January 2022 and February 2022.

2.2 The average number of total monthly visitors increased from 89 in Feb 21-July 21 to 255 in Aug 21-Feb 22. As reported above, email newsletters have helped to increase the number of web visitors, as well as links from social media content.

Table 1. Comparison of average website page views, sessions and highest referrals.

	Feb 21 – July 21 Average	Aug 21 – Feb 2022 Average
Page views	294	516
Average number of page/sessions	1.76	1.73
Total users / referrals	89	255
Top referral channel	71 (organic search)	119 (organic search and email)
Top web content	74 (home page)	122 (home page and PBH car parks)

2.3 The web KPIs collected from June 2020 until the launch of the new website on April 4th will be reviewed as benchmarks for objectives for the new website.

4. Social media and newsletter

4.1 Facebook engagement rate hovers around 6-16% but increased markedly to 62% in January due to a video post about Snipes (a wetland bird), which featured on the BBC's Winterwatch TV programme -- although the post actually mentioned Springwatch, which boosted engagement.

4.2 Top twitter post for engagement (at 16.3%) featured in September focussing on the ITV Westcountry TV broadcast because it tagged @itwestcountry and @itvbob.

4.3 The top instagram post featured in October focussing on searocket (a coastal plant), reaching 215 accounts mainly because it used popular hashtags inc #wildflowerhour (15.1k posts) and #dune (1.4m posts). It also tagged @wildflowerhour which currently has 2,881 followers and asks for images of wild flowers to be posted 8-9pm on Sundays.

4.4 Many additional people can be reached through the use of popular hashtags, for example in August 2021, a total of 569 people were reached and of those 337 were not followers of SEDW which shows the post would have been found through following or searching for the hashtags we used.

4.5 Newsletter: There has been a significant increase in newsletter subscribers in this period which can be attributed to traffic driven to the website (where sign up form is located on homepage) from activity in the press, the media and in partner newsletters. Statistics for the most recent newsletter (Shores, Heaths and Dunes) which was issued on 2 Feb 2022 reported there were 1063 recipients; 1630 total opens; 196 total clicks; and the top story was car park improvements story on our website at 119 total clicks.

5. Media

Press releases

5.1 The following press releases were issued during this period and featured on the website. This sustains a healthy presence in the local press, driving web traffic and maximising search engine optimisation:

28 July 2021 New guide to enjoying countryside dog walks launched for Heath Week - sent to 54 media contacts (Devon Loves Dogs).

7 September 2021 Epic 3000 mile journey to the Exe Estuary has begun – sent to 79 contacts inc media and cllrs.

Public plea as hundreds of exhausted birds arrive on Exe Estuary ahead of winter - Devon Live

9 September 2021 Wildlife refuges piece for Exmouth Journal – in place of Clinton Devon's Kate Ponting's usual column Brent geese arrive at Exe Estuary | Exmouth Journal and in Midweek Herald too.

27 October Green light for car park improvements on East Devon Pebblebed Heaths – sent to 79 contacts inc media and councillors.

2 November 2021: Three years of Exe Estuary wildlife refuges are working – sent to 79 contacts inc media and cllrs.

9 December 2021: Dawlish Countryside Park managed by Land Trust – press release with quotes and photos sent by the Land Trust, on TDC and SEDW websites and shared on social media Land Trust takes over management of Dawlish Countryside Park - Teignbridge District Council. This was sent by Teignbridge DC.

1 Feb 2022: Car parks press release – sent to 54 media contacts. Press coverage included in Exmouth Journal (<https://www.exmouthjournal.co.uk/news/heathland-car-parks-close-for-improvement-work-8660436>)

6. TV and Radio

6.1 TV and radio coverage has been fairly frequent for this period:

ITV Westcountry filming on patrol boat and interviews with Wildlife Wardens and Cllr Martin Wrigley, Broadcast 29 September 2022.

<https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2021-09-28/warning-as-hundreds-of-birds-on-the-brink-arrive-after-epic-journey>

BBC Radio Devon interview with Cllr Martin Wrigley on Wildlife Refuges, 8 November 2022.

Devon Loves Dogs on East Devon's Pebblebed Heaths NNR featured on Escape to the Country, BBC1, 22 Feb 3pm and on iplayer. Visitors to Devon Loves Dogs website peaked on this day with 200 visitors to the website, when numbers usually average around 50 per day. Of the 377 visitors to the website during February, 367 were new with 282 finding their way to the site through organic search.

The profile of the Pebblebed Heaths NNR has been raised by Clinton Devon Estates appearance in January 2022 on BBC1's Countryfile, where Kim Strawbridge gave an interview about the Pebblebed Heaths NNR.

7. Editorial

7.1 A range of articles have been provided for partner e-newsletters during this period:

September 2021 Devon and Cornwall Police's Teignmouth and Dawlish Rural Neighbourhood Gazette featured the Dawlish Warren code of conduct as well as an article explaining nesting birds, no dogs past Groyne 9, no BBQs and body cams worn by rangers due to anti-social behaviour. 'Saul's corner' explained community engagement with a visit to the Warren to meet Phil Chambers and rangers. Sent to all parish council's and local stakeholders in that area.

17 September 2021 TDC residents and staff newsletters: Exe Estuary cited as one of best in country by RSPB

11 November 2021 Wild East Devon newsletter: 4847 recipients; 2336 total opens; 121 total clicks. Pebblebed Heaths car park improvements (top story) 78 total clicks; Exe Estuary wildlife refuges are successful 36 total clicks.

4 Feb 2022: East Devon District Council's weekly residents update – article on car park closures on Pebblebed Heaths. 11826 recipients; 10760 total opens; 1437 total clicks; car park improvements on EDDC website 249 total clicks (top story);

8. Lessons learned and future plans

8.1 “Content is king” and drives communications across the board. Our media activities show that regular news updates should continue to be distributed through press releases and newsletters which encourages visitors to the website and increases awareness and engagement. Social media supports distribution of news too.

8.2 Content which isn't newsworthy/suitable for the media, should also be distributed through our own and partner councils' channels where appropriate.

8.3 The social media statistics show that the use of images and videos in social media means they are given higher profile through the platform's algorithms so we should continue to develop this approach.

8.4 Optimisation of relevant hashtags and tagging partners increases reach and engagement in social media. We will focus on this with the new team members.

8.5 Social media is optimised by using the rule of thirds (personal, point, promote) so we don't just talk about ourselves. When the new website is launched, we will ensure that social media posts link to relevant content on our website as much as possible. Including web links in our newsletter significantly increases web traffic.

8.6 Securing new platforms to distribute our content is key. Reporting shows that content provided to platforms like Wild East Devon newsletter, Exe Press newsletter and Police news etc. increases our reach and engages more people. Our key messages can be shared in articles supplied to third parties which will bring about behaviour change over time. (Some reports suggest that people need to read/hear a message 5 times before they take fully it on board and act on it.)

8.7 Forward planning communications according to seasonal variations is also key, so that the right content is shared at the right time and visitors can be targeted according to their behaviour. The monitoring reports show what has worked well in the past and can be built on in future. We have built this into our regular communications review and forward planning process.

8.8 Although we strive to increase reach in our communications and engagement on social media, we cannot be sure that we are reaching all visitors to the protected sites. Therefore, we extend our reach by sharing content and tagging partners on social media and by providing content to partner newsletters to complement our face to face onsite exchanges and influence our target audience.

8.9 To better target our audience, we will develop 'user journey' profiles for the different types of user to different sites to help us understand their behaviour and target them more effectively. This will help us find more communication outlets to engage with.

8.10 After the new website is launched, we will review visitor journeys – to see how they navigate through the site and seek ways to develop and improve the content.

Anne Mountjoy
Communications Officer

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Natural England comment:

Natural England have reviewed the report and have no comment to make.