



South East Devon Habitat Regulations Executive Committee

South East Devon Wildlife Communications Report

Anne Mountjoy, Communications Officer
October 2025

Legal comment/advice:

EDDC Legal have read the report and have no comments to make.

DEM.1-0007/October 2025/RAH

Finance comment/advice:

There are no direct financial implications 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 September 2024 – August 2025.

Equalities impact: Low

Risk: Low. This report provides the results of the communications report for September 2024 – August 2025.

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 marketing and communications evaluation as measures of success. The agreed KPIs reflect the aims of the business plan. The KPIs are:

1. Website visitors
2. Website average engagement time
3. Website acquisition channels
4. Top website content
5. Number of people signing up to newsletters

In addition, social media engagement is being monitored:

6. Social media reach – Facebook, Instagram

Appendix 1 shows data for the KPIs.

1.3 KPI data is reviewed with the team on a bi-monthly basis to understand how project delivery, stakeholder engagement and communications are impacting on our overall goals and how we can improve.

1.4 As the communications officer role is limited to 1 day per week, digital communications are delivered by the Wildlife Wardens and Project Officer at the same time as engaging with stakeholders and other duties. Generally, during the summer and autumn months wardens spend more time on site engaging directly with visitors, which means less time spent on communications. On 6 January 2025 Claire Spence has joined as Wildlife Warden, covering Imogen Salmon's maternity leave.

1.5 Communications and engagement across the work of the team has been enriched over the last year with a focus on providing engaging and informative social media content. We have adopted a campaigns approach, for more targeted messaging and QR codes for tracking and measurement. See Appendix 2 for campaign collateral examples.

1.6 How the comms resource is used is a key challenge for the team. The comms officer focuses on identifying opportunities for media engagement and delivering on those, support for campaign planning and delivery, monitoring and evaluation and website development and support. As stated above, a bi-monthly operational review of comms activity across the team takes place. This helps us learn from experience and make changes accordingly. For example, the team deployed a Christmas tactic in 2024, by maximising social media engagement at a time when people are not at work, have lots of free time plus using all local online community groups to increase reach. The result was one of the highest reach statistics of all time of almost 20,000 people on Boxing Day 2024.

2 Website

2.1 Table 1 below shows the figures from 1 Sept 2024 until 31 August 25. Compared with previous period statistics are showing an impressive improvement.

2.2 The average engagement time per session is 0.45s compared with 0.37s in the previous period. We have been working on making content more “sticky” by giving visitors reasons to stay longer and make repeat visits, eg through preparing a virtual reality tour of the Pebblebed Heaths and running a competition. The proposed “virtual tour” of the Pebblebed Heaths is in development.

2.3 We are very excited to launch the first SEDW competition. Working in partnership with Stuart Line cruises, competition entrants can win a prize of a wildlife sailing for two. The competition runs from 1 September to 30 November 2025 and a prize winner will be selected at random every month. This builds on the success of Devon Loves Dogs competition to win a dicky bag from Dec 24-March 25. We will continue to look for opportunities to add to our website “offer” and thereby increase the number of repeat visits.

2.4 Total website users for the 12-month period is 15,013 compared to the previous 14-month period of 12,268.

2.5 Search Engine Optimisation continues to be effective as the way most users reach the site is through organic search. This reinforces the need to regularly update the website with engaging content.

2.6 Top web content was Dawlish Warren code at 2743 visits in the last 12 months. Social media posts generated interest in ground nesting birds, recruiting Devon Loves Dogs project officer, collecting litter at Exmouth LNR, landing at and enjoying Dawlish Warren, juvenile Brent Geese, red damselfly, female ranger week and gulls in decline.

2.7 The monitoring dashboard on the website has been updated with details of Petalwort monitoring. The dashboard provides visitors with insight into the condition of species and habitats that are found across our protected sites.

Table 1: Website analytics comparing July 23-August 2024 with the period 1 Sept 2024 until 31 August 25

	July 23 – Aug 24 (14 months)	1 Sept 2024 – 31 August 2025
Average engagement time per session	37sec	44.83sec
Total users	12,268	15,301
Sessions / top referral channel	Organic search 7318	Organic search 11,175
Top web content / landing page	June newsletter page 568	Dawlish Warren code 2743

3. Social media and newsletter

3.1 Through social media monitoring, we learned that reach is increased by posting content separately to various geographical community groups, where relevant. As a result, social media engagement increased considerably, particularly on Facebook. Facebook reach grew from 206 in November to 19232 in December as a direct result of this. Where appropriate, we change our approach based on monitoring and it is a strategy we continue to deploy.

3.2 Tailored content has been developed to target different user groups – eg paddle board groups. A video on water sports was created by working with partners, Exmouth Water sports. It was used to target water sports groups. The team have been focussing on developing engaging content for reels and stories.

3.3 Numbers of social media followers continue to grow but in particular Facebook's algorithm makes this challenging. The algorithm is constantly, secretly changing, so trial and error is continually needed to identify the best approach. We have adapted to the algorithm by putting external links in the first comment rather than in the post itself.

3.4 Our campaign focussed approach is paying dividends. For example, on social media we ran a campaign for 'Female Ranger Week' featuring our own wardens and partners' rangers. It led to a spike in views over the week totalling 8780. Engagement increased to around 120 interactions on this topic.

3.4 The use of hashtags remains important particularly for Instagram as significantly more 'not following' accounts are reached compared to followers.

3.5 We have reduced our focus on twitter / X channel due to the declining engagement this channel brings. We keep our handles and presence but we are not active.

3.6 Newsletter: A pleasing increase in newsletter subscribers indicates the content is interesting to our readers, with subscribers increasing from 2647 in June 24

We are anticipating a growth in newsletter subscribers connected to the forthcoming Let Birds Be competition – as proven by Devon Loves Dogs bag it and bin it campaign which saw an increase in newsletter subscribers and website visitors, receiving: 361 competition entrants, 247 new newsletter subscribers, 726 visits to the competition webpage.

4. Media

4.1 Press releases

4.1.1 The press coverage for this period is listed below. Stories also feature on the website and on social media.

Sept 24 Call to avoid Wildlife Refuges as flocks of birds return to the Exe Estuary

Sept 24 Birds and visitors return to Exe Estuary as wildlife refuges reopen - Yahoo News UK

Sept 24 Birds and visitors return to Exe Estuary as wildlife refuges reopen - Devon Live

Dec 24 Works totalling half a million pounds complete at 11 car parks in East Devon (Yahoo News UK)

Dec 24 Popular nature gets much needed improvements (Exeter City Council news)

Dec 24 Pebblebed Heaths car park improvements completed (East Devon District Council)

Dec 24 Devon dog owners encouraged to clean up with competition | Exmouth Journal

Dec 24 Win a monthly prize for cleaning up after your dog with new competition - Yahoo News UK

Dec 24 Car park improvements on Devon Air Radio

April 25 Devon Loves Dogs winners of Bag it and Bin it announced - Sidmouth Herald - Sidmouth Herald

April 25 Dogs and owners work to help protect Devon countryside – BBC

April 25 Waggy Walks get national praise - Teignmouth Post

April 25 Devon dogs project receives national recognition for best advice - East Devon District Council News

April 25 Waggy Walks win big: Devon dogs lead the way in conservation - Yahoo News UK

May 25 Nature conservation during bird breeding season - East Devon District Council news

June 25 New parks ease pressure on wildlife havens - Devon Live

June 25 New dog walking parks open near Exeter - Exeter Today

June 25 Julie Owen interview on Devon Air Radio

July 25 Council strategy aims to protect Dawlish Warren wildlife - Teignmouth Post

July 25 EDDC website: Three Councils unite to back South East Devon's crucial wildlife sites

July 25 Devon council strategy to protect wildlife launched - Sidmouth Herald

July 25 New conservation strategy launched to protect key wildlife sites - Yahoo

July 25 New plan launched to protect Devon's wildlife sites - Exmouth Journal

July 25 Devon council's new strategy to protect wildlife launched - Midweek Herald

Newsletter coverage

Feb 25 EDDC staff newsletter: Brent Geese at Exmouth Duckpond

Feb 25 EDDC Residents Newsletter: Brent Geese at Exmouth Duckpond

June 25 EDDC Staff newsletter: Sama & Claire showed Tim the ropes! – East Devon District Council staff newsletter

July 25 EDDC Staff newsletter: Bringing our work to life for Councillors

July 25 ECC and TDC newsletters: Plan to protect the Exe Estuary and other crucial local nature reserves

Sept 25 EDDC newsletters launch of 'Let Birds be' competition

4.2 TV

In April 2025, Devon Loves Dogs featured on BBC TV Spotlight news and BBC Radio Devon. In addition, Julie was interviewed on Devon Air Radio in June 2025. Coming up, Claire Spence will be interviewed by Devon Air Radio on 21 September to discuss Wardens' work, wildlife refuges and the Let Birds Be competition.

4.3 Editorial

4.3.1 Articles have been provided for partner e-newsletters during this period. In addition, Devon Loves Dogs was recommended by gov.uk website - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-visitors-with-dogs-in-your-woodland>

5. Events/presentations

5.1 For Devon Loves Dogs and South East Devon Wildlife, events and presentations are an important way of engaging with people visiting or likely to visit the protected sites. As Wardens outline their activities separately in the "Habitat mitigation team update" report, it is not duplicated here.

6. Lessons learned and future plans

- 6.1 Devon Loves Dogs' 'Bag it and bin it' campaign resulted in increased newsletter subscribers (247), and an uplift in social media followers.
- 6.2 The lessons learned from this campaign have been incorporated into the SEDW campaign to 'Let Birds Be' for the Autumn focus on Wildlife Refuges.
- 6.3 We are planning website improvements, such as: for Devon Loves Dogs, improving the Out and About page by streamlining the format of walks and adding more; a new page for private dog walking facilities – really useful for dogs that need space or are training; improving business listings and a new page for commercial dog walkers, showing those licenced to walk on the Pebblebeds and advice on how to select a dog walker. For SEDW, a review of the website's homepage will increase engagement and help visitors navigate the site.
- 6.4 We aim to provide a rich experience for viewers and linking social media posts and newsletter articles to relevant web content.

6.5 We are committed to forward planning communications campaigns. We are focussing on Wildlife Refuge Season; BBQ and fire risk; Bird Breeding season encouraging Paws on Paths and Female Ranger Week campaigns. We meet with key partners to plan campaigns and agree key messages. We developed a new campaign (Bag It and Bin It competition) around dog fouling on the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths. We use a social media scheduling tool which means we can monitor and evaluate each campaign to continue to build on success.

6.6 The majority of visitors are new, so we need to do more to give visitors reasons to make repeat visits. We have explored ways to provide fresh content to encourage repeat visitors and create a community of interest. The 'Let Birds Be' competition is designed to address this. There is still an opportunity to focus on updating the "Events" page with details of partners outreach work, if staff time permits.

6.7 Whilst the communications and engagement achievements have improved on last year, it is important to note that the level of communications output is at capacity. Devon Loves Dogs comms will benefit with the recent recruitment of Trish Waller, Project Assistant. A further increase in dedicated staff resource would increase communications planning, delivery and monitoring further still.

Anne Mountjoy

Senior Marketing and Communications Officer

South East Devon Habitat Regulations Executive Committee

October 2025

Natural England comment:

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