

## *Discovering how the public interact with, respond to, and talk about British woodlands*

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While we know that people receive many benefits from being 'in nature', such as improved mental wellbeing, we have very little understanding of what parts of nature provide those benefits. Here we try to tease this apart, focusing on 'biodiversity', the living components of nature. We wanted to find out if there were particular ways the public think and speak about biodiversity. This might be in response to how a species behaves or what it symbolises, the colours or shapes people see around them in a habitat, or because of associated childhood memories. So, we aiming to find out both what people were concentrating on and why.

We used a specific technique called 'Q methodology' that gets people to rank and discuss items given to them. The items we used were all images of species found in British woodlands, including: vertebrates (e.g. birds, mammals, reptiles), invertebrates (e.g. worms, spiders, insects), trees, and plants and fungi found underneath the tree canopy.

Not only did people talk about what they saw in the images (e.g. colours, shapes), they also told us about things they knew about the images (e.g. the roles species play in the environment, behaviours, smells). Sometimes the discussions were positive, other times they were negative. Even though woodlands were used as a study system, people chatted to us about their perspectives and everyday experiences from other habitats, such as their gardens at home. Cultural influences and memories linked to particular people and places were also featured prominently. We found that very few of the perspectives communicated by the public align with how researchers measure and describe biodiversity. By carrying out studies such as this one, we can develop a fuller understanding of the ways in which people interact with, respond to and talk about biodiversity. This will help researchers, practitioners and policy-makers better engage people with nature.



*Fallow deer in beech woodland Credit: Zoe G Davies*

Plain language summary from article:  
Austen, G. E., Dallimer, M., Irvine, K. N., Maund, P. R., Fish, R. D., & Davies, Z. G. (2021). Exploring shared public perspectives on biodiversity attributes. *People and Nature*, 00, 000–000.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10237>