

Dipping into nature

Understanding longer term changes in children's attitudes to nature and wildlife resulting from a school visit

Lucy Hellier – WWT

Hugh Hope-Stone – Hope-Stone Research

Visitor Studies Group Conference March 2017



Why this research?



- WWT is a conservation & education charity that works globally to save wetlands
- In the UK WWT welcomes one million people a year to its 10 wetland centres
- This includes around 55,000 formal learning visitors
- Research funded by HSBC as part of WWT's Inspiring Generations' project, which is enabling 70,000 pupils to have free school visits over 5 years (2013-17)

Why this research?

Through our school visits
WWT wants to inspire young
people to care about wetlands

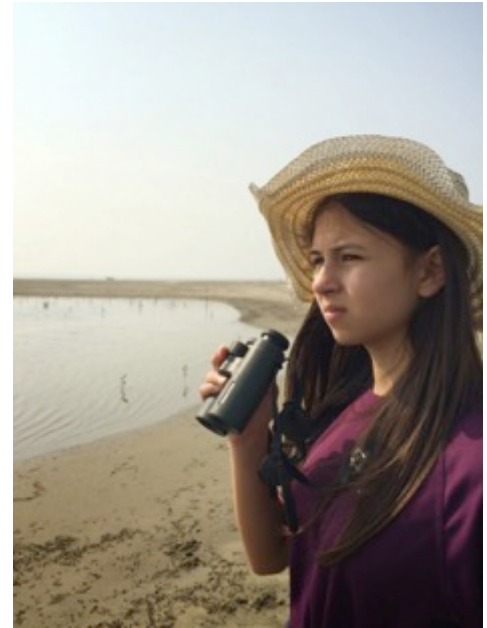
We know children enjoy their
visit, but we have little idea
what children think or do
relating to nature after they
leave



Why this research?

There is very little research into the longer term impact of visits to natural places on children's attitudes and values, especially when the visit is a one-off, rather than a regular experience

Our research could help many nature conservation organisations, as well as us



What we wanted to find out

- What is the impact of a school visit to a WWT centre?
- What are the best approaches to ensure longer-term benefits?
- Measure the broader impact of the visit
 - Behaviour
 - Attitudes
 - Awareness
 - Sharing and influencing others around them
- Assess the specific value of visits to those on the free visit scheme
- The context in which the above impact takes place



Our approach



Research requirements

- Comparable, representative & measurable data
- Control sample – HFMS + LFMS
- Before and after visit feedback
- Short, medium and long term feedback
- Insight – qualitative feedback
- The voice of the children as well as teachers
- Practical and within budget and timescale

Research requirements

- 21 schools
- 3 (4) centres
- 9 LFSM schools, 12 HFSM
- Inner city, rural, suburban



Quantitative measurement

- All attending a pond dipping session



Quantitative measurement

Every child in every visit group to complete a questionnaire:

- Pre-visit
- Visit day
- 2 weeks post visit
- 6 months post visit
- 12 months post visit



Quantitative measurement

- n=2,625 pupils
- Surveys to measure:
 - Awareness
 - Knowledge
 - Attitudes
 - Behaviour
 - Demographics
- Core questions repeated

VISIT DAY QUESTIONNAIRE (London)

Hello, we would like to know what you have enjoyed and learnt today at your visit the Wetlands centre.

If you don't understand any of the questions please ask your teacher or adult helper. This is not a test, there are no right or wrong answers, just answer what you think or feel.

Q1. Tick the words below that describe how you feel about your visit today.

- Fun
- Boring
- Interesting
- Amazing
- Educational
- Tiring
- Noisy
- Exciting
- Peaceful
- Busy

Q2. Please tell us if you agree or disagree with the sentences below.

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
This is the first time I've visited a place like this	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I will tell my family about the visit when I get home	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q3. Tell us what you think about today's visit. Read each sentence and tick the box that fits most with how you feel. **JUST TICK ONE BOX FOR EACH SENTENCE**

	Agree very much	Agree a bit	Not sure	Don't agree	Don't agree at all
I learnt new things about wildlife and wetlands	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would like to come back here again	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I now want to find out more about wildlife and wetlands	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Qualitative insight

- At 9 schools
- Pupil focus groups at four stages
- Drawing exercise in pre-visit – their favourite wildlife in its habitat
- Visit day group observation
- Visit day video interviews with pupils
- Interviews with lead teachers and new teachers at each stage



Challenges

- Finding the right schools visiting the right centres
- Building relationships to ensure compliance
- Drop outs
- Changing teachers
- Consent
- Pupil engagement

Interim findings



We have been able to measure impact and change

- It was fun, interesting and they learnt something new
- Recall of facts and skills learnt was fairly good after 12 months
- Pupils in schools in more deprived areas show a greater short term increase in positive attitudes to and interest in nature and wildlife
- But tailed off after 6 months



And understand impact through observation and verbal feedback from children and teachers

"I wasn't expecting to go so close to the geese... it was quite scary"

"I never had a chance to feed any birds so today was my first chance"

"I've faced my fears head on"

"The scariest part was when the Great Crane come flying at me and we ran"

Impact on children's attitudes?

- [video]

Change in attitudes & behaviour

- Change is not easily measureable because only a small minority experience it
- In each group one or two individuals appear genuinely to have had a change of attitude towards wildlife and nature as result of the visit
- What children recall isn't always what has happened or at least hasn't since the visit



Challenges in interpreting the data

- Children recall behaviour randomly rather than in sequence
- They are inclined to tell you what you wish to hear
- They are growing up and lifestyle and interests change
- Many external factors:
 - Residential location
 - School activity
 - Family relationships and activities
 - Family attitudes
- Pond dipping doesn't contain explicit messages relating to the impacts we are measuring

We have contradictory data

- Despite an increasingly reliable data set the quantifiable questions still can throw up contradictory results
- Which justifies using a qualitative approach too

Statement	Pre-visit n=529	Short-term n=457	Medium-term n=203	Long-term n=150
Scary	6%	6%	5%	6%
Interesting	72%	75%	76%	72%
It needs protecting↑	37%	36%	39%	42%
Boring ↑	5%	4%	10%	16%
Dirty	21%	21%	24%	23%
Amazing	66%	70%	69%	63%
Waste of space	4%	3%	7%	7%
Fun	59%	65%	61%	51%
Home for wildlife↑	77%	78%	79%	81%
Smelly ↑	14%	18%	23%	26%
Important for humans	29%	27%	29%	35%
Pretty	61%	65%	62%	67%
I want one near my house↓	56%	51%	54%	47%
I want to go there↓	66%	52%	50%	46%

Are we getting the findings we sought?



Changing the approach – why?

By and large yes but we've needed to re-think our approach

- To maintain pupil engagement
- To verify pupils feedback
- To test interim findings
- To explore new avenues of enquiry arising from the data collected
- To answer some of the contradictory survey data in a qualitative way

Changing the approach – how?

- Feeding back the interim findings to participants for comment
 - Why do some children feel differently about wildlife and nature?
 - Why do some children want to do more to help wildlife?
- Additional questions on attitudes and barriers to outdoor play
- Additional question on how the school or WWT could encourage children to help wildlife
- Quantitative questions on school related activity

Conclusions



Conclusions

- Survey data needs qualitative insight
- The process needs to be dynamic
- Small or nuanced changes are important but easily missed in survey data
- People (and particularly children) can be fickle and inconsistent
- Taking into account the broader social, geographical, ethnic, family and school environment helps with understanding
- Be realistic about how much impact a single visit can have

Thank you

