

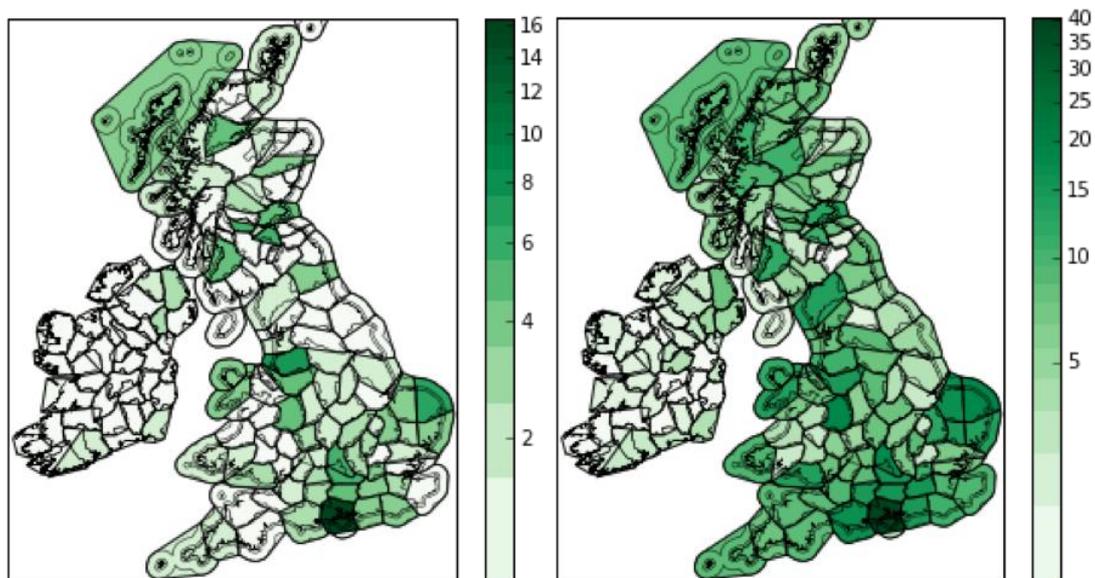
Recorder motivation internship preliminary results

In November Ben opened our survey on recorders and their motivations, and the response rate since then has been overwhelming! Thanks to the support of national schemes, LERCs and organisations across the board in promoting the survey - and especially to recorders themselves for their time and insight - we've received around **200 responses and 20 hours of interviews**, with many more offering to be telephoned and submissions continuing to arrive into January. The resulting dataset holds value beyond Ben's three-month internship, but (while we're looking to enable continued study of the data), some headline findings can already be reported.

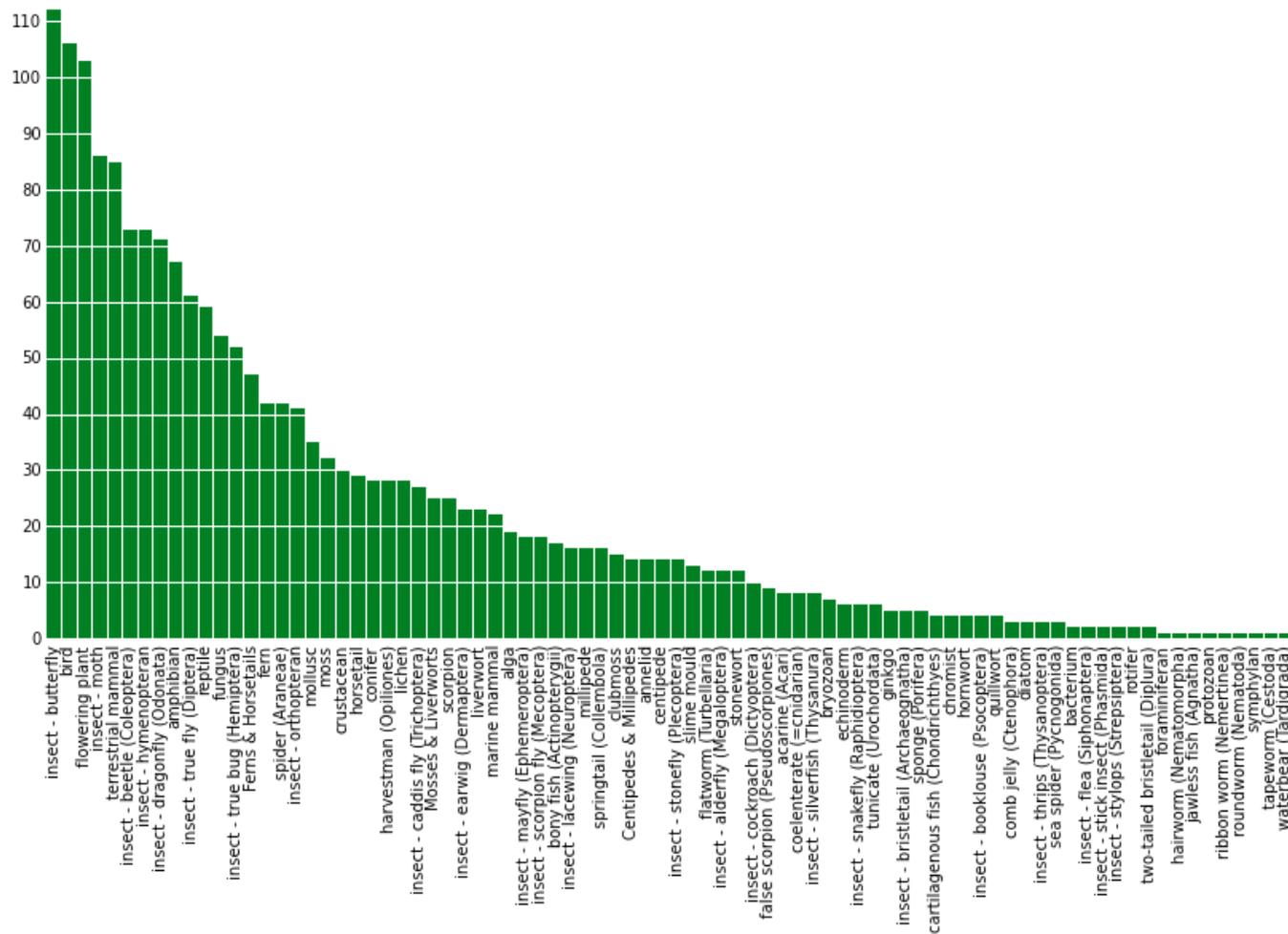
Survey respondents came from **over 70 vice-counties**, and recorded in **over 130 across the British Isles**.

They ranged from **18 to nearly 80 years old**, having **started recording anywhere from 0 to 70 years ago**, and **recorded 83 different species groups** (grouped as per iRecord).

Where do you live? Where have you collected records in the last 12 months?



Which species groups did you note down or submit records on in the last 12 months?

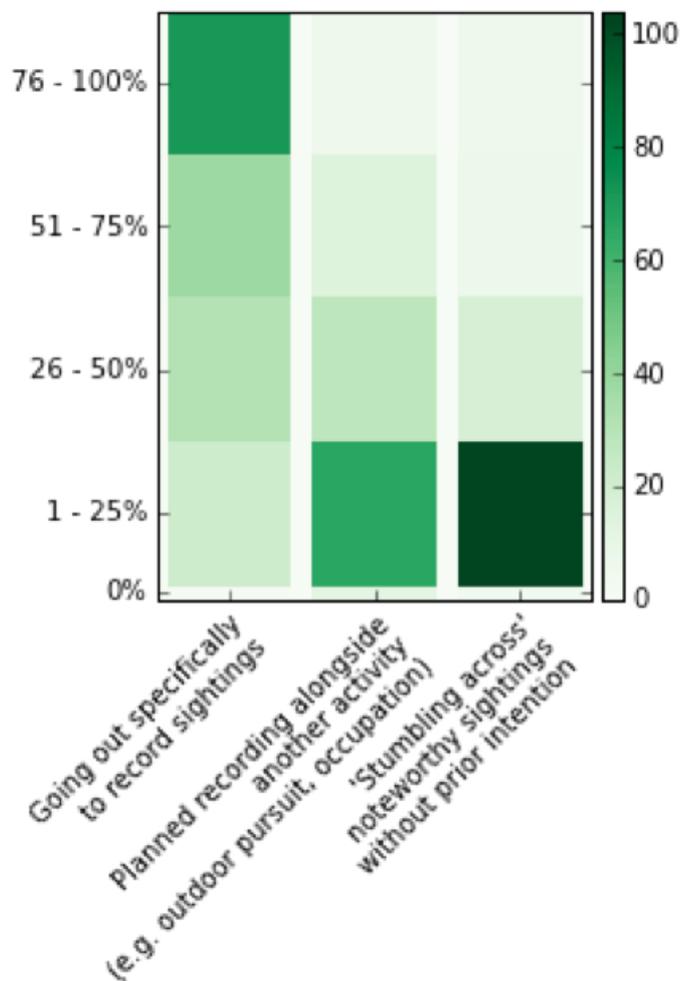


The range of backgrounds across survey and interviews was broad. Several held senior positions in organisations or schemes but others were recent starters. Ben spoke to people involved in ecological consultancy; education or training (from schoolchildren to recorders out in the field); and those who'd gotten involved from university, as part of a career change, or after retirement. Some traced their development through a series of inspirational relationships within the recording community, while others built their own knowledge and notes independently or for many years unaware of recording's wider scope. The previously reported diversity of perspectives and motives is alive and well in our data.

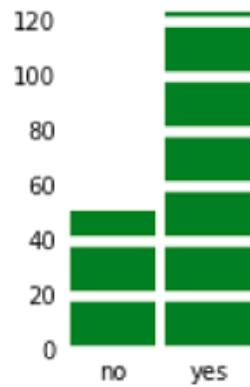
So what can we say about respondents' recording behaviour in recreational/free time, environmental, and social contexts, and how does it link with their self-described experiences and preferences?

Recorders are committed. Records tended to derive from regularly-planned trips to collect them (as opposed to incidental sightings), and the vast majority of sightings were recorded. Respondents rated biological recording as one of the most important things they did in their free time.

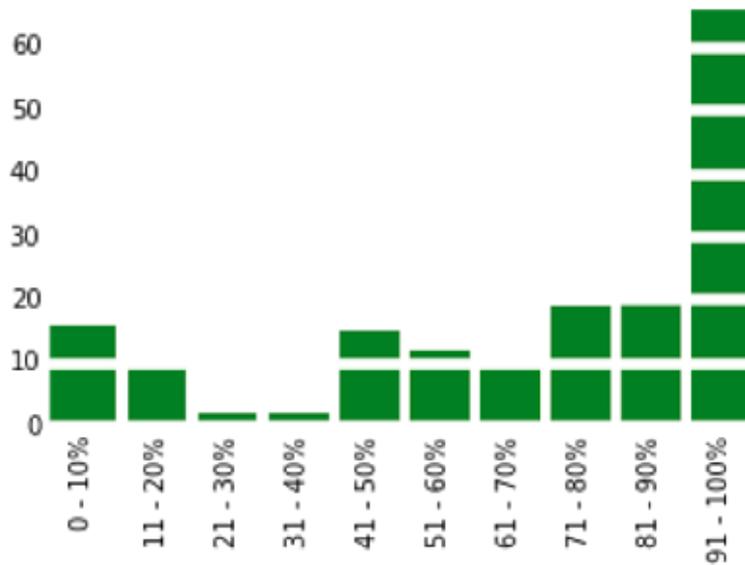
Under what circumstances did you collect your records in the last 12 months?



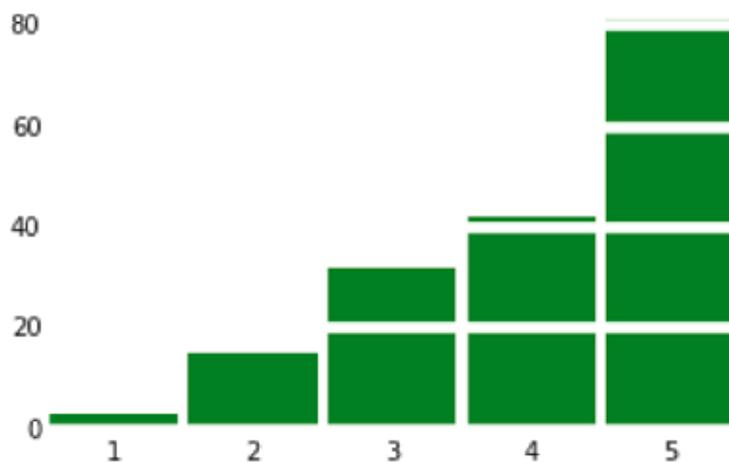
Did you record at regular or semi-regular times?



What proportion of your sightings did you record?

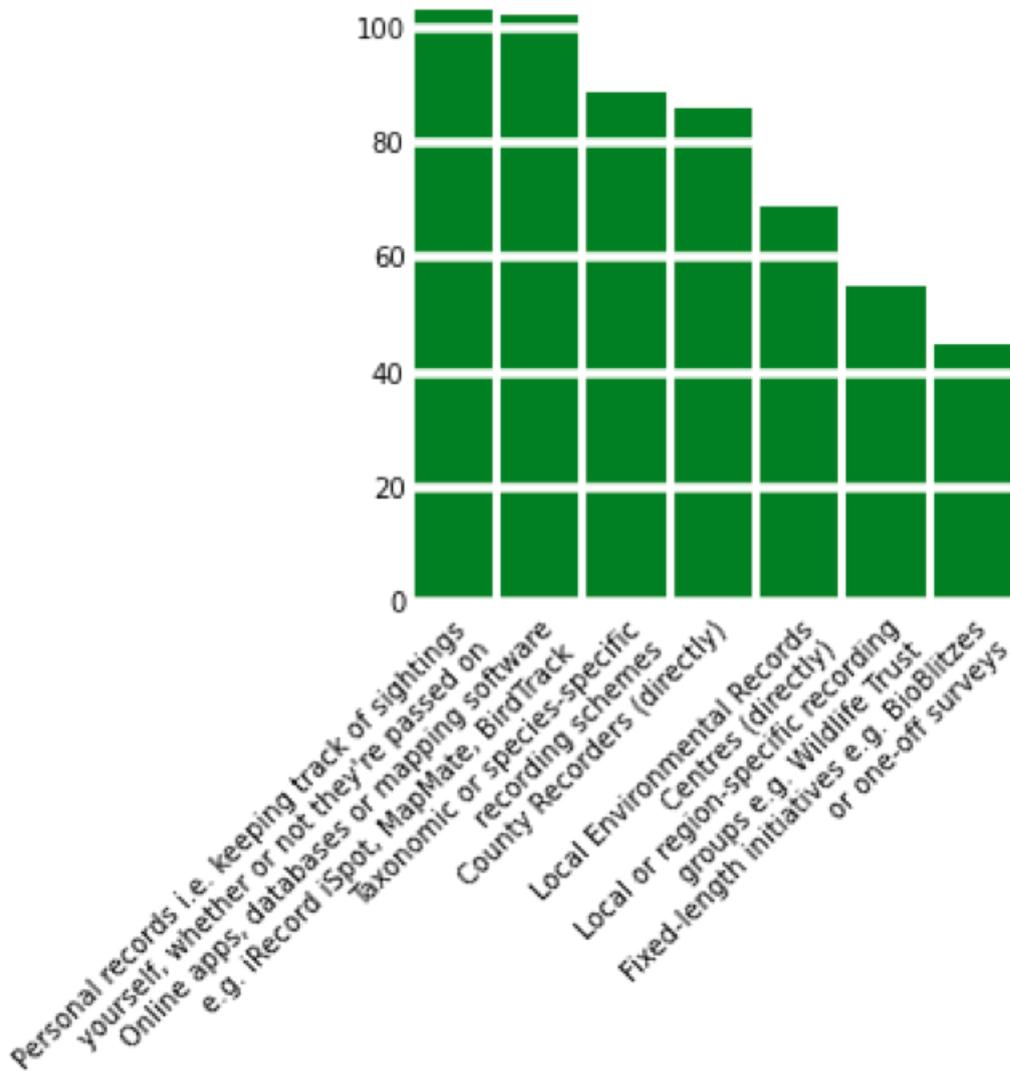


"Of the things I do in my free time, biological recording is one of the most important to me."

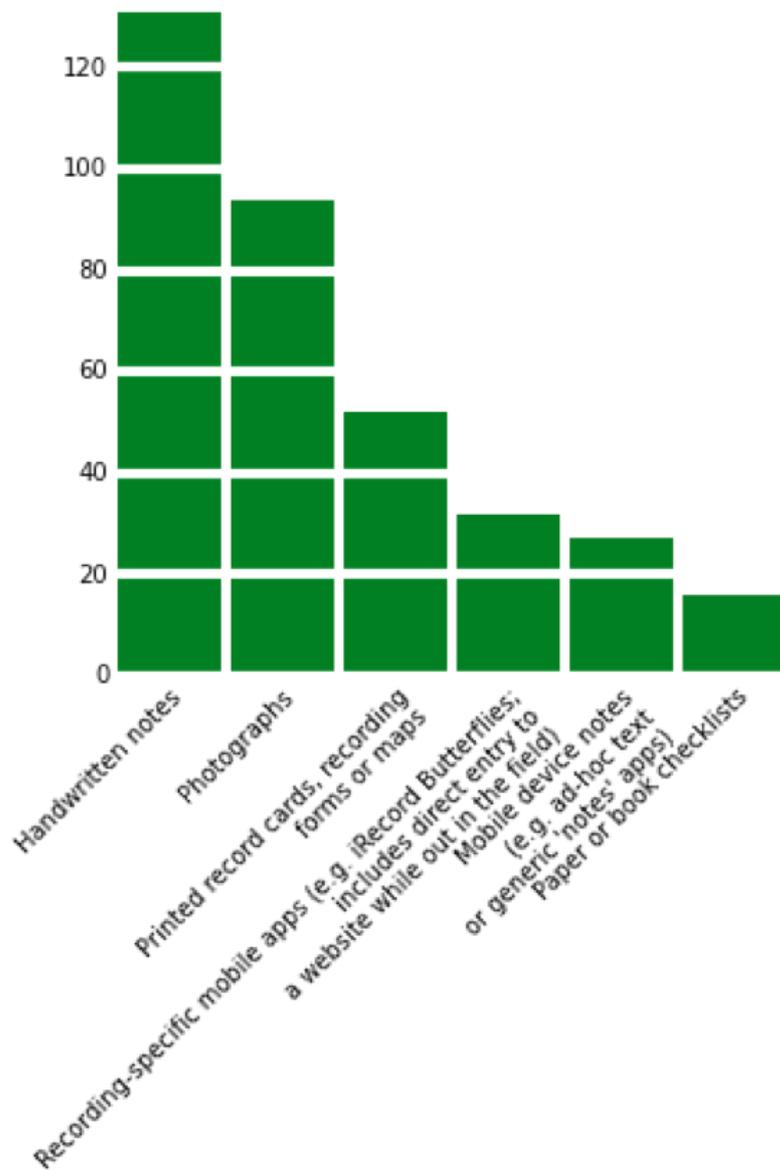


This marries with the self-directed nature of interviewees' recording. Several had begun keeping their own notes at a young age, and only later became aware of the national recording community. Today's technologies notwithstanding, personal records remained the most common endpoint of records, and handwritten notes the most popular medium.

What did you do with the records collected in the last 12 months?



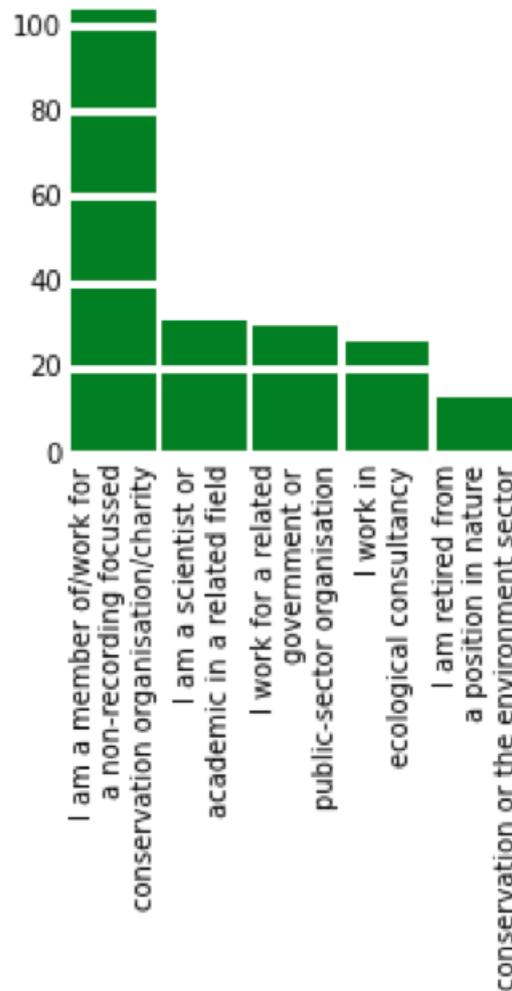
What form does your initial recording of a sighting take?



Interviewees often spoke of a qualitative shift in their interest toward greater understanding. For example, whereas initial motives might be straightforward counting or 'box-ticking', this often gave way to a desire to recognise underlying relationships or causes. Spontaneous note-taking might arise from a desire to spot trends in the environment. Searching for and watching a species might provoke an interest in characteristic behaviours, or a broadening of expertise into other species with which the former interacts in a common ecosystem. A greater understanding of this system, being able to spot variation and interactions not previously visible, was its own reward. Thus one might go from counting the plants in the garden, to the bees that visit them, to watching the routes of the bees. A seemingly homogenous thicket of brambles becomes more interesting, and tells you about the local environment past and present, once you can identify the constituent species. Others satisfied an interest in nature via careers in the environmental sector, but did not record and were unaware of its importance prior to this being impressed upon them in some chance meeting. The majority of survey

respondents were also members or employees of non-recording focussed conservation organisations.

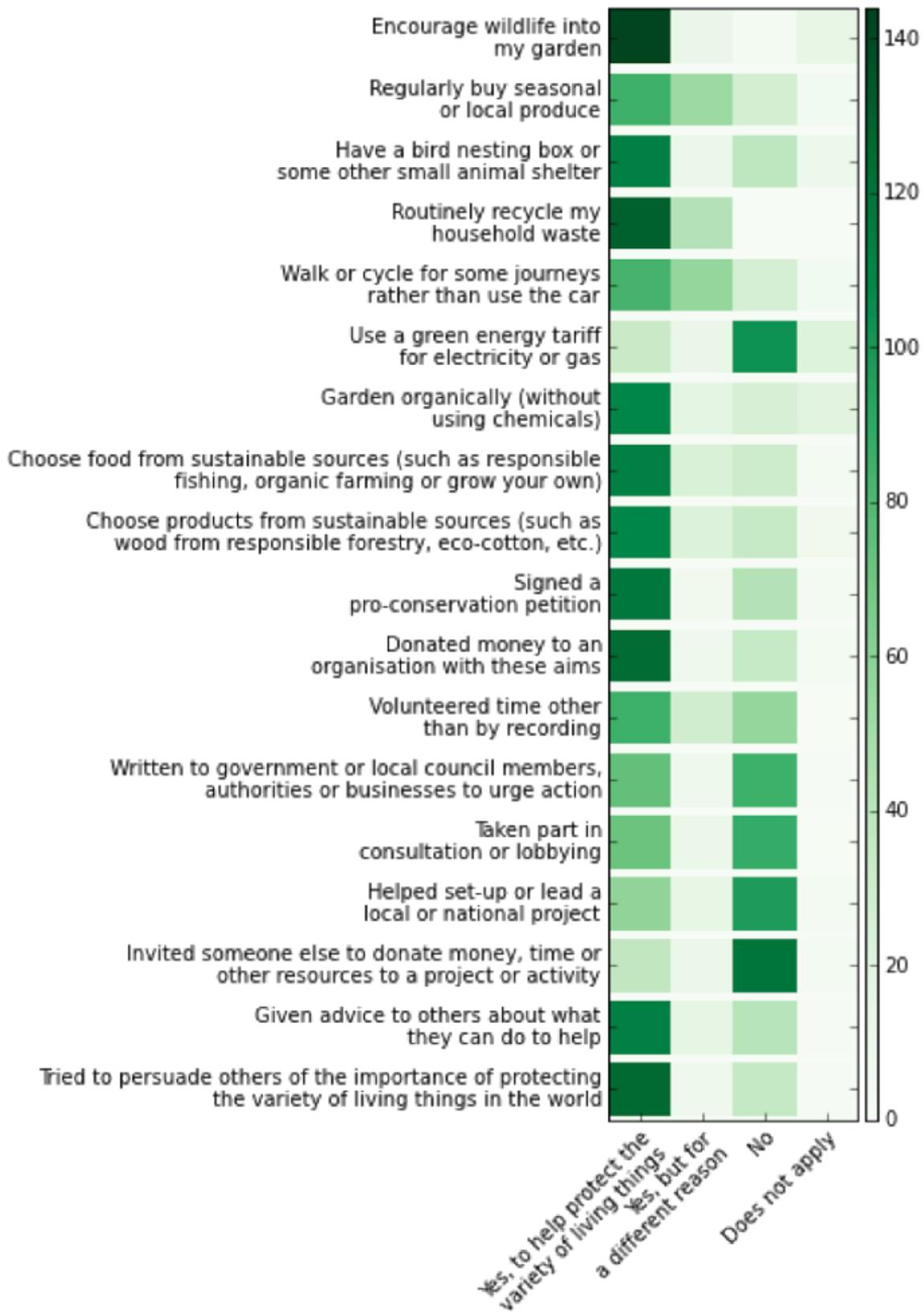
Do you have formal ties to the nature conservation or environment sector outside recording?



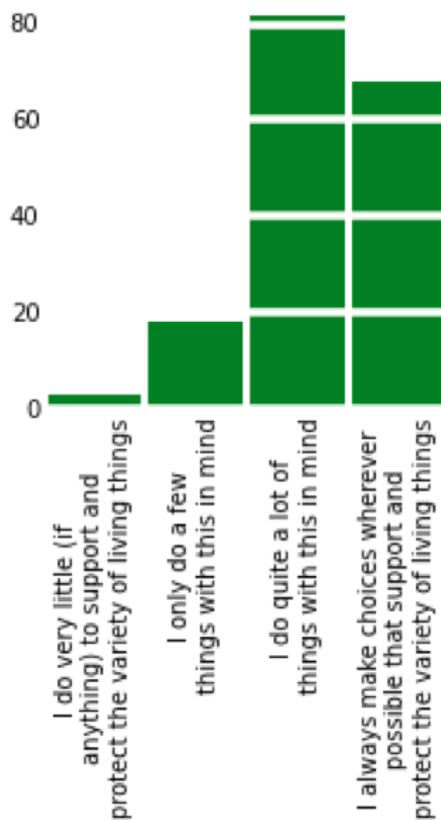
So respondents' appreciation of nature and desire to improve their own knowledge preexist independently of submission of records. This explains another recurring theme in the interviews: while you cannot make people do anything they're not enthusiastic about, many come with an intrinsic drive that directs their recording. This has consequences for views on socialising and communicating with organisations and other recorders, as well as access to identification aids and training (discussed below).

The seating of recording within wider environmental interest is reflected in our survey responses. Biodiversity was regarded as decreasing somewhat, and respondents were very concerned about the consequences of this. They regarded conservation of biodiversity as a personal and collective duty, felt fairly able and empowered to help, and undertook a range of activities in pursuit of this.

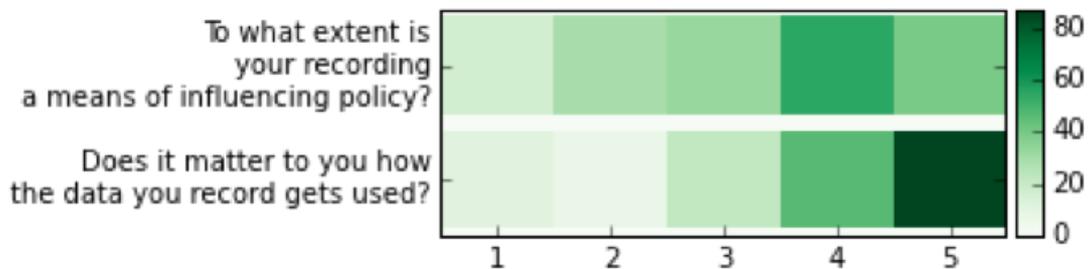
Which of the following have you done in the last 12 months?



With respect to things you do in your daily life to support and protect the variety of living things:



In line with the personal motives already described, recording was moderately regarded as a means of influencing policy. On the other hand, respondents cared deeply about how the data they collected was used.



From the interviews it becomes clear this is more a concern that the data collected is used, i.e. it is as open and available for use as possible. Beyond occasional sensitive or persecuted sightings, interviewees viewed reservations around full openness as minor compared with failure to exploit the potential of the data for scientific or decision-making purposes. Thus, data

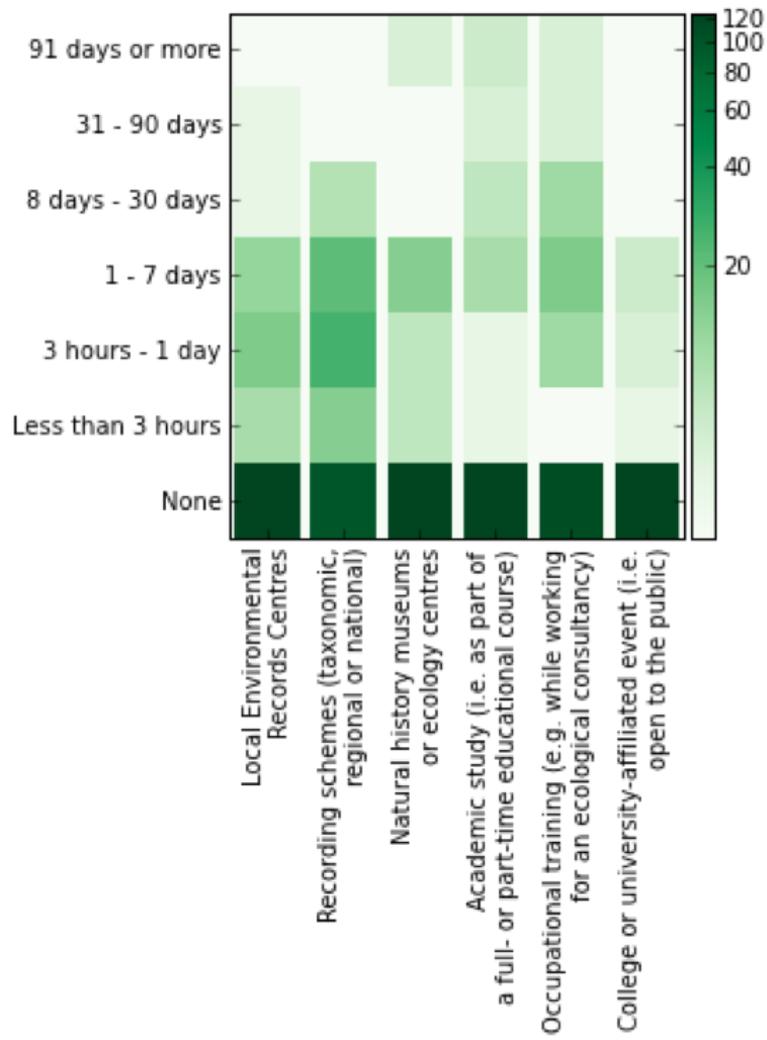
use matters in the sense that impediments to it are a source of frustration for those who collect and curate.

Impediments discussed ranged beyond the oft-repeated debates over data ownership and revenue streams, highlighting also systemic, national-level issues which NBN is centrally placed to address. On one hand, some queried data flow and reliability, with concerns that known or suspected poor-quality datasets might be regarded as 'the standard' because of their availability on NBN, and worries that one's own verified-correct data be mixed with, or seen to endorse the former were it to be similarly provided. Alternatively, occasions where specific, known-incorrect records made their way onto NBN and subsequently proved difficult to access or correct were described. These speak to broader issues around verification and quality control as volumes of records increase, and the routes through which they arrive become more anonymous. While some were uncomfortable with datasets that hadn't been checked and accepted on a per-record basis, others saw promise in technical developments such as automated pre-screening or tagging/filtering of records by confidence - assuming the systems responsible were reliable and effective.

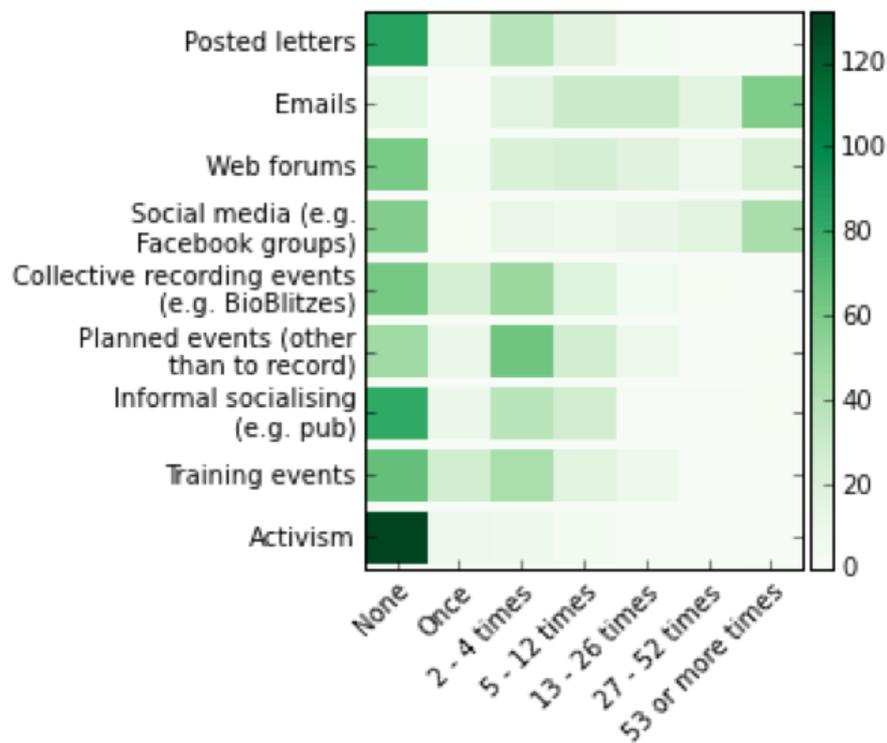
On the other hand, the fragmented nature of recording as potentially off-putting to newcomers was mentioned, versus the potential role of NBN as a unified, public face. Those expecting a centralised scientific research programme and ignorant of biological recording's long, organic history might find internal debates around ownership and sharing as distractions from what is surely the collective aim - to build an accurate and comprehensive picture of the UK's biodiversity. This challenge is coordination rather than technology, but the sentiment tended to be similar: "Just sort it!"

Survey respondents mostly reported having received no training from any of the sources listed, but we know from interviews this is not for a lack of desire. Several reported training from other sources, with a recurring theme being informal learning via contact with other recorders. Whereas most reported satisfaction with their opportunities to communicate with other recorders, more training scored highest amongst those dissatisfied.

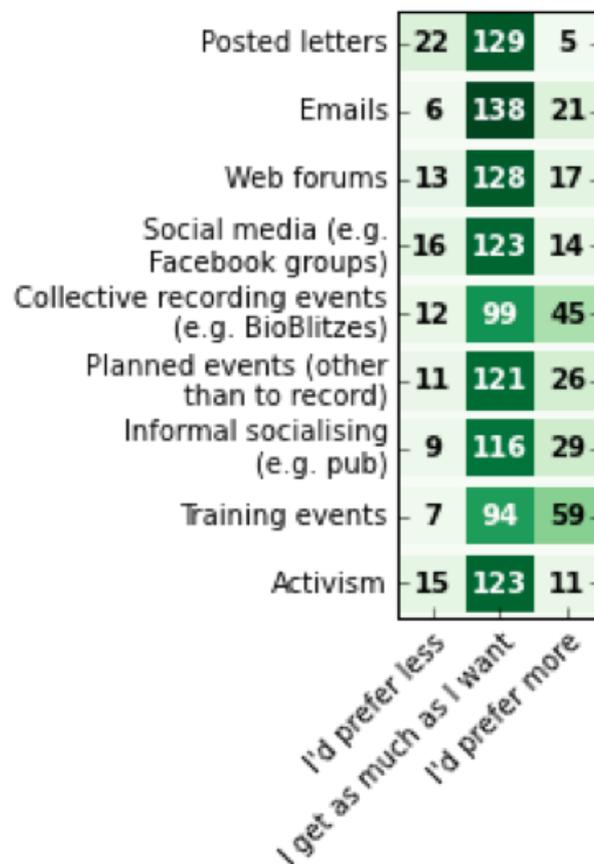
How much recording or identification-relevant training have you received in the last 12 months?



In the last 12 months, what (and how much) communication did you have with other recorders?

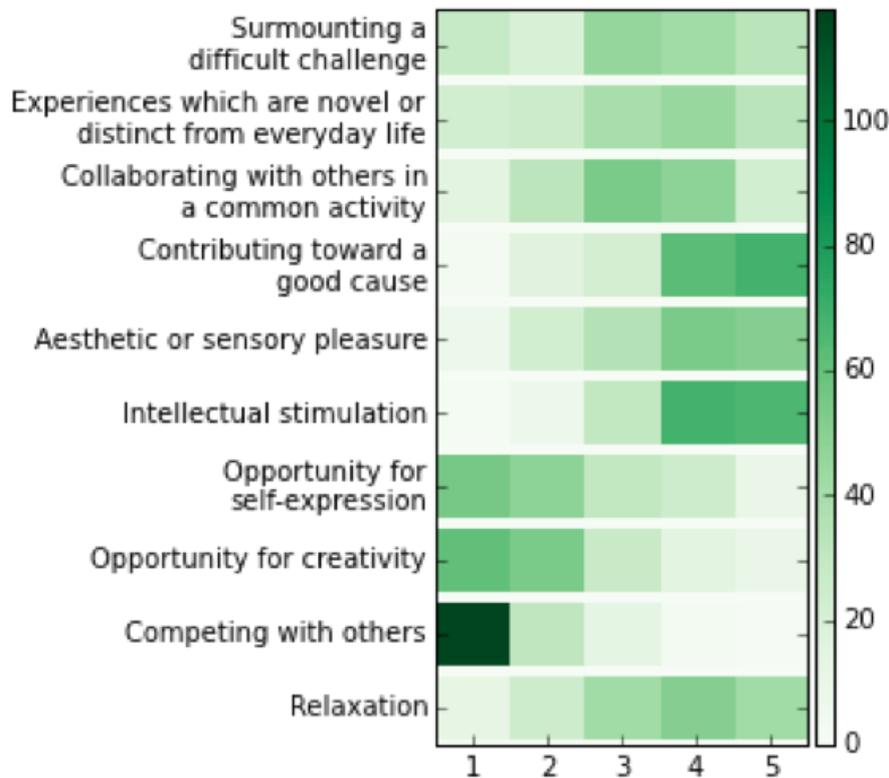


How does this compare to the opportunities you'd prefer?

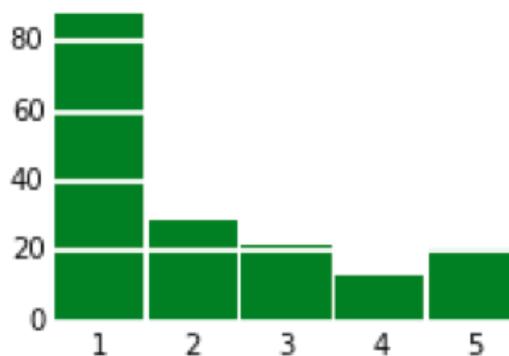


This links directly to social motives, and the complexity of their relationship with recording. On the one hand, survey respondents were ambivalent about social factors driving their recording. Their environmentally friendly behaviour (above) wasn't particularly motivated by expectations of people who's opinions mattered to them, and collaboration with others was middling as a reported benefit of recording. Respondents' entry into recording was not typically influenced by friends and family, and opinion was divided as to whether organisations should set up more opportunities to interact.

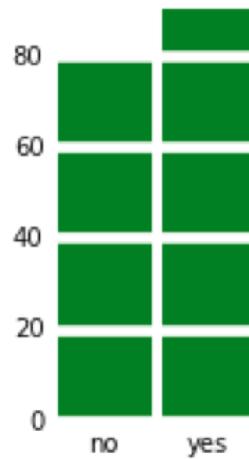
What do you enjoy about biological recording?



To what extent was your entry into biological recording influenced by friends and family?

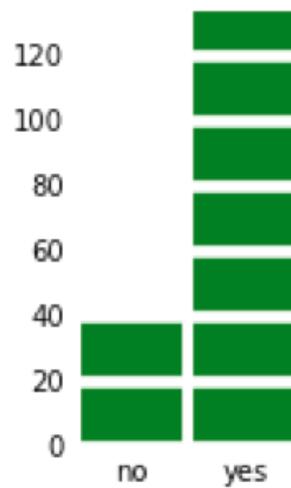


Would you like organisations to set up more opportunities for recorders to interact?

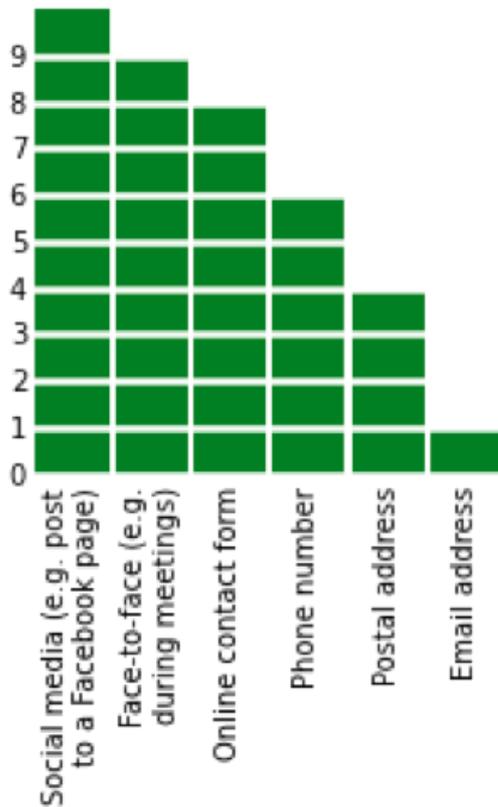


On the other hand, most had made new friends via recording, and of those channels for communication with organisations which people did *not* have but *wanted*, social media and face-to-face communication scored highest.

Have you made new friends through recording?



*Respondents who do not have a route
Rof communication but would like it:*



Again interviewees shed light on this, with several emphasising the need for get-togethers to have a purpose. They were less interested in socialising for its own sake; rather, those who expressed a desire saw it as a means to an end, for greater contact with experts who could aid identification or fellow recorders with whom one could trade knowledge. This sentiment was echoed by senior interviewees experienced in organising such events: bringing recorders together is important but because it promotes development of skills, and dependent on the event being directed toward specific goals beyond socialising. Similarly to how recorders care about the quality and end-uses of their data despite the underlying fascination for nature existing independently, so they often appreciate opportunities to meet up but for the purposes of furthering their own knowledge and identification abilities.

Many of these headline findings concord with previous research from the UK and abroad, and demonstrate the utility of a combined survey-interview approach. Thanks to the depth and candidness provided by respondents from across recording however, the data holds potential insight beyond that which has been overviewed here.