

Anke Fischer, Keith Marshall and Sebastian Selge

The Macaulay Land Use Research Institute, Craigiebuckler, Aberdeen, AB15 8QH • a.fischer@macaulay.ac.uk

IDEAS OF NATURE – AND HOW THEY HELP US TO UNDERSTAND PUBLIC ATTITUDES TO BIODIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

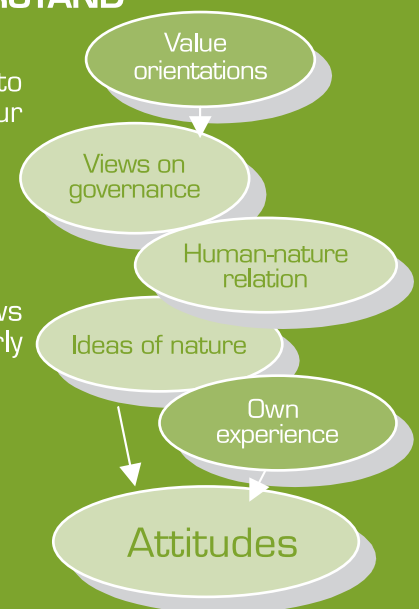
We need to better understand what nature means to people if we are to improve the management of our natural environment. To this end, our research focuses on local biodiversity issues, such as:

- the management of species locally seen as problematic
- changes in species populations
- habitat management, e.g., grouse moors, and woodland restoration.

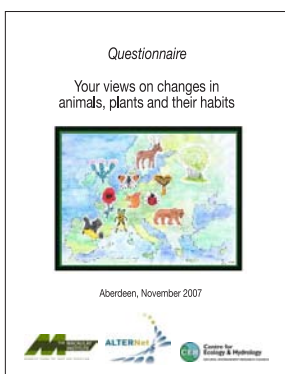
Through a series of studies, involving questionnaires, in-depth interviews and group discussions, we identified the following factors as particularly important in public discourses on biodiversity management:

- values implicit to people's ideas of nature, e.g., balance, naturalness
- views on the relationship between humans and nature
- views on the trustworthiness of humans in general
- views on the effectiveness of governance approaches.

These were by no means arbitrary, but embedded in people's own observations, their values and more general worldviews.



WHAT DO PEOPLE THINK ABOUT NON-NATIVE SPECIES?



Survey conducted in Aberdeen City & Shire plus 7 other European sites

In particular, we explored the views of the Scottish public on non-native and invasive species.

A range of arguments and values shaped the debates:

- 'naturalness' of a system as opposed to human interference
- dominance of single species and suppression of others
- harmfulness of species
- nativeness.

Of these, nativeness mattered least to people: non-native species were primarily judged by their impacts on other species and habitats. Human responsibility for introducing species and/or disturbing systems was also an important factor. These findings suggest that the concept of nativeness might be obsolete in the conservation discourse.

IMPLICATIONS FOR BIODIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

- Attitudes towards biodiversity management are often well-embedded in people's experiences and worldviews and shaped by social interactions. Simple, broadbrush awareness campaigns might thus not achieve their objectives. Instead, more differentiated discourses are needed.
- Values implicit to conservation and biodiversity policies should be made explicit, and their objectives need a more open debate.
- We need more than simple opinions polls to understand public – including our own – views on biodiversity management.