



Coastal Creatures – the results of an evaluation survey

North Devon +
August 2018



1. Background

Aims & objectives of the project

Coastal Creatures was a two-year project, which ran from July 2016 to July 2018, delivered by North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The project's aims were:

- To work in a partnership to raise awareness of coastal habitats, species and pressures on coastal and marine environments.
- To continually raise awareness of the special qualities of the AONB.
- To deliver citizen science activities and training related to coastal species and habitats, including wildlife identification, survey events, data recording and coastal BioBlitz.
- To support schools, colleges and community groups to carry out learning in the natural environment (LINE) along the AONB coast.
- To build new and existing relationships between the North Devon Coast AONB and its partner organisations, for example local schools, colleges, parish councils, community organisations and special interest groups.
- To recruit, support and supervise volunteers engaged with the project, including citizen science surveys and beach cleans.

Activities undertaken

The project focused on four beaches along the AONB coast - Northam Burrows (Westward Ho! and Greysands), Croyde, Lee Bay and Combe Martin - which offered a range of habitats and species that were suitable for different audiences, learning levels and styles; and offered citizen science opportunities to identify, record, enjoy and learn about the varied flora and fauna of diverse intertidal and coastal habitats.

An Education & Interpretation Officer, recruited to deliver the project, worked with schools, community groups, volunteers and partner organisations to coordinate a range of species identification, recording training and specialist surveying techniques. These sessions supported mass and targeted surveying of coastal species to increase knowledge about local natural history and the natural environment. Project activities included:

- Species identification training days run by experts on crabs, anemones and hard corals, sea slugs and sea snails, introduction to seaweeds, red seaweeds, jellyfish and hydroids, plankton as well as coastal photography and survey methodology.
- An intertidal survey group was formed to record coastal species and biotopes across the four beaches over 18 months (2 surveys p.m.).
- Schools, colleges and community groups participated in rocky shore workshops (both introduction to the rocky shore, rocky shore ecology and intertidal survey workshops), marine litter workshops (delivered to Key Stage 1 all the way up to college students), mud ecology workshops and introduction to the beach/strandline workshops.

- School staff took part in Outdoor Coastal Science one-day workshops to familiarise themselves with coastal species and habitats. and learn about activities to take their groups onto the shore safely.
- Citizen science surveys for all groups including 'Great (Shark) Eggcase Hunt', 'Big Seaweed Search', Beachwatch marine litter surveys, 'Great Nurdle Hunt' and Marine Biological Association 'ShoreThing' surveys.
- Fun on the coast activities for the public, including 'Tideline Treasure Search', 'Rockpool Scavenger Hunt', mud dipping, and marine themed sand sculpture competitions.

The project worked closely with the National Trust, Northam Burrows Country Park, Combe Martin Sea School and Coastwise North Devon. Over its two-year term:

- Coastal Creatures delivered 213 activities including: 37 events, 59 learning workshops (with school, college and community groups), 13 talks and conferences, 32 surveys, 18 training events and 54 beach cleans.
- Public involvement amounted to over 10,000 aggregate participations, including events (4,092 people), learning workshops (2,272 people days), talks and conferences (714 people), surveys (254 people days), training events (335 people days) and beach cleans (2,672 people days).
- A total of 31 school and college groups engaged with the project, many of these attending multiple workshops and 'Learning in the Natural Environment' (LINE) activities.
- During 54 beach cleans, 707 bags of litter were cleared from 18 beaches. The project ran four 'Extreme Beach Cleans' where volunteers collected marine litter by coasteering, kayaking and abseiling to inaccessible parts of the coast.

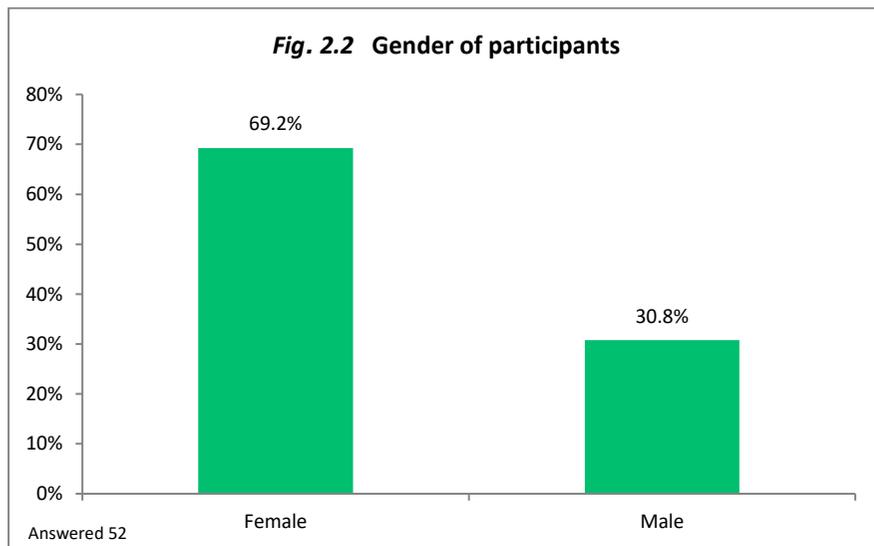
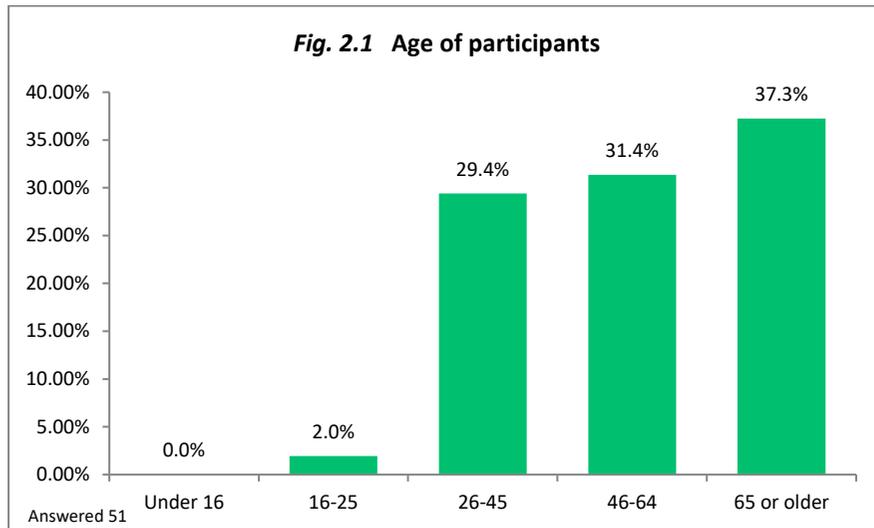
The evaluation survey

At the end of the project, participants were invited to complete a web-based survey about their experiences. The survey was publicised on the project's Facebook and Twitter pages (each with c. 5,000 reach) and invitations to complete the survey were sent to the following:

- Members of the general public who had signed-up during events.
- Volunteers in intertidal surveying group.
- School staff who participated in Coastal Outdoor Science training days and worked with their class during a workshop or coastal visit (invitations were not sent to students).
- Beach clean volunteers and work experience placements.
- Project partners, organisations, businesses and contractors who we worked with during the project.

The results are presented in this report.

2. Results of the survey



a. Characteristics of the sample

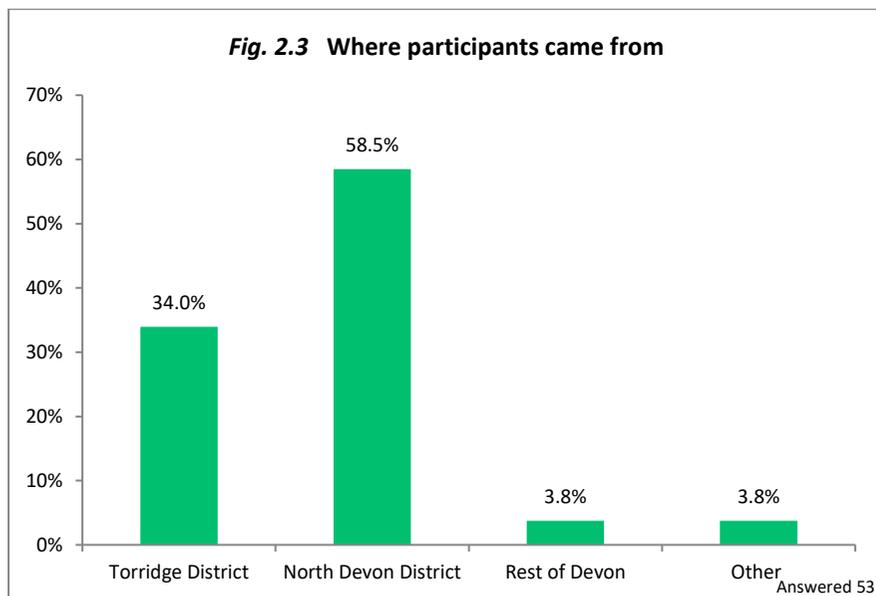
The survey was administered between May and July 2018. A total of 53 people completed the survey, which represents 30% of the population of participants who were invited to complete it. The typical survey completion time was 7½ minutes.

Age profile

- Over two-thirds of respondents (68.7%) were over the age of 45, and over a third (37.3%) were over 65 (see Fig. 2.1).
- Only 1 survey (2.0%) was completed by someone below the age of 26.
- Whilst significant numbers of young people were involved in the project (e.g. through schools activities), this survey reflects the views of older generations (aged over 25)
- To capture the views and experiences of younger people, separate approaches and mechanisms will be required.

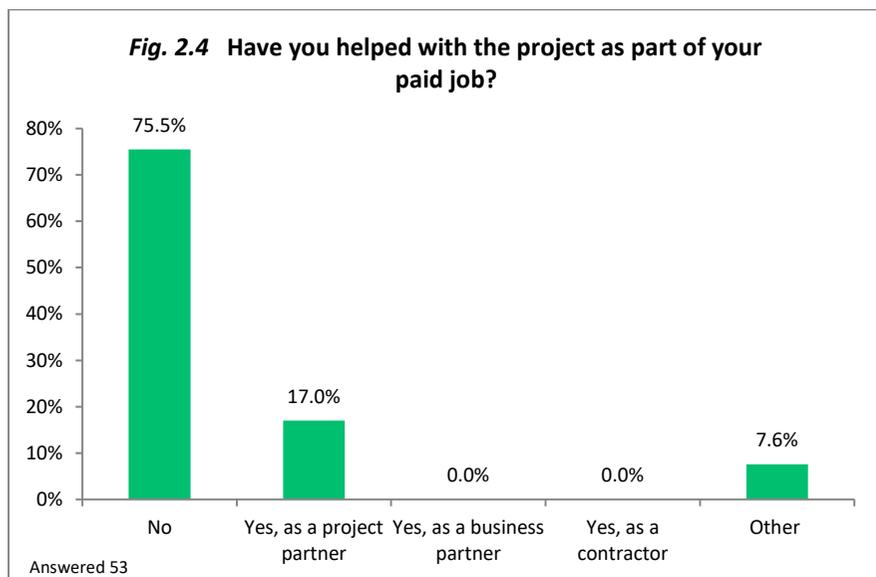
Gender profile

- More than two-thirds of respondents were female (69.2%) and less than 1 in 3 were male (30.8%) (see Fig. 2.2).



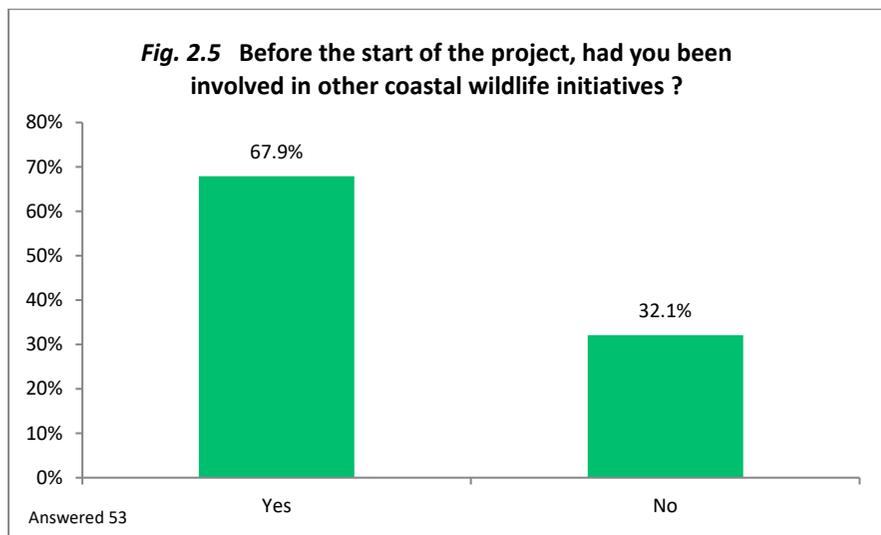
Distribution of project participants

- Most participants were residents of North Devon District (58.5%), with around a third (34.0%) from Torridge District (see Fig. 2.3).
- This split reflects the greater population size within North Devon, but also that three of the four beaches that were a focus for the project (Croyde, Lee Bay and Combe Martin) are located in North Devon. Only Northam Burrows is located in Torridge.
- A minority travelled from other parts of Devon (3.8% i.e. 2 respondents) or from other parts of the country (3.8% i.e. 2 respondents travelling from Somerset and Surrey).



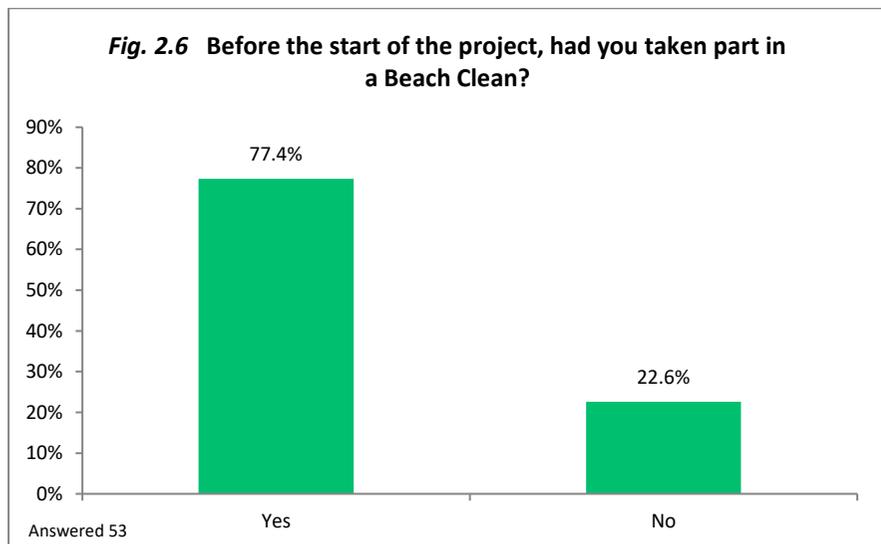
Status of project participants

- Most respondents (75.5%) had participated in the project as members of the public in their own right (see Fig. 2.4).
- A total of 9 respondents (17.0%) were project partners and a further 4 were teachers (7.6%).
- No business partners or contractors (people contracted to help with extreme beach cleans e.g. coasteering, kayaking, abseiling) completed the survey. Although the survey was not aimed at these groups, the survey design allowed for their completion, if it occurred.



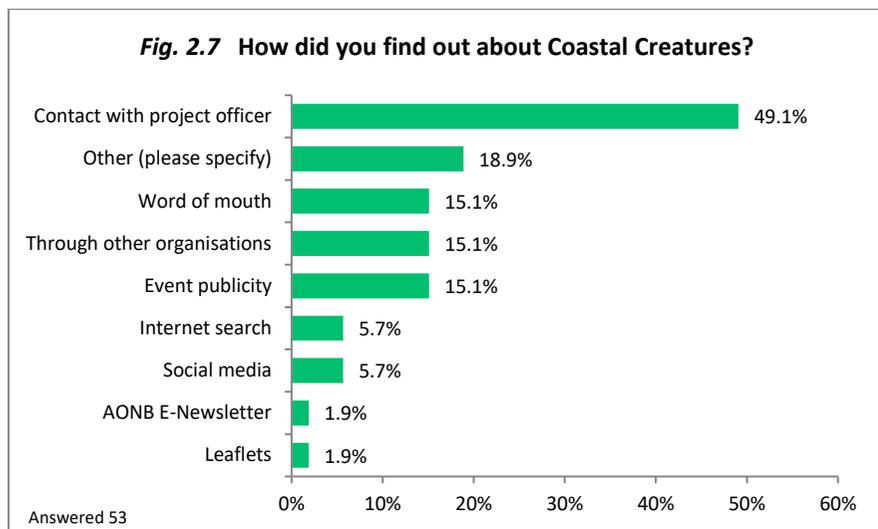
Previous experience of coastal wildlife initiatives

- Prior to the Coastal Creatures Project, two-thirds of respondents (67.9%) had been involved in other coastal wildlife initiatives (see Fig. 2.5).
- Encouragingly, almost a third (32.1%) had not been involved before, suggesting that the programme had been successful in reaching out to new audiences.



Previous experience of Beach Cleans

- Beach Cleans were a popular activity within the project. Prior to Coastal Creatures, three-quarters of respondents (77.4%) had taken part in a Beach Clean before (see Fig. 2.6).
- Almost 1 in 4 respondents (22.6%) had had no prior experience of Beach Cleans.



Getting to hear about the project

- People heard about Coastal Creatures in a range of ways (see Fig. 2.7) and often from more than one source (on average 1.3 different sources).
- The most frequently mentioned channels were through face-to-face contact and word of mouth, particularly through contact with the Education & Interpretation Officer – around half of the sample (49.1%) heard about the project from the Officer illustrating the importance of local networking.
- ‘Other sources’ included through AONB staff, partner organisations and schools.
- Only a minority identified the internet, social media, the AONB Newsletter or leaflets as one of the ways they recall hearing about the project.

b. Activities undertaken

Number of activities

- Most respondents (90.5%) had participated in more than one project activity or event (see Fig. 2.8).
- A total of 2 in every 5 (39.6%) had participated individually in more than 10 events, indicating a large core of strong commitment to the project.
- Only 5 respondents (9.4%) had only participated in one activity or event - of these, 2 respondents were teachers involved in schools’ activities, and 1 was resident outside of the North Devon and Torridge area.

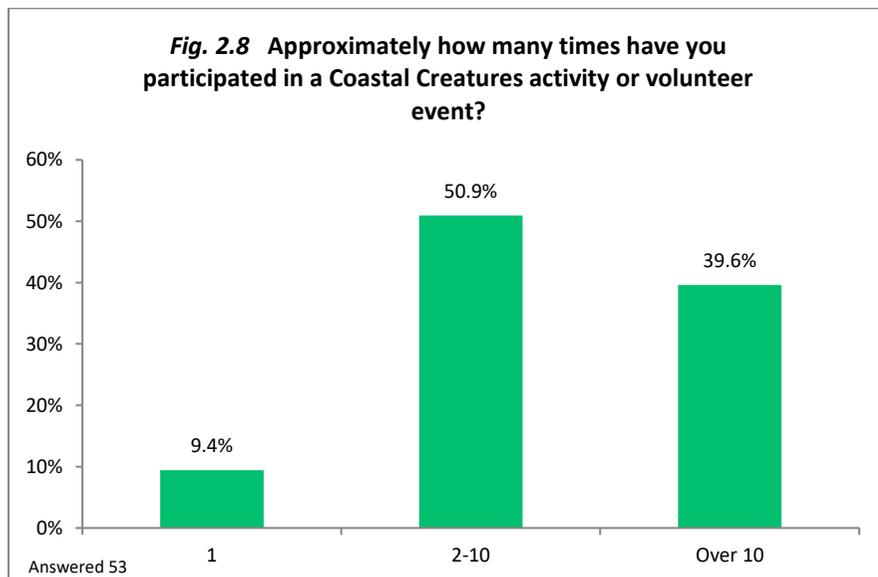
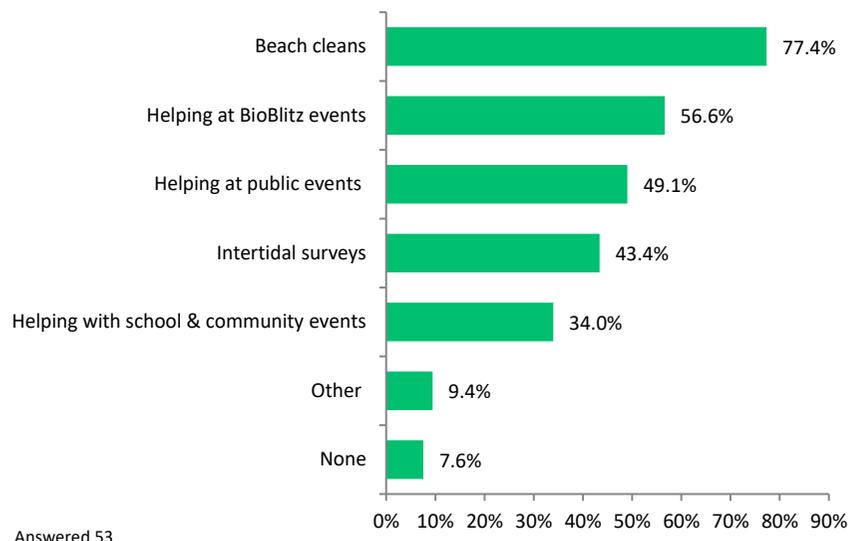


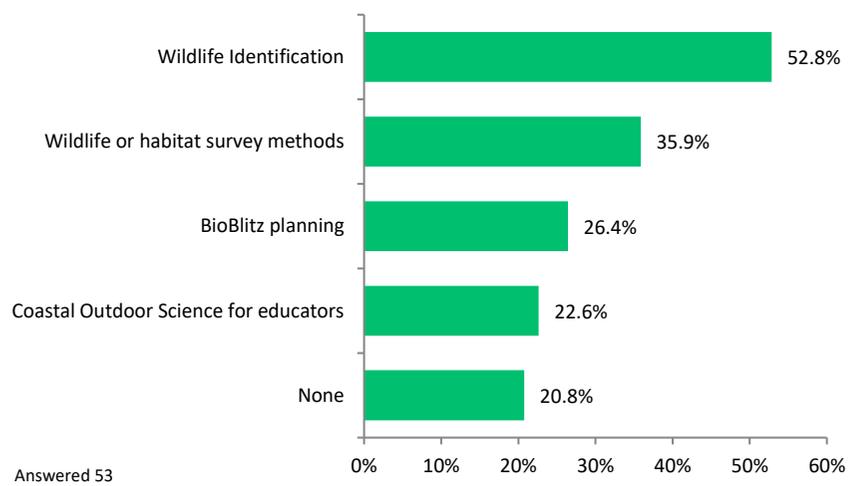
Fig 2.9 Which of the following did you volunteer time for?



Volunteering activity

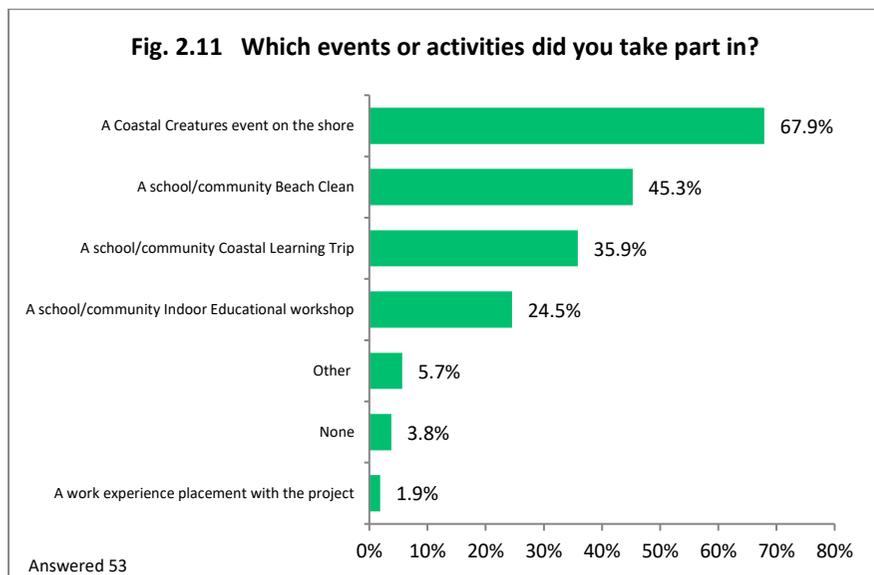
- Most people freely donated time to the project.
- All but 5 of the survey respondents (i.e. 92.4%) volunteered time to support a Coastal Creatures event or activity (see Fig. 2.9).
- The most popular volunteer activities were Beach Cleans (undertaken by 77.4% of respondents), helping at a BioBlitz event (65.6%), helping at a public event (49.1%) and undertaking Intertidal Surveys (43.4%).
- More than a third (34.0%) had helped with a school or community event.

Fig. 2.10 Which training workshops or training sessions did you take part in?



Training workshops

- Almost 4 in 5 respondents (79.2%) took part in a training workshop (see Fig. 2.10). Only 20.8% didn't take part in any.
- The most popular workshop was 'Wildlife Identification', which was attended by more than half of the respondent sample (50.8%).
- Of the 12 people (22.6%) who attended the 'Coastal Outdoor Science for Educators' workshop, half (i.e. 6 of 12) were either a project partner or a teacher.

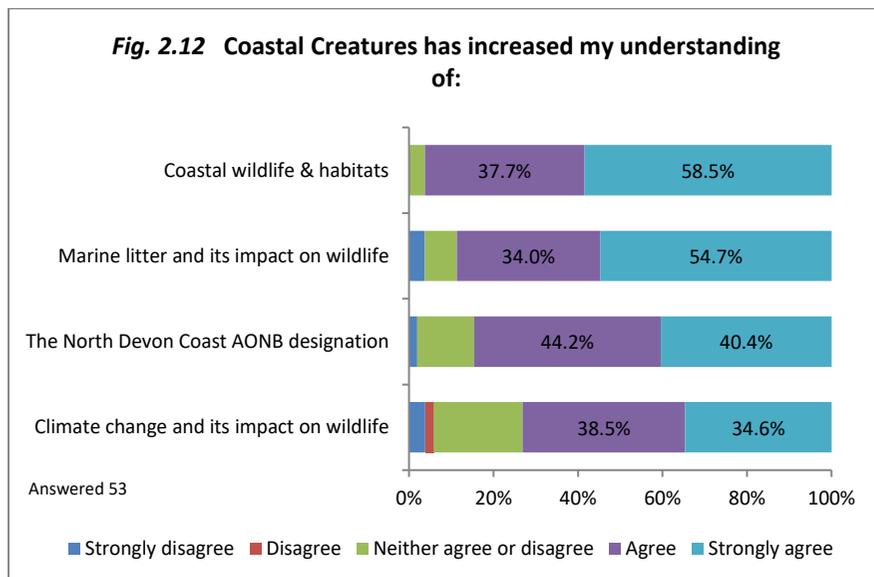


Events and activities

- Almost all respondents (96.2%) took part in a Coastal Creatures event or activity (see Fig. 2.11). Only 2 respondents (3.8%) didn't take part in any.
- The most popular events and activities were 'a Coastal Creatures event on the shore', more than two thirds (67.9%) attended one of these; and 'a school/community Beach Clean' (45.3%).
- One of the respondents had undertaken a work experience placement within the project. In total, the project provided nine work placements.

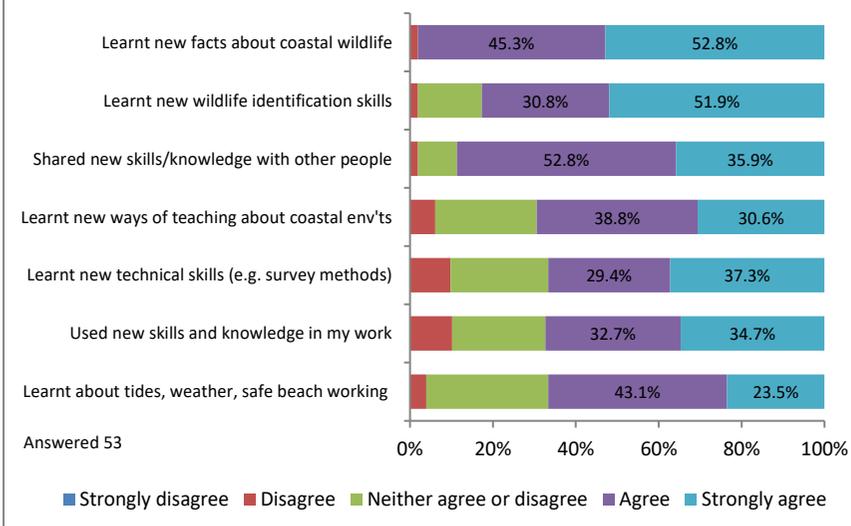
c. Benefits for participants

Understanding & learning



- A large majority recognised benefits of better understanding the natural world through their involvement in Coastal Creatures (see Fig. 2.12).
- 96.2% agreed or strongly agreed that Coastal Creatures had increased their understanding of coastal wildlife and habitats.
- 88.7% agreed or strongly agreed that it had increased their understanding of marine litter and its impacts on wildlife.
- 84.6% agreed or strongly agreed that it had increased their understanding of the North Devon Coast AONB designations.
- 73.1% agreed or strongly agreed that it had increased their understanding of climate change and its impacts on wildlife.

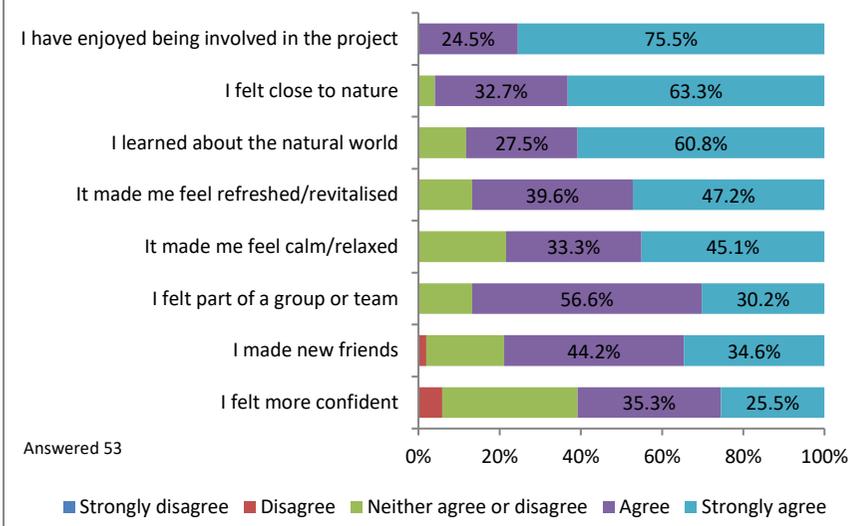
Fig. 2.13 Through Coastal Creatures I have:



Skills and knowledge

- Through the project, participants felt that they had acquired a range of new skills (see Fig. 2.13).
- Almost all (98.1%) agreed or strongly agreed that that they had learnt new facts about coastal wildlife.
- 82.7% agreed or strongly agreed that they had learnt new wildlife identification skills.
- Almost 9 in 10 (88.7%) had shared their new skills and knowledge with others and over two-thirds (69.4%) had learnt new ways of teaching about coastal environments.
- Two-thirds (66.7%) had learnt new technical skills and a similar proportion (67.4%) had used their new skills and knowledge in their work.

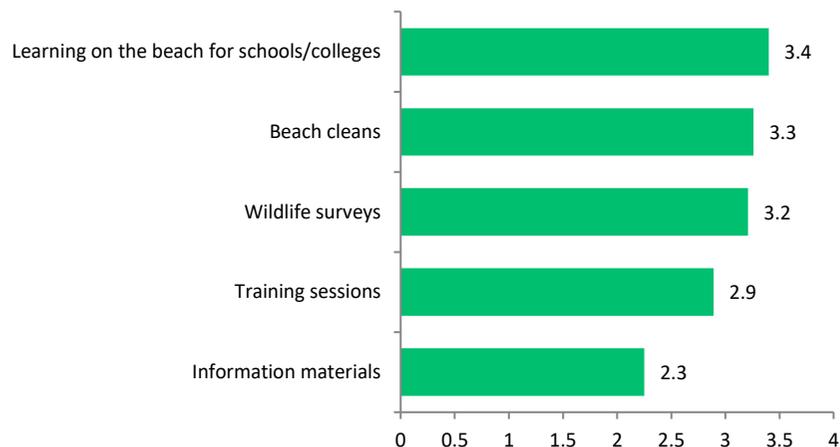
Fig 2.14 Personal benefits:



Personal benefits

- All participants (100%) had enjoyed being involved in the project, indicating high levels of satisfaction (see Fig. 2.14).
- There were also a range of other personal benefits. High proportions agreed or strongly agreed that through Coastal Creatures they had felt close to nature (96.0%); had felt refreshed/revitalised (86.8%); had felt calm/relaxed (78.4%); had felt more confident (60.8%).
- The project also generated social benefits – 86.8% of participants agreed/strongly agreed that they felt part of a team and 78.8% that they had made new friends.

Fig. 2.15 Which of the following activities do you think should be taken forward when Coastal Creatures ends? (weighted ranking)



d. Activities to continue

Participants were asked which were the most important Coastal Creatures activities to keep going after the project by ranking the main five activities in order of preference. The responses were weighted with the highest scores indicating the highest aggregate rankings.

- The highest rankings were for the most dynamic activities - ‘learning on the beach for schools and colleges’, ‘beach cleans’, and ‘wildlife surveys’.
- Overall, ‘training sessions’ were ranked slightly lower with ‘information materials’ in general ranked the lowest.

These results suggest an order of preference, but do not indicate that lower ranked activities are not worthwhile. Indeed, the results in the following pages suggest that high value was placed on all activities

e. Favourite memories of Coastal Creatures

As an open question within the survey, participants were asked about their favourite memory of Coastal Creatures. It is clear that participants took away a range of magical experiences. The comments here also begin to highlight the key role played by the Education & Interpretation Officer.

Working with the children on a Bioblitz Lee Bay Bioblitz! **night time rockpooling** Cat Northam Burrows
BioBlitz Midnight rockpooling at Lee Bay understanding rock pools Resolving soggy survey form with ID book, microscope &
partner **Rockpooling session on Westward Ho! beach** Cat Oliver

completing the biotope mapping at Westward Ho!... and a very kind Cat Oliver buying us all ice cream bioblitz

Working with a dedicated and knowledgeable project officer Enthusiastic delivery and knowledge. I loved it

Interacting with the children and parents in a new environment Children in the rock pools

That wet wipes are the enemy! Identification skills on coastal creatures, taking family friends to W. Ho! and watching the children
thoroughly enjoy identifying their finds!

Seeing the children from my school having hands on experience of beach litter. We were all
especially amazed by the amount of nurdles Inspiring the children involved

Cat's presentation at the NAAONB Conference Working with the children on a Bioblitz

It's all been excellent. Perhaps having experts come and talk to us and work with us!

The excitement of my class when they find an unusual sea creature.

Great teamwork and enthusiastic AONB staff Beach clean at Greencliffe Microscope workshop, beach clean at
Hartland Sharing what we find on beach

Finding a sharks egg Working with groups who enjoy similar interests Rockpooling with my two sons

Spending time with my daughter surveying crabs at Westward Ho! rock pool

identifying a blenny without help Running round the sands of Combe Martin learning how to map the beach

Seeing a curled octopus on a survey **Discovering my first stalked jelly!!** Finding an octopus on a beach on a CC survey

Lee Bay BioBlitz Finding a stalked jellyfish! Identification workshops

Being with the sea and looking and SEEING! photographing large edible crab at Lee Bay **The beauty of the North Devon**

Coast Lee Bay Bioblitz Viewing creatures under microscope Cockington Extreme Beach Clean

stalked jellyfish learning about what we picked up beach cleanup Discovering rock pool creatures we had never
seen before **Taking rockpool photos under water** Receiving an award for my dedication at CC events!

3. In summary

- Coastal Creatures ran for two years, delivering an impressive range of activity and levels of participation, including reaching out to young people and those who had previously not been engaged in coastal wildlife initiatives before.
- People voted with their feet - most respondents had participated in more than one activity and almost 40% had participated in more than 10. More than 90% volunteered time to the project.
- Participant views were universally positive, with people taking away unique special memories, new knowledge and understanding of the marine environment, new skills, and a number of personal benefits, including feeling closer to nature, health benefits of feeling calmer and more relaxed, and positive feelings about being part of a team and making new friends.
- These views mirror the very positive feedback obtained during the course of the project in relation to specific training sessions and events - of 163 people completing a feedback form after a training event, almost all (98%) rated the training as at least 'very good' and two thirds (67%) rated it as 'excellent'. Example comments received included:

"Near perfect, informal, educated and entertaining."

"Both sessions were very enjoyable and informative with material sympathetically presented and well explained, building up our knowledge very effectively."

"As a cohort we can be quite awkward to train, Cat met our needs perfectly. Thanks for a great afternoon."

"I felt this was an excellent course that I feel will benefit myself providing exceptional educational experiences for students and stimulate knowledge and understanding about the marine environment and how to protect it."

"Excellent!!!! Thanks for a great day. Have learnt lots which could be applied back at school."

- The project also had direct vocation benefits: amongst educators who acquired new ways of teaching, amongst participants who developed new transferable skills, including inter-personal skills; and amongst work placements, seeing immediate and longer-term employment and career benefits. On the back of their work placement experience, one student gained part-time employment with a benthic ecology company and in the following summer, paid seasonal employment with the National Trust in North Devon as a Beach Ranger. In talking about the project, he commented:

"The North Devon Coast AONB (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) has provided me with a great amount of experience and knowledge in an area that massively interests me and I knew very little about. I have gained a more detailed knowledge of the coast and the many organisms which live on and around it. My ability to identify species has massively increased, which before was only a few seaweeds studied Environmental Sciences degree at Bournemouth University."

- While many young people were involved in the project, the survey results largely represent the views and experiences of older age groups and of women more than men, who may have been underrepresented in the survey sample. Although proxy views were obtained through

the feedback of their school teachers, who confirmed the value of the project to their pupils, other research methods will be required to survey the experiences of younger people directly.

- Going forward, there is strong support for the continuation of key activities after the end of the project. The high level of volunteering within the project points to an important resource to support possible continuity, which will also require ongoing management/co-ordination and appropriate budgets.
- A consistent factor highlighted in the success of the project has been the role of the Education & Interpretation Officer who was a focal point for Coastal Creatures and was widely praised by the survey respondents. This role had a direct impact on participants' experiences and many of the memories that they took away. In projects of this type, which rely on personal engagement and interactions, the importance of this role should not be overlooked.