SPECIES on the EDGE
Gnèithean air an Oir

Participatory projects and their role in widening participation



Thematic review at a glance

Taing dhan | Made possible with
A' Mhaoin-Dualchais
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Who gets to do conservation? Rethinking who we reach, and how



Overview

Species on the Edge set out to protect 37 of Scotland's most threatened coastal and island species. But protecting nature can't be a job for conservationists alone.

Across seven project areas, we delivered projects which aimed to open up new and varying pathways to engaging with conservation. Driven by creative, community-led action, we proved that species conservation belongs to the communities who live alongside them.

Key impacts

- **Over 9,000 people** took part in participative projects specifically aimed at widening participation.
- **76% of survey respondents** were new to the organisation, the activity, or both, showing we reached new people, not just the usual suspects.
- **95% of participants** reported a stronger connection to nature after taking part in participative projects.
- **£500 to £5,000 grants** were awarded to **21 community-led projects**, putting funding directly into the hands of local groups and volunteers.
- Delivery shifted from **awareness-raising activity in 2023 to deeper co-design and participation by 2026**, proof that early relationship-building paid off over time.

What made the difference

Not everyone connects with nature in the same way, so we didn't provide just one route in.

We built multiple low-pressure entry points so people could find their own way to get involved. Our activities included:

- Traditional citizen science and hands-on volunteering opportunities
- Small 'micro-volunteering' opportunities, encouraging people to 'help nature their way'
- Creative workshops aimed at a range of audiences, including marginalised communities
- Health and wellbeing connection-to-nature activities
- Training events
- Online talks

We also removed practical barriers, covered travel costs and provided funding, free materials, and training, meaning that participation wasn't just open in theory - it was open in practice.

> "Nature journaling workshop was just the right speed as we slowly looked at everything...I could bring my child...I really appreciated being able to take the journal home to continue."
>
> **Participant**

Key findings

1 Entry-level activity can lead to deeper engagement.

Low-barrier engagement, like a craft activity in a community hall, often sparked bigger things: fundraising efforts, hands-on volunteering, and new local partnerships.

2 Different audiences need different doors.

Reaching under-represented groups, including older adults, people with additional support needs, and socially isolated individuals, meant rethinking where and how we showed and what we offered.

3 Flexibility builds confidence.

Embracing a flexible co-design model expanded the teams' engagement toolkit, giving project staff the confidence and versatility needed to forge stronger community relationships.



> “You did a lot to support us anyway... you jumped over a lot of hurdles to make it so we could still take part.”
>
> **Young volunteer**



The ripple effect

Participation didn’t stop at the edge of our events.

People went on to fundraise, restore habitats, and build their own cross-sector collaborations.

Read the full *Participatory projects and their role in widening participation* Thematic Review

Explore the evidence, practical examples and recommendations on how to widen participation in conservation. Coming soon - available from our website: **www.speciesontheedge.co.uk**

All photographs © Kieran Playfair, Samantha Stringer, Louise Senior and Gareth Powell.
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