

# Why Our Children Are Not Being Connected With Nature

Chris Rose, May 2014

chris@campaignstrategy.co.uk

A recent Fairyland Trust survey [reported](#) that 85.2% of Britons agreed “it is vital to introduce young children to nature”.

On the face of it, this seems good news for groups such as those involved with this year’s [National Children’s Day](#) (Sunday May 11) which focuses on ‘connecting children with nature’.

Yet the overwhelming support for a very must-do proposition, cannot reflect what is actually happening, as evidence suggests British children are not very connected to nature, and nor indeed, are their parents.

The reality seems to be that parents and grandparents, and even teachers, are no longer able to ‘introduce young children to nature’ in any meaningful way, because they can’t really see nature themselves. The old inter-generational connections that passed on the ability to tell one wild plant or creature from another, and to understand where and why they might be found, have been broken.

We need a national campaign of remedial action, and something motivational that will appeal to a population which has grown used to being ‘nature blind’. Such a drive needs to be big and multi-faceted, social and cultural not just straightforwardly ‘educational’, and to learn the lessons of marketing and other large-scale campaigns that have influenced public priorities.

## Nature Blindness in Children

In 2008 a National Trust survey [found](#) that

- Only 53 per cent of children could correctly identify an oak leaf, Britain’s national tree
- 29 per cent could not recognize a magpie, although they had increased in despite numbers soaring three-fold over the preceding three decades
- Only 47 per cent could identify a barn owl
- One in three failed to recognise Britain’s best-known butterfly, the Red Admiral

And apparently, half could not tell the difference between a bee and a wasp.

On the other hand, nine out of ten were able to correctly name Doctor Who’s enemies, the Daleks and a similar number were able to identify Star Wars’ Jedi Grand Master, Yoda.

Similarly, in 2002 Cambridge University Zoologist Andrew Balmford and colleagues [1] found that children could identify more Pokémon characters than native British wildlife.

## Adults Blind to Nature

A few years ago a RSPB survey asked people what bird they most associated with the countryside. I’m told the RSPB thought it would be something like the skylark. The most

frequent answer was “a chicken”. This is understandable when you consider that many people experience the countryside through a car window while driving at around 50mph and a chicken would be visible, whereas a skylark would be hard to see or hear. Our lifestyles militate against connection with nature but that’s not even half the story. Another factor is that there is simply less nature around to connect with. Like so many of our songbirds, skylarks are now scarce: they [declined 75%](#) between 1972 and 1996.

Similarly, numbers of the iconic nightingale fell by [over 90%](#) between 1967 and 2007. Even a bird as ‘common’ as a song thrush is now officially ‘[red listed](#)’. Not surprisingly, people are losing touch with nature. Nor is this a result of ‘urban living’. Much of our countryside is now as poor in wildlife and wildflowers as our cities, towns and suburbs, often more so.

Here in rural Norfolk I have a friend who is a local farmer. He’s quite environmentally-minded and has undertaken agri-environment schemes on his farm, creating ‘beetle banks’ and wild flower borders to some of his fields. A while ago I mentioned the decline of turtle doves to him (the turtle dove population fell by [more than 90%](#) between 1997 and 2010) and he replied “we have lots of them on this farm”. If true, this would have made it a rare exception but he then added “they are all around the yard”, and it turned out these were collared doves, a similar-looking species that has recently colonised Britain. Although a lifelong countryman, he could not tell the difference between the two.

## **Nature Links Lost**

Being a farmer or agricultural worker is no longer the guarantee of a connection to nature that it once was. In the days before farms were industrialised, working on the land meant many generations encountered nature in huge variety. Hundreds of plant and animals were both common and familiar. Take the connection to nature evident in the 39 local names for ‘cowslip’ recorded by Geoffrey Grigson in his *The Englishman’s Flora* (1958).

*Bunch of Keys - Somerset*

*Cove-Keys – Kent*

*Cowflop – Devon, Somerset*

*Cowpaigle – Hertfordshire*

*Carslope – Yorkshire*

*Coosloop – Lincolnshire*

*Cower-Slop – Shropshire*

*Cowslap – Hertfordshire, Northamptonshire*

*Cowslop – Devon, East Anglia, Northamptonshire, Shropshire, Cheshire*

*Cowslup – Warwickshire, Worcestershire*

*Cow’s Mouth - Lothian*

*Cow Stripling, Cow Strupple, Cow Stropple – Yorkshire, Cumbria, Westmorland, Northern England*

*Creivel – Dorset*

*Crewel – Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Wiltshire*

*Cuckoo – Cornwall (and Coucou in France)*

*Culver Keys – Somerset, Kent, Northamptonshire*

*Fairies’ Basins – Somerset*

*Fairie’s flower – Somerset*

*Fairy Bells – Somerset*  
*Fairy Cups – Dorset, Somerset, Lincolnshire*  
*Freckled Face – Somerset*  
*Golden Drops – Somerset*  
*Herb Peter – Somerset, Cheshire*  
*Hodrod – Dorset*  
*Holrod – Dorset*  
*Horse's Buckle – Wiltshire, Kent*  
*Keys of Heaven – (cf German – Himmelschussel) – Devon*  
*Lady's Bunch of Keys – Somerset*  
*Lady's Bunch of Keys – Somerset*  
*Lady's Keys – Somerset, Wiltshire, Kent*  
*Long Legs – Somerset*  
*Milk-Maidens – Lincolnshire*  
*Oddrod – Dorset*  
*Paigle – Dorset, Kent, Middlesex, Hertfordshire, East Anglia, Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire, Northamptonshire, Cheshire, Lincolnshire, Yorkshire, Northern England, Pembrokeshire*  
*Racconals – Cheshire*  
*St Peter's Herb – Yorkshire*  
*St Peter's Keys – Somerset*  
*Tisty-Tosty - (properly a cowslip ball), Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire*  
*Tosty - (properly a cowslip ball), Somerset, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, Pembrokeshire*

Cowslips still exist but today they are a rare sight in most of our farmland and roadside verges. Re-seeding of pastures with a few grasses which respond rapidly to artificial fertiliser to maximise milk yields, and application of herbicides, have put paid to them along with hundreds of other wild flowers. Most people are more likely to see cowslips on a motorway verge, sown in a 'habitat creation' scheme.

When Grigson wrote in the 1950s, the engine of agricultural destruction had only just got going and many of these local names were probably still in use, at least by older people. Their diversity reflects the past abundance of wild flowers, and the universal connection to nature enjoyed by generations of our ancestors.

Grigson's daughter, Sophie, wrote in the Introduction to the 1996 edition to the book, that:

*"Reading it takes me straight back to the foraging strolls through my native Wiltshire countryside. My father transformed what might, for a child, have been a penance, into a voyage of discovery. He illuminated the hedgerows and fields with his knowledge of the plants that grew there".*

It is this knowing, the ability to read the countryside and living places in detail, which makes the connection with nature, and enables it to be passed on from parents to children. Many people will know Shakespeare's line: "I know a bank where the wild thyme grows" but how many can say they know such a bank today, and what about the other plants mentioned in Oberon's speech?

*'I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,  
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,  
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,  
With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine:  
There sleeps Titania sometime of the night ...'*

(Act II, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, William Shakespeare)

Which of us now can identify wild thyme, or tell a cowslip from an oxlip or even from a primrose, a dog violet from a sweet violet, or recognize woodbine or even know what eglantine is ? (Tip, eglantine is like a dog rose but the leaves smell of apple). When Shakespeare wrote, most of the audience was probably familiar with all this nature. These days it might only be botany students or their lecturers who are this 'nature-literate' ? Perhaps, but then again, probably not.

### **Poor Nature-Sight in Students and Teachers**

In 2005 Anne Bebbington from the Field Studies Council [found](#) that it's not just the youngest children who are flying blind when it comes to navigating nature. She showed that both A-level students and their teachers, as well as trainee teachers attending courses at Juniper Hall Field Centre, had very little ability to name 'common' wild plants. A third of students could only name three species. '86% of A-level biology students could only name three or fewer common wild flowers whilst 41% could only name one or less'. Bebbington also found that 29% of the biology teachers could only name three or fewer flowers.

At Brunel University, Angus Westgarth-Smith [wrote in 2003](#):

*"There is a need to reintroduce natural history into biology teaching. Natural history has disappeared from the vocabulary of British biology – what little remains has been disguised with names such as 'biodiversity' or 'animal and plant diversity'"*

The same thing has happened in other countries including the United States. In his book *Last Child in the Woods* [2], [Richard Louv](#) quotes Paul Dayton, a professor at Scripps Institution of Oceanography in California as saying that most of his top-flight graduate students in marine ecology exhibit "no evidence of training in any type of natural history", and that soon there will be "nobody left" to identify several major groups of marine wildlife.

Stephen Moss writes in his report [Natural Childhood](#) that entomologist Roger Key, formerly employed by government conservation agency Natural England, told the Board of that organisation: 'Young people are still studying biology and zoology degrees, and many have a keen interest in environmental issues; but few have the practical, hands-on field knowledge of their predecessors'. Key was right and sadly, Natural England has lost many of its own natural history experts, replacing them with smaller numbers of 'project managers', adept at gant charts and process but more able to read spreadsheets than recognize sheets of flowers.

So low is the nature-literacy of modern students emerging from university with biological sciences degrees that Reading University now [offers](#) a 'MSc in Species Identification and Survey Skills', because there is a market for ecologists who can identify wild plants and animals in

order to conduct the surveys needed by developers under the European Habitats Directive and similar regulations. This is not a sign of nature-connection but of disconnection.

### **The Experience of the Fairyland Trust**

I help my partner Sarah Wise run the small conservation charity '[The Fairyland Trust](#)'. Its mission is to engage children with nature, and it does so by creating events and activities designed to be attractive to mainstream families, building on their established interest in things 'magical'. It provides creative workshops and 'magical days out' such as the Fairy Fair. Having attracted over 70,000 people to our activities since 2001, our direct experience is that most British people's nature understanding is now too low for them to actually 'introduce children to nature', even if our survey shows that 85% of them think it is 'vital'.


### **'Green' but Nature-Blind**

The audience at Glastonbury Festival in the 'Green Fields', is about as environmentally-minded as you can get. Nevertheless, we met that parents attending our workshops there who expressed astonishment that there was more than one type of 'hedge tree'.

We've also had to simplify our [magical nature workshops](#) on moths and butterflies, when we found that most people assume that it is the adult butterflies that require specific food plants, not the caterpillars. Nor have most ever experienced a [real hay-meadow](#) of the type that once covered much of England before tractors replaced farm horses. Many think that industrial oil seed rape fields are flower meadows and so post photos of them online, with comments like "beautiful countryside".

### **Nature Disappearing from Popular Culture**

As authentic nature disappears from popular culture, we accept ersatz versions for our children. Maybe the reason why our visitors think caterpillars eat anything is because they've read the best-selling book *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* to their children. Described as "one of the greatest childhood classics of all time", it features a caterpillar which will eat anything. The fact that almost all real caterpillars and moths are actually very fussy about what they will eat, is a large part of the reason why our moths have dwindled by 40% in southern Britain since 1968: herbicides have eliminated food-plants, while pesticides also kill the insects.

Previous generations knew a different countryside, not just from direct experience but from popular art and culture. Actual nature once featured prominently in commercial art, such as posters designed to encourage excursions on trains or buses. (Old London Transport posters are available from their [online shop](#)). They tell of a time before Alton Towers and the M25 when nature and the seasons were a trip-generating selling point for public transport. Many of the posters, feature such botanically accurate flowers as the 1938 primrose in 'Coming Out?'.  


Others such as 'Flowers o'the corn' poster designed for 'London Underground and 'Bus Group' by Edward McKnight Kauffer in the 1920s, show wild flowers that have long vanished from modern fields.



Walter E Spradberry's 'Dorking' (1929), shows recognizable bluebells and orange-tip butterflies. His spring 'Flowers of the Season' poster (1933) could serve as an identification guide, showing realistic bluebell, ragged robin, violets and lady's smock, amongst others. At the time these were all familiar: Edward Step's Wayside and woodland blossoms describes lady's smock as "a multitude" in "all moist meadows". Not now of course. The summer poster shows yarrow and harebell and different species of scabious, cinquefoil and other flowers.

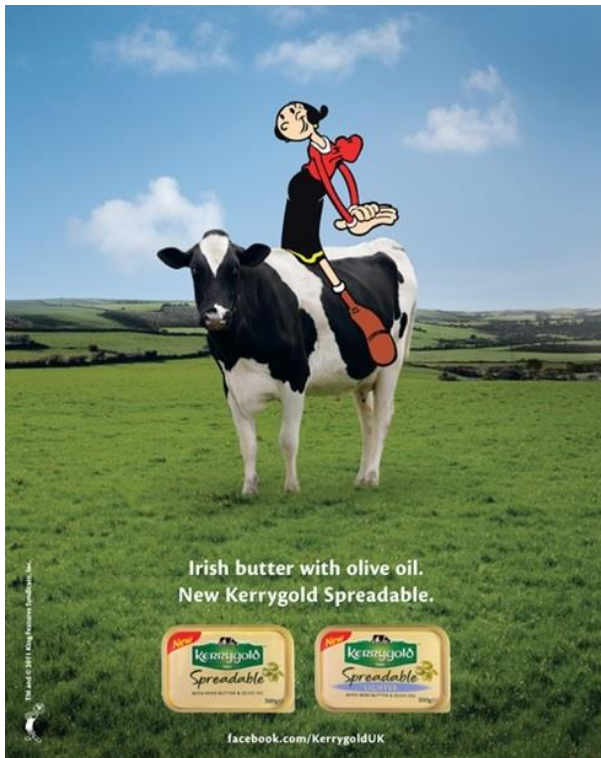


In the 1950s, a London schoolchild or commuter staring at platform posters might have seen Derrick Sayer's red admiral 'Butterflies' poster, perhaps explaining why it became our 'best known' butterfly, whereas a third of modern children cannot recognize it.

It is noticeable that LT posters produced by the 1960s started to show more 'open spaces' and less nature. Even allowing for artistic trends, it seems likely that the artists, commissioners and audiences were beginning to lose touch with the detail of nature. Contemporary depictions of our countryside in advertisements are very different.

Imagine you are sourcing a photo for a countryside promotion. You might visit an online photolibrary, and search for 'picnic + meadow'. [This this](#) at Getty Images and see what you get. A lot of people sitting on grass but mostly with few flowers, often none at all, and a lot with just grass plus dandelions. Those with flower-rich meadows are in a small minority.

Contemporary depictions of grasslands and meadows are dominated by dairy product advertisements. Many of these make great play on nature but give the utter disconnect of modern intensive farming is revealed by the images they use. Take these three leading dairy brands: Country Life butter owned by [Dairycrest](#), Kerrygold butter owned by the Irish dairy Board, and [Arla](#) (a farmer-owned Danish dairy company with many popular brands). All show cows on 'green concrete'.



*Kerrygold: no flowers at all but plenty of bright green grass. No butterflies here, and precious few birds.*



*Country Life: endorsed by the farmer's label 'Red Tractor' but just daisies in the grass. The robin looks stuffed but might have been real, or an animation.*



*Webshot from Arla: 'we care about nature'. Hard to tell if it's real but it's probably a set-up in a meticulously 'clean' (ie wildflower-free) intensive dairy field. Nothing much can live here except cows (and most Danish dairy cows are in fact now kept indoors).*

### **Nature-Blindness in Nature Groups**

We've found the same lack of nature-literacy even exists in conservation organisations. The Fairyland Trust also hires out its 'magical workshops' to help attract people to events run by others. One of our first such 'travelling workshops' went to a nature reserve run by a Wildlife Trust. Because the workshop involved making 'Magic Wands' in which children learn about different native trees, before setting out we asked the Trust staff which types of trees were found on the reserve. We were surprised that the two 'Education Officers' did not know. They would, they said, have to "ask the warden".

Sarah and I also work as communications and campaigns consultants, and in 2007 we were asked to invent a new way for [Natural England](#) to attract visitors to some of its major National Nature Reserves. At the time (though sadly thanks to the attitude of the current government, no longer) it had admirable intentions to try and re-engage large numbers of people with nature.

Starting from where public audiences are at, rather than where committed conservationists area at, we created something called 'Ecoteering', which in different formats could be a cross between geocaching, treasure trails, nature trails and orienteering. The crux of it being that in

order to find hidden treasures and succeed in completing a route, you had to be able to identify some 'navigation species'.

Ecoteering turned out to be popular with the public and we trialled numerous versions of it. To test an early variant, we thought it would be easy to begin with some of Natural England's own staff. We were taken aback to find that we had been wrong to assume that they would be able to identify common plant species. One staff member, who admittedly wasn't a field surveyor or warden, commented in her feedback to us that the 'navigation species' were 'too difficult' and that only a 'specialist' would know such things as the difference between heather and bracken.



*Ecoteers*

This is just one small part of the big picture of societies disengaged with nature: ecologists who understand modelling but can't recognize real plants or animals; and 'education' staff who may know learning theories and 'good practice' for Health and Safety but who see natural history as outside their remit.

These are not bad people. They are not lazy or (in other respects) incompetent. They are disconnected from nature because they can't recognize it because nobody showed them, be it grandparents or parents, teachers or work mentors. Nature then becomes a theory, a concept rather than a reality, and as a concept it can survive indefinitely, even as real nature dies out.

### **Taking Nature for Granted**

Those who like us, learned natural history informally, from friends or parents or a local Natural History Society, for many years took such knowledge for granted. We were wrong to do so. Despite their best efforts, organisations like the [Field Studies Council](#) and the [Wild Flower Society](#) have been left in a backwater, and the explosion of nature-on-tv has not been a replacement for real natural history.

This situation has crept up on us over decades in which conservation groups, who you would assume should naturally be in the front line for engaging the public with nature, have been looking the other way.

Faced with outright destruction of nature for agricultural development, or by pollution or by road-building, they focused on site protection and changing policies, on 'biodiversity targets' and influencing landowners. Even if these essential efforts succeed, how will people appreciate them, if nature is a book they cannot read? It is not a recipe for building political support.

Faced with the need to raise funds to operate, conservation NGOs have also focused mainly on their members, a manageable, reachable group, rather than the great 'disinterested' public. This is good for those involved but for purposes of increasing connection with nature, it is like running a drive to increase public literacy amongst people who already use libraries. Such an approach is guaranteed to reach mainly the 'converted'.

We need to do differently, to get a different result.

### **A National Campaign for Real Nature Literacy**

The parlous state of national nature-literacy cannot be blamed solely on the education system but that is one element that needs fixing. The UK University of South Wales [offers](#) an Honours Degree in Natural History. That's good but we need lots of such courses.

Following campaigns by [Elisabeth Whitebread](#) and others, there is talk that UK Education secretary Michael Gove now intends to reverse the idea to remove nature from Primary School curricula and make it compulsory to teach about British wildlife: a beneficial side effect of Mr Gove's predilection for enforcing formal 'Britishness'. Any such change would be a huge leap forward, albeit after taking about one hundred such leaps backwards.

To reach teenagers, [Tony Juniper](#), myself, [Mary Colwell](#) and others have suggested introducing a GCSE in natural history. Of course we'd need to train the teachers, and therein lays the rub. Lobbying for changes to formal education will get us only so far in reconnecting the population with nature: significant response from 'the system' needs popular demand, not just calls from advocacy groups with a limited base. A population literate in nature needs to become a political objective.

### **Getting Outdoors ?**

Schemes like [Forest Schools](#) are great for improving learning through 'outdoor classrooms', which is their objective but the learning may be maths or PE or physics: it is rarely nature. The objective is not being able to read nature.

Much the same goes for the DEFRA-funded Natural England [Access to Nature](#) and '[Natural Connections](#)' schemes, which principally focus on outdoor learning and getting-children-outdoors. Similarly, the main 'ask' of even the [Wild Network](#) project, which includes most of the larger UK 'NGOs' such as National Trust and RSPB and links to National Children's Day, is to

'get outdoors', eg [swapping 'screen time' for time outdoors](#). All very good but it may not lead to any nature ability or understanding.

Surely 'getting outdoors' will lead to connecting with nature ? Well not if you can't recognize it, and to rectify that you need someone or something on hand to translate.

On its own, a broadcast call for parents to 'get children outdoors' runs an even greater risk of going nowhere useful for real engagement with nature.



For instance this May Day, the weekly 'Event' guide for the EDP, Britain's biggest regional newspaper, took up the call and devoted a two page spread to outdoor events. It was fronted by a large photograph of two girls examining a pond dipping net, with the headline "Time To Get Outdoors".

But look inside and you find that many of the outdoor activities have not much to do with nature. There is the Pedal Norfolk bike ride "through the glorious North Norfolk countryside" (this is where I live – the route mainly passes cereal fields and oil seed rape) for which the selling point is mainly burning off calories. Then there's a day out with Thomas (the steam engine), Minty's Whizzy Windmills at Bewilderwood (a sort of theme park), a Scarecrow Festival, another bike ride (objective health and fitness), a 'medieval' Knights Tournament, a Fun Run, Stock Car racing, a tour of an abbey, another steam railway event, the Classic Vehicles Rally, a Vintage Rally (vehicles), a Vintage Fair (clothes), a re-creation of the 1970s (tie-dye socks and spacehoppers), climbing Happisburgh Lighthouse (by the stairs inside), and Truckfest. All undeniably out-doors but unlikely to lead to connection with nature.



If we cannot see that a local verge is a remnant of ancient grassland rich in native plant species, not just an artificial monoculture of rye grass, how will we know to intervene if we see it being sprayed or re-turfed? And if we have [never heard a nightingale](#), how will we recognize that a local nightingale copse is being destroyed by deer or development?

As David Attenborough said: “no one will protect what they don’t care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced”. It’s all the small changes which progressively erode the fabric of nature, breaking our connection to it, one thread at a time.

### **Starting From Where People Are At**

I don’t mean steam rallies or Truckfest but we do need to engage people starting where they are at, for example their interest in their homes and gardens. A ratings scheme for how nature-rich your garden is, would be a good idea. Some German towns offer the equivalent of rate rebates to home-owners who build in nesting places for swifts, and grow creepers on their walls. How would your home and garden rate?

Nature ability needs communicating in ways that fit with leisure time and aspirations. Unlikely as it may seem, those of us who care about nature could learn from the wine marketers. In the 1980s the wine industry and supermarkets educated the British public to understand that there are more than just three varieties (red, pink and white), which was the default assumption in Britain when I grew up.

Or we could learn from the architecture lobby. Back in the 1960s the Civic Trust taught people the difference between real and mock Tudor buildings. We now need to equip Britons with the ability to see the diversity of nature, not just types of wine and houses, before we become a nature of green-ish lovers of nature-on-tv, living in a green but nature-free land.

### **Connect With Values**

Let’s go back to that survey in which 85.2% said they agreed it was ‘vital’ to introduce young children to nature. We also asked the same people a set of questions which segment them by [motivational values](#) as well as age and sex. The insights this generates go some way to show why conservation groups keep on reaching the same ‘converted’ subset of the population, why so many people are not ‘connected with nature’, and who those people are. They also suggest the terms on which we have to engage, if it is to make a difference.

The values I am talking about are not so much those we are aware of but those that unconsciously inform our most deeply held attitudes and beliefs that underlie our opinions, shape our behaviours and give us our own version of ‘common sense’ and what really does and does not ‘work’. These ‘Maslow groups’ are Pioneers (inner directed), Prospectors (outer directed) and Settlers (security driven). (See a [summary here](#) – note that these are not the same as ‘intrinsic and extrinsic’).

How are these groups defined ? The answer is by measuring them in up to a thousand different ways and comparing all the results together but the short-order description used by CDSM is this:

'The brief descriptors for the three Maslow Groups are:

People with a PIONEER orientation often have the following characteristics:

- \* Trying to put things together and understand the big picture.
- \* Concerned about the environment, society, world poverty, etc.
- \* Always looking for new questions and answers.
- \* Strong internal sense of what is right and what is wrong.
- \* Strong desire for fairness, justice and equality.
- \* Self-assured and sense of self-agency.
- \* Generally positive about change, if it is worthwhile.
- \* Cautiously optimistic about the future.

People with a PROSPECTOR orientation often have the following characteristics:

- \* Success oriented.
- \* Always want to "be the best" at what they are doing.
- \* Welcome opportunities to show abilities.
- \* Take great pleasure in recognition and reward.
- \* Look to maximise opportunities.
- \* Will take opportunities for advancement and professional networking.
- \* Trend and fashion conscious.
- \* Like new ideas and new ways.
- \* Generally optimistic about the future.

People with a SETTLER orientation often have the following characteristics:

- \* Family and home, and caring for them, tend to be at centre.
- \* For those living alone, friends take the place of family.
- \* Tradition and family structure are important.
- \* Prefer things to be "normal".
- \* Naturally conservative (with a small "c").
- \* Security conscious - wary of crime, violence and terrorism.
- \* Supportive of tough punishment for criminals.
- \* Wary of change, especially for its own sake.
- \* More comfortable with regular and routine situations.
- \* Concerned about what the future holds'.

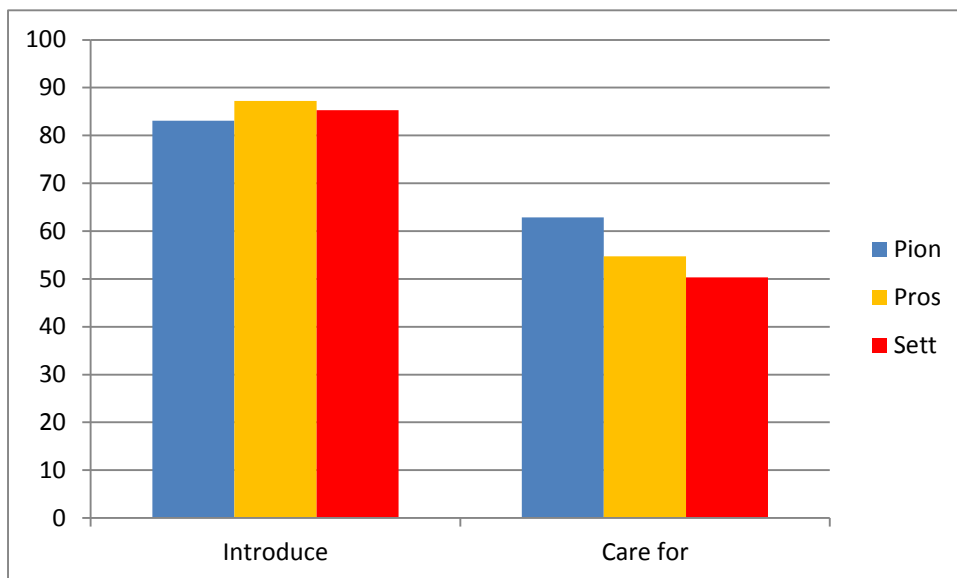
Here are the results for two questions from values surveys in the UK. The first is our statement 'It is vital to introduce young children to nature'. Although we know it does not happen, 85.2% agree with it, and the proportions of Pioneers, Settlers and Prospectors agreeing are very similar. In other words it appeals across the board. In fact the Prospectors agree slightly more than the Settlers who in turn agree slightly more than the Pioneers.

	Pion	Pros	Sett	
Introduce	83.1	87.2	85.3	85.2
Care for	62.9	54.7	50.3	67.6

The second question asks whether or not they agree they are like a person who: 'strongly believes that people should care for nature. Looking after the environment is important to him/her'.

This may sound similar but it is very different because it asks for personal action. It's also not about children but just about you and about 'nature'. In framing terms these are very different questions. The difference between the results for the two questions is much greater for Prospectors and Settlers than for Pioneers.

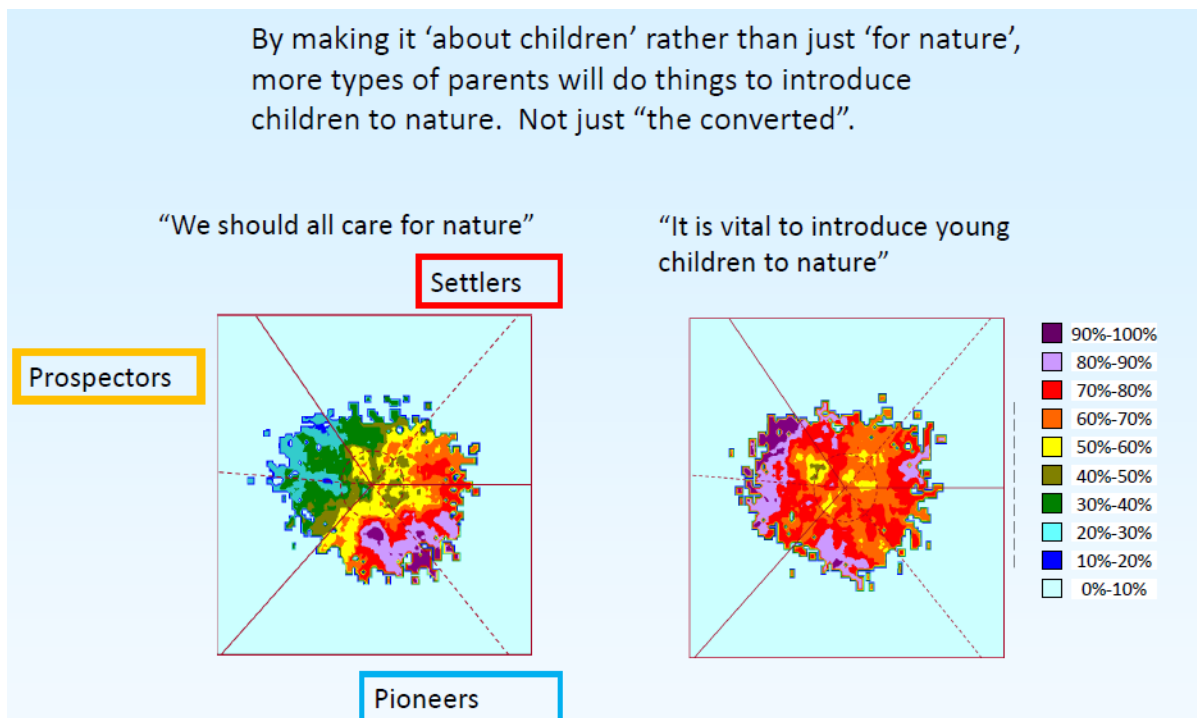
This time only 67.6% of the population 'agree' and a slightly differently worded question 'we should all do something' for the 'natural environment' gets 42%, less than half the positive response to the 'vital to introduce young children to nature' statement.



Above: Pioneers respond 20.2% more positively to the framing about 'introducing children to nature' than just 'care for nature' but for Prospectors the 'uplift' is much bigger at 32.5% and for Settlers it is 34.9%.

One reason for this difference is the presence or absence of 'children'. CDSM also ask 'identity factor' questions and 'being a parent' is the single most powerful self-identifier, so powerful that even people without children tend to agree it is important (ie it is important as a concept I agree with). That cuts across values differences. The drive to help our children is biological and innate so it tends to drive people to positive responses if helping children is at stake.

Another factor is self-agency. Although all the groups score significantly lower on "we should all care for nature", the Pioneers, with the highest sense of self-agency (ie they feel they can change the world, not that it changes or controls them), score higher than the other groups. This makes it a highly values differentiated proposition. Any such active 'care for nature' idea is much more accepted by Pioneers than by the others.



Above - left: strong support for 'care for nature'. Right: strong support for introducing children to nature. Colours indicate strength of support, purple 90 – 100% agreement, down to pale blue 0 – 10%. Care for nature is strongly Pioneer dominated whereas introducing children to nature has cross-values group appeal.

This means that a focus on children is indeed a good way to engage the wider public in rebuilding a connection to nature but it has to be *done* in ways that resonate with values.

### Matching Propositions to Values

Pioneers are satisfied with doing something for 'big picture' reasons and because it is ethically right, they don't feel much need to 'get anything' for activity to 'have a point to it', a 'result'. They also positively lap up 'issues' and complicated ideas.

That does not appeal to Prospectors. Their idea of a good day out is more having fun and getting a result, for example in terms of looking good, being seen at a 'recommended' venue, and their children achieving something. A walk around a wood to look at nature might be 'boring' but winning a competition to find 'treasure' species might be more interesting. Making or buying something that other people will envy, to take home, would add value.

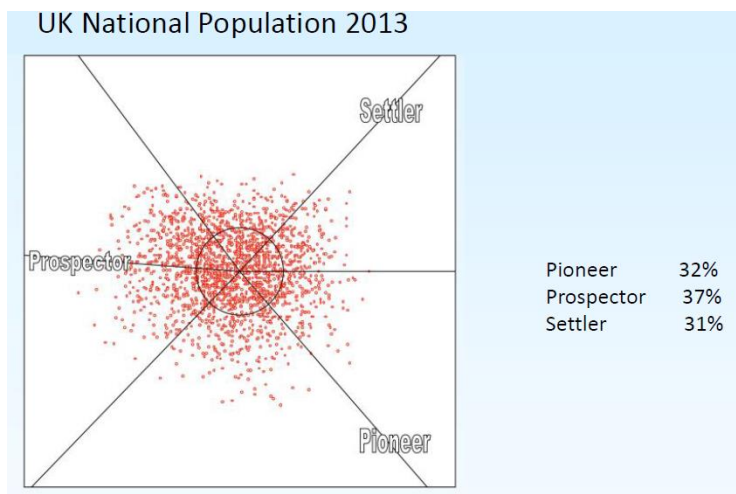
This is why you find a lot of Prospectors among the people outdoors doing physical exercise, such as jogging (get fit, look good), mountain biking (with special kit) and in competitive orienteering. If you inserted nature-ability into such activities (as we did in Ecoteering), you've made nature something to be good-at. Otherwise 'nature' will just remain a background factor, not a must-have.

Settlers love tradition and continuity. The EDP's steam rallies and railway days out will be heavily supported by Settlers but they also like family-days-out and nature-as-it-was. There are many ways to tune nature to fit with people's values.

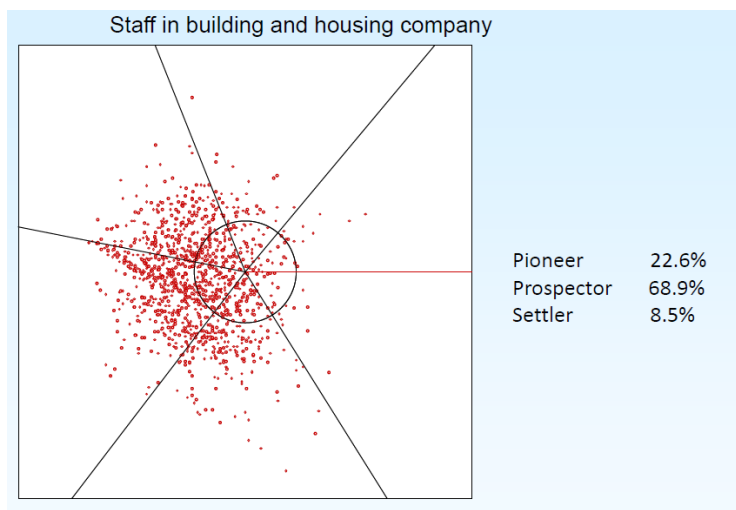
The problem conservation groups have is that care-for-nature has been promoted mainly on ethical grounds, and closely associated with 'issues'. This appeals to Pioneers but not the others. Consequently the current 'base' for nature, as represented by membership of and active support for UK green and conservation NGOs, is very skewed to Pioneers. This makes it a politically and socially limited base: the "usual suspects", the "converted".

### Values of the Green Groups and of 'The Public'

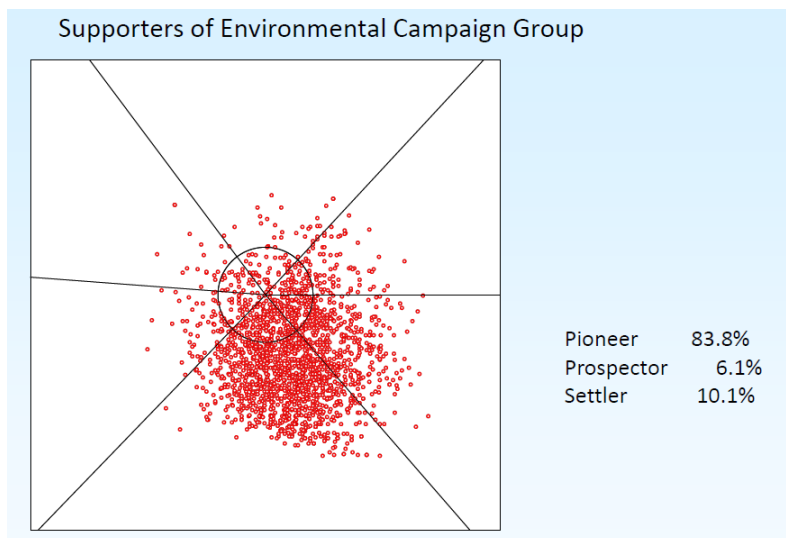
Here are some values maps showing the difference between 'normal people' as represented by the national population and the staff of a mainstream housing company (which is actually a very environmentally aware company but looks 'normal'), and some cause groups.



Above: 'scatter diagram' of UK population (sample 2000) showing roughly equal numbers in each values group, with Prospectors being slightly larger than the others.

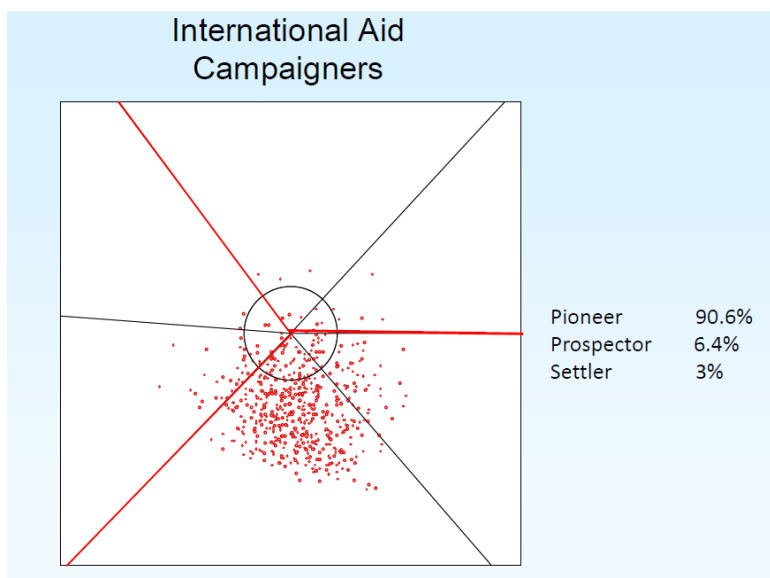


Above: staff in a housing company. More than two thirds are Prospectors. This is indicative of the UK working population. Prospectors form the majority of people in full-time employment working for an organisation in the UK (as opposed to self-employed, students, retired etc).



Above: supporters of a green campaign group. Over four fifths are Pioneers. Many of the people they most need to persuade are Prospectors or Settlers but the way these people see the world, and what they intuitively feel should “work”, for example to connect people to nature, is very different. The others might call them ‘typical Guardian readers’, and in that they would be right.

The supporter bases of other major conservation groups are similar. This shows who is actually being engaged to protect nature.



Above: staff from an international aid charity: over 90% Pioneer. Conservation and environmental staff maps look much the same. These are the people making decisions about how to “re-connect” children and parents with nature but their instincts are way out of kilter with the population as a whole.

For some communications guidance on values matching, see this [note](#), and my book [What Makes People Tick: The Three Hidden Worlds of Settlers, Prospectors and Pioneers](#)

Finally, as well as being values-skewed, the NGO conservation base is small. Put together, once you allow for multiple memberships, the number of people signed up to support groups in some

way trying to protect nature, is probably about 3 million people, or 1 in 20. Even making the generous assumption that these people are all 'nature literate', it is obvious that much wider engagement is required.

## Conclusions

1. Britain is sliding towards national nature-blindness. Because they cannot discern nature themselves, most people are unable to introduce nature to their children, although they say it's a good idea. People of all ages are generally disconnected from nature, and the old links that passed on nature knowledge are broken and need repair.
2. This undermines efforts to stem the onward decline of wild plants and animals because people do not notice it, and means that any successes will tend not to be appreciated.
3. We need a national programme of campaigns and initiatives to reconnect people to nature by enabling them to become nature-literate. This has to involve adults, not just children. It could include:
  - Teaching Natural History at all levels of education
  - Social and cultural initiatives to give people the skills and ability to read nature, recognize its diversity and quality, and identify species in the same way that earlier generations could.
  - Putting authentic nature back into popular culture, eg advertisements
  - Diverting some of the effort and resources put into agri-environment schemes which pay farmers to modify intensive agriculture (some [£400m](#) each year), into public engagement for nature literacy
4. Such a campaign requires the sort of marketing and communications skills and methods that have been used to promote sports, anti-drunk driving and anti-smoking campaigns, equal opportunities and anti-discrimination, and commercially, the promotion of a public appetite for better cooking and wines.
5. Conservation groups need to recognize that simply getting children outdoors, is no guarantee of connection with nature. Government and voluntary-funded projects intended to connect children with nature should measure outcomes in terms of nature-literacy and ability, not simply time spent out of doors, or general attitudes to 'nature'.
6. Effective engagement beyond the narrow 'conservation base' (maybe 1 in 20 ?) will require activities and opportunities that appeal to the psychological groups Prospectors and Settlers as much as Pioneers.
7. Such a campaign will require moments which focus attention on particular species or features of nature, for example if the BBC were to reinstate its former tradition of a [live Nightingale broadcast](#), it could form the centrepiece of an annual 'Nightingale Night'.
8. Such a campaign would also need nature-engaging activities that match lifestages and lifestyles: for example courses for the time-rich (retired ?), and activities and opportunities which entertain children and time-poor parents.
9. A nature-literate Britain must become a widely shared political objective.
10. To achieve such political backing, nature ability and quality must become aspirational, for example by being attached to popular past-times like gardening, and being seen as a desirable feature in gardens and homes.

[1] Why Conservationists Should Heed Pokémon; *Science* -- Balmford et al. 295 (5564): 2367b  
Tuesday, September 3, 2002 109 schoolchildren aged 4 to 11 Andrew Balmford Camb Univ  
Zool

[2] Richard Louv, *Last child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature Deficit Disorder*,  
(Atlantic Books 2010), p 142

Chris Rose is Director of Campaign Strategy Ltd. He runs the campaign planning website  
[www.campaignstrategy.org](http://www.campaignstrategy.org) and is author of numerous books and papers on communications,  
campaigns and the environment.