Nature visuals

Diversity in images of England's green and natural spaces

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NATURAL
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Nature Visuals: Diversity in images of England's green and natural spaces

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Further information

This report can be downloaded from the Natural England Access to Evidence Catalogue: http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/. For information on Natural England publications contact the Natural England Enquiry Service on 0300 060 3900 or e-mail enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk.

Nature visuals: Diversity in images of England's green and natural spaces

Evidence-led strategic guidance to increase engagement with nature and climate through effectively diversifying images of people and nature. This report includes a literature review, insights from stakeholders about problems, needs and opportunities to promote engagement and also recommendations.

About Natural England

Natural England is the UK government's adviser for the natural environment in England, helping to protect England's nature and landscapes for people to enjoy and for the services they provide. Natural England is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra).

Natural England is responsible for:

- promoting nature conservation and protecting biodiversity
- conserving and enhancing the landscape
- securing the provision and improvement of facilities for the study, understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment
- promoting access to the countryside and open spaces and encouraging open-air recreation
- contributing in other ways to social and economic well-being through management of the natural environment,

For further information:

https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england

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About Climate Outreach and Climate Visuals

Climate Outreach is a team of social scientists and communication specialists who are working to widen and deepen public engagement with climate change. Through our research, practical guides and consultancy services, our charity helps organisations communicate about climate change in ways that resonate with the values of their audiences. We have over 15 years' experience of working with a wide range of international partners, including central, regional and local governments, international bodies, charities, businesses, faith organisations and youth groups.

Climate Visuals, a programme of Climate Outreach, is the world's only evidence-based programme and library for climate change, environment and sustainability images. Based on international social research, Climate Visuals aims to strategically change the working practices of visual communicators across the world, to move away from emblematic but broken visual tropes – such as polar bears, melting ice caps and smokestacks – to catalyse a new, more compelling, diverse and impactful visual language.

Climate Visuals has a unique history of commissioning and developing research, including literature reviews, surveys and narrative workshops, into the effectiveness of photography on measured and diverse audiences. Climate Visuals is also uniquely positioned and experienced in taking a broad evidence base into targeted systemic impact and interface with both commercial image libraries, media gatekeepers, content producers and publishers. Climate Visuals manages the Climate Visuals Image Library, a unique and equitable not-for-profit resource containing impactful climate images.

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Foreword by Natural England

Natural England commissions a range of work from external contractors to provide evidence and advice to assist in delivering its duties. The views in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of Natural England.

This report was commissioned by Natural England in response to the evidence from the People and Nature Survey (Natural England 2021a), which shows the variety of ways in which people connect with, enjoy and benefit from nature – something that is not currently fully represented in conservation sector imagery.

The purpose of this report is to present evidence-led guidance to address the key challenges around the lack of inclusion in contemporary nature imagery. Climate Outreach were commissioned to lead this work, recognising their particular expertise in climate communications, and in order to build on their experiences and successes developing Climate Visuals – the world's only evidence-backed programme and library for climate change, environment and sustainability images. This resulting report contains guidance for Nature Visuals that is evidence-led, and underpinned by the literature and qualitative stakeholder interviews presented in the report. Natural England is committed to ensuring the images they use in their work are more inclusive. We hope that the resulting practical evidence-led guide will be of use to across the sector, from communication professionals to anyone wanting to tell a more inclusive story of people and nature, as well as academics and practitioners considering how to develop and use imagery to ensure that it is more reflective of contemporary users and uses of the natural environment.

> *"We are committed to ensuring the images we use as an organisation are more representative of our audiences. We hope this report will provide the stimulus as well as the guidance for others across the sector to do the same."*
> *– Amanda Craig, Director, People and Nature Programme, Natural England*

Acknowledgments

The authors of this report would like to personally thank all of the stakeholders interviewed, those whose content from social media is featured in illustrations or discussions, and the journalists, researchers or authors whose work we have cited and included in this report.

We are extremely grateful for your time, honest reflections and expertise, but most significantly your leadership, commitment and energy in regard to improving equality, equity, diversity and inclusion in both communications and access to nature. We sincerely hope this report and its recommendations can be used to support this work and to promote positive action.

In particular we would like to thank the following:

Judy Ling Wong CBE

Honorary president of the Black Environmental Network, an organisation that 'works for ethnic environmental participation', Judy has decades of experience in community engagement, especially within ethnic minority communities, and acts as a consultant in tackling the themes covered by this report.

Ben Andrew, RSPB

Ben is responsible for sourcing the majority of the RSPB's photographic content through picture research and also oversees its photographic library.

Nicole Itano, Share Verified (202)

Nicole was a television journalist for Al Jazeera before becoming Head of Creative at Save The Children, Director of Media & Content at WWF, and Executive Director of Television for the Environment (TVE).

Maxwell Ayamba, University of Nottingham

Maxwell is a journalist and founder of the Sheffield Environmental Movement, which promotes access to nature for ethnic minority and refugee communities.

Omie Dale, Black Swimming Association

Omie is a communications professional who tackles the barriers to people participating in swimming. She volunteers for Pride in Water and is also a host for Mental Health Swims.

In the course of this work, a number of interviews were carried out with a range of stakeholders. References have been removed from our database to ensure the anonymity of the interviewees. Through the report, some direct quotations have been included from these interviews and these have been anonymised.

Thank you to Getty Images for the licensed images featured in this report and their commitment to increasing both the diversity and authenticity of the people featured in their commercial photography collections.

Executive summary

The available library of images relating to nature in England currently inaccurately represents the diversity of both natural places in a changing climate and the communities engaging with them. Moreover, the images currently in circulation are unlikely to engage well beyond those already interested in 'nature'. This misses the opportunity both to engage a wide range of people on relevant issues, such as climate change and biodiversity loss, and to convey an equitable concept of inclusivity. Moreover, what images are chosen sends signals to an audience about what and who the communicator or organisation values. Throughout this review we encountered the expression that the outdoors is "for white people" and "for certain activities", signalling to many audiences that they should look elsewhere for activities and experiences if they do not fit the traditional stereotype of an 'outdoors person'. This challenge is aggravated by the comparatively small number of diverse or representative images of people in nature offered by most image libraries.

In this report we consider the role of visual storytelling and we explore how images can reinforce known barriers to accessing the natural environment for a wide range of people. Where possible, we offer practical recommendations for moving beyond this and for ensuring that images are more inclusive.

"Let's get more people, from more diverse backgrounds, into this…we are at the cusp of a climate emergency and no one nation is going to solve this alone… It's something that's going to take all of us putting our shoulders to the wheel and we need to get more people in, learning about the outdoor environment… So hopefully they'll learn to love it and go on to want to protect it."

This report is the product of multiple perspectives. It is a mix of insights from existing literature, articles and journalism, the expertise gained from the Climate Visuals programme, and, critically, new primary research. Over 25 hours of interviews were conducted with individuals, including diversity and outdoor influencers from a variety of backgrounds. Unedited but anonymised quotes from these interviews have been used throughout this report to illustrate points using authentic voices. Interviews with communication professionals from within non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also inspired the production of practical guidance around sourcing images for use in this context, which are also presented in this report.

Photo by @bgh_uk from Instagram

Six visual principles emerged from this research and are presented to address a broadened understanding of the diversity of visitors to the natural environment. These conceptual principles should ideally be used in conjunction with our practical recommendations to ensure images created are of, by and for a diverse range of people and stakeholders. The principles are as follows:

Use images to tell positive, identifiable stories

Create authentic representation, not tokenism

Depict diverse activities in diverse landscapes

Connect people to the wonderful diversity of natural places

Include more real people in images

Diversify who is behind the camera and the message

These six principles are illustrated in this report by exemplary content sourced from Getty Images and Instagram accounts from influencers in the outdoor sector. Images have been selected that have different visual and aesthetic qualities, especially authenticity, to help demonstrate some of our outlined visual recommendations and principles. Without a specific campaign, message or audience, they are generic and also include locations beyond the context of England to better illustrate the principles.

"So I think more than ever, it's time that all these outdoor organisations, industries, start taking on these social media sites and using them, putting them to use. Reach the young people and reach them in a format that they understand and that they use, imagery."

This report concludes by presenting how a collaborative and evidence-based image library could catalyse new networks and capacity building, as well as developing impactful visual content. We hope this report and its recommendations are indeed helpful as regards prompting new and continued action in this inclusion space, supported by further research, image production and curation.

Contents

Six principles for nature visuals

1 – Use images to tell positive, identifiable stories

Visuals can capture attention, promote interest and motivate engagement. By showing diverse, identifiable individuals engaged in fulfilling activities in England's natural spaces, these positive representations and narratives will tell a story that enhances feelings of inclusivity and belonging. These are critical for motivating new experiences among those who are typically left out of traditional outdoor narratives.

[Walk through the park with my dad](#) / Getty Images

Photo by [@themirnavator](#) from Instagram

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2 – Create authentic representation, not tokenism

Authenticity is a critical foundation for telling an empowering, inclusive story that audiences will connect with. Stock imagery and staged portraits may provide a veneer of representation but are not empowering and may backfire if they are perceived as inauthentic or merely symbolic (i.e., tokenistic). Display real images of diverse individuals enjoying a variety of natural spaces in ways that can connect with them on a personal level.

Child playing in the park / Getty Images

flocktogether.world · Following
Sydenham Hill Wood

flocktogether.world Come rain or shine! Another beautiful walk with the flock on Sunday. 🎥 @will_carr #birdgang
50 w

twaynamayne ✓ This must have been amazing, these are my local woods, whenever I'm in there I don't often see any other black and brown people. 😕
50 w 7 likes Reply

View replies (1)

_wildfinds Wonderful! I'm going to head there this weekend. Looks like everyone had a great time spotting interesting things!
50 w 1 like Reply

rosebuddworldwide @mayyanna_ such a beautiful face 😍
50 w 2 likes Reply

Liked by will_carr and 836 others
DECEMBER 15, 2020

Add a comment...   Post

Photo by @flocktogether.world from Instagram

3 – Depict diverse activities in diverse landscapes

The cultural narrative of outdoor engagement and what it means to enjoy the outdoors is dominated by a narrow subset of landscapes, activities and people. Enhance and expand representation to break through harmful stereotypes and embrace different or new visual narratives of spaces, people and activities.

Wild swimming women's group autumnal swim / Getty Images

Photo by @birdgirluk from Instagram

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4 – Connect people to the wonderful diversity of natural places – from urban parks to national landscapes

The vast majority of people live in towns and cities, and Natural England research shows that most outdoor experiences occur in urban green spaces. Yet the most common imagery of England's natural spaces focuses on the countryside. Increasing the visual representation of urban green spaces and the variety of activities in those spaces will help to connect a wide range of people. It is not just the 'far away', the 'special' and designated landscapes which are important for people and their well-being. Craft visual stories that connect the activities people enjoy in a wide range of spaces. This could be walking a tree-lined urban avenue or walking a national trail, a day trip to a city park or to a National Park – making connections about how people enjoy nature in a range of places everyday as well as on holidays.

Salisbury Crags, Holyrood Park in Edinburgh / Getty Image

Photo by @flocktogether.world from Instagram

5 – Include more real people in images

Images of idyllic countryside tend to dominate the visual story, while only partially representing the many reasons people enjoy the outdoors. Peoples' outdoor and landscape preferences are diverse and unique. Broaden the visual narrative and connect natural spaces to peoples' everyday lives by capturing the many ways people use the outdoors to connect with friends and family, as well as with nature.

Four friends posing together during a hike on Mount Snowdon, Wales / Getty Images

mssophiepierce · Following

mssophiepierce Deep in a dappled Cornish river valley. #wildswimmingwalkscornwall

73 w

51 likes

JULY 6, 2020

Add a comment...   Post

Photo by @mssophiepierce from Instagram

6 – Diversify who is behind the camera and the message

Improving the 'who', 'what', and 'where' of outdoor imagery is only one part of the solution: diversifying who is behind the camera and designing the wider communications will help ensure greater authenticity and empowerment of those being captured in images. A diverse group of individuals are already hard at work harnessing the power of social media to shift the outdoor narrative by documenting their own stories and experiences. Work with and learn from these individuals to create new visuals.

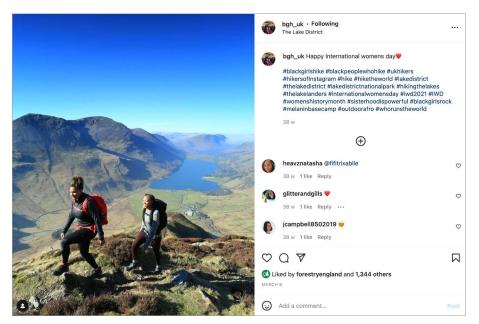A woman, friend, strong, fierce and beautiful / Getty Images

Photo by @bgh_uk from Instagram

Recommendations for developing inclusive nature visuals

The following is a collation of recommendations, advice, insights and solutions developed based on our findings, which should be used in collaboration with our six principles. These recommendations can be used by a range of organisations seeking to develop more inclusive nature visuals.

Sourcing or managing existing imagery

- experiment with keyword and search strategies in how you source imagery
- create a simple internal image library or system, to store, organise and track image use
- utilise sales teams within commercial image libraries to help find effective content

Creation or acquisition of new imagery

- commission diverse photographers from and within the audiences you wish to reach
- develop and consider new representations in outdoor digital media
- commission new photography strategically, with capacity building and co-owned images

Evaluation, curation and checking the contexts of images

- review and diversify the images across all organisational content and publications
- consider the caption, context, messaging, structure and effect of existing and new images
- adapt measures of success to favour messaging for impact and new audiences
- develop clear guidelines and safeguarding measures around collaboration and sharing images
- create feedback loops to measure effectiveness, impact and message testing

Resources

- secure greater capacity and resources to manage, commission and license imagery
- ensure that communications, including specific activities around equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), are budgeted for
- invest in imagery that can drive cultural and organisational change beyond communications

Greater inclusivity of creators, staff and external contractors

- allow Instagram and social media takeovers by new and authentic guest contributors
- invest time in real and digital social networking with audiences and grassroots organisations
- identify new groups or individuals and build sincere relationships around common goals
- raise the profile of EDI needs internally and develop dedicated fund-raising ideas
- work towards true organisational diversity through diverse recruitment
- combat cultures of disengagement and fears of harassment and discrimination
- co-create realistic and measurable EDI goals linked to communication resources
- procure and work sustainably with external diversity expertise
- avoid extractive consultancy and ensure diversity consultants or knowledge are paid for

Research around content

- research to understand and uncover the real needs of diverse groups
- diversify activities and communications to meet the real needs of diverse audiences
- conduct message and image testing with existing and new audiences

Introduction: the role of visual storytelling in reshaping the outdoor experience

> *"In the world of instant everything, people don't always know what to think about stuff straight away. That's where the image is quite important, particularly to capture that authenticity."*
> *– Senior campaigner at an environmental organisation*

This review synthesises the evidence regarding narratives of inclusion and their relation to England's outdoor spaces, and it identifies barriers and potential solutions in this area. As ornithologist and outdoors advocate Mya-Rose Craig has said: "There is a mono ethnic view of how our society should engage with nature which excludes [visible minority ethnic] experiences" (Craig 2019). However, issues concerning inclusion in outdoor spaces do impact on other communities also (for example, those living in low-income areas), so this review seeks to be broad in its exploration. Shifting this "mono-ethnic view" requires new stories, new role models, and authentic, inclusive *visual representations* of England, its landscape, and people and activities, that transcend "traditional" stock portraits and idyllic outdoor photographs. It is vital that people feel seen and represented authentically in outdoor imagery. In this report we highlight learnings from the on-the-ground efforts of diverse photographers and social media influencers who are doing the work of reframing what it means to be an outdoors-engaged person in England. Throughout this report, findings from interviews with stakeholders representing groups who historically have been underrepresented in nature imagery are also included and relevant quotes serve to illustrate the points that are made.

Visual imagery is critical for capturing awareness of, spurring interest in, and fostering engagement with the outdoors. Images of idyllic landscapes, wildlife, woodlands and scenic beaches are ubiquitous in outdoor magazines, advertisements for parks and recreation areas, and popular media. Visuals have long been the cornerstone of environmental advocacy and awareness-raising, and are increasingly recognised as a vital part of climate change communication (e.g. O'Neill and Smith 2014; Rebich-Hespanha et al. 2015; Seppänen and Väliverronen, 2003).

While the study of visuals in environmental and scientific communication is a growing field (Hansen & Machin, 2013; O'Neill 2017), recent research has repeatedly reinforced the idea that careful selection of visual imagery and narratives can promote interest in and engagement with conservation-related topics (Lewandowsky and Whitmarsh 2018; Lazard and Atkinson 2015; Gulliver, Chapman, Solly, and Schultz 2020; Chapman, Corner, Webster, and Markowitz 2016). Effective visual imagery can foster interest in and engagement with the outdoors more broadly, and can promote a culture of outdoors engagement and environmental concern in England.

In an economy that is increasingly dominated by fast-paced information processing and social media, visual imagery, in the form of photography and brief videos, can perhaps play a more central role in communication than at any time in recent memory (Wang, Corner, Chapman, and Markowitz 2018; Finkler and Leon 2019). Our full review highlights significant inclusion issues in England's outdoor culture, including the need to diversify organisations, improve access and rectify social inequities that privilege and reinforce stereotypes of the outdoors. Such efforts are essential for making meaningful progress toward genuine inclusion. The core focus of this review and a key area of contribution for Climate Visuals is examining the role of visual imagery and new visual approaches in shifting the dominant outdoor culture from one of exclusion to one of inclusion.

In this report we draw on research, including from Climate Visuals, on the importance of images in environmental communications, and we discuss the limited findings on visuals in outdoor spaces specifically related to inclusion. Importantly, we put a spotlight on recent efforts to improve representations of diversity in outdoor media undertaken by diverse content creators on online platforms.

Young male athlete training in a woodland gym / Getty Images

A wealth of evidence, including a Public Health England review (2020) has found compelling evidence that natural spaces really matter for our health, formally recognising that green environments are associated with reduced levels of depression, anxiety, cardiovascular disease and obesity, and can enhance quality of life for both children and adults. It noted that people living in the most economically deprived areas have fewer opportunities to reap the benefits, and that if everyone had access to good-quality green space the NHS could save an estimated £2.1 billion every year in treatment costs (Bevan 2020).

Issues of disparities in England's outdoors have significant implications for individual well-being, community health and broader cultural values. The variety of outdoor spaces in England, including its 10 National Parks, 34 Areas of Natural Beauty (AONBs), and myriad urban green spaces and blue spaces offer visitors the opportunity to exercise, spend time with family and friends, engage in recreational activities and sightsee natural features. Such experiences offer many physical, psychological and social benefits to the individual and contribute to the cultural value of England's outdoor spaces. Outdoor experiences can serve to reduce stress, improve life satisfaction and sustain physiological health (Natural England 2016a; Natural England 2019; Natural England 2020).

[Father and son play in an urban park / Getty Images](#)

Safe and accessible urban green spaces are promising for offering greater community building, providing a key location to enhance social capital and promoting community cohesion (Liu et al. [2020](#)). Experiences in these spaces can help facilitate a culture of community environmental concern while promoting connectedness to nature and supporting values of conservation, biodiversity and environmental protection. A broad understanding of these benefits has been obtained through survey data collected over a decade by Natural England (Natural England [2019](#); Martin et al. [2020](#)). As England's outdoor spaces continue to face challenges from climate change, biodiversity loss and funding limitations, it is vital to nurture a culture of environmental protection in the broader population. Fostering a culture of inclusivity is central to this, but as the 2019 Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) Landscapes Review highlights:

'Many communities in modern Britain feel that these landscapes hold no relevance for them. The countryside is seen by both black, Asian, and minority ethnic groups and white people as very much a 'white' environment. If that is true today, then the divide is only going to widen as society changes. Our countryside will end up being irrelevant to the country that actually exists.' (Defra [2018](#), p. 70)

The way outdoor spaces are used and represented therefore needs to be equitable, diverse and inclusive of people from all walks of life.

This report firstly presents a literature review, which outlines some of the barriers to engaging with nature for diverse populations and the implications of this for visual choices. It then summarises the method used for stakeholder engagement and presents a summary of the main points obtained from these conversations, to provide a richer and more personal narrative around these issues. Some recommendations for developing new representations in nature visuals are then presented, before drawing together some conclusions from this work.

Literature review methodology and scope

To gain insights into the main issues around inclusion and outdoor spaces, we conducted a thematic literature review of literature from the past decade. To locate resources, we used public databases and government websites (e.g. Natural England's Access to Evidence Portal (Natural England 2021b). We also used a variety of keyword and phrase searches within Google, Google Scholar and academic databases (e.g. Scopus) to find relevant content.

Given the remit of this review, we focused our literature review on England specifically, and only included findings from other global contexts when deemed especially relevant. Our search process returned several hundred potentially relevant government reports, white and grey literature, peer-reviewed journal articles, magazine and newspaper articles, as well as blogs and social media posts. Our final selection of sources used in producing this review was determined based on the relevance to key topics and themes that emerged.

We cast our net as wide as possible in terms of inclusion-related writing in the English context, focusing on issues pertinent to ethnic minority populations, different age groups, classes, abilities and body sizes. However, our searches for coverage of these issues overwhelmingly returned insights pertaining to ethnic diversity. As such, at times in this review there is an undeniable slant in coverage towards the topic of ethnic representation in nature. This in and of itself highlights an important gap in scholarship that must be addressed by organisations, scholars and activists, although it is almost certainly a reflection of critical cultural flashpoints in recent years, such as the global impact of the Black Lives Matter movement.

This review focuses as much as possible on findings specific to England, in part given the remit of Natural England, who commissioned this work. There is, however, an additional rationale for this particular emphasis. First, the sheer scope of inclusion-related topics covered in this review would become unwieldy if we attempted to consider all potentially relevant issues from the entire international arena, including the need to give appropriate and sensitive attention to diverse cultural and geographical differences across societies. The search fields and techniques used were deliberately chosen to present the background issues but also to inform both the production of the distilled principles while supporting the conversation and insights from the qualitative interview phase. Simultaneously, particular emphasis was placed on reviewing documentation or literature that might inform the more hybrid and practical recommendations of this report.

While it is possible to derive some important insights from other regions where research has been conducted (the United States and the Netherlands are two particularly notable examples), the substantial differences in physical, cultural and political landscapes means that such insights have limited applicability. This is reflected in the different classifications and terminologies embedded in the language of diversity: for example, in the context of ethnic diversity, the United States focuses on 'people of color' (primarily African, Hispanic, Asian and Native American populations), the Netherlands focuses on "immigrant populations" in the absence of detailed ethnic diversity data released on their population, and England commonly covers ethnicity topics under the umbrella of 'black, Asian, and minority ethnic' (BAME) communities. In addition to our geographical remit, where possible we also constrain our coverage to the most recent and relevant data available, in order to maintain maximal societal relevance in a rapidly changing cultural landscape. While we do expand this scope to cover certain older works in the international landscape, due to the sheer dearth of literature on some topics, ultimately this review reflects a broad synthesis of evidence rather than an exhaustive account of all inclusion-related research.

We have done our best to consider all aspects of inclusion in discussing barriers and structuring our recommendations for new visual narratives, although future efforts are necessary to faithfully assess the complete scope. The following sections highlight our findings from this literature review around the barriers to engaging with nature for different groups, and the implications of these for nature visuals.

Barriers to engaging with nature and implications for visual choices

In order to consider the role of visual storytelling in re-shaping the outdoor experience so that more people feel that the natural environment is relevant to them, it is important first to ground efforts in a firm understanding of the barriers to greater outdoor engagement among England's diverse population, and the implications these barriers have for visual choices. These barriers range from structural to cultural, although the distinction between the two is rarely clean cut.

While we focus on the visual narrative, we recognise the need to address the structural barriers at the heart of the problem and we stress the necessity of other forms of action around inclusion. Focusing only on cultural narratives and visual framing around inclusion without wider structural change is insufficient and may backfire. The following paragraphs outline some of these issues.

> "If you don't even know that stuff exists you're never going to do it. And if you don't see people like you doing it, then you're not going to think it's for you. And also, you know, talk about the financial and practical barriers in terms of transport."
> – Representative, NGO

A lack of organisational diversity

A 2017 report by Policy Exchange found that environmental professions were the second least diverse of 202 occupations (Norrie 2017). The composition of environmental organisations' boards of directors are not an indicator of improvement either; for example, of the National Park and AONB boards, 68% are male, 0.8% are BAME, no members are under 25, and the average member age is 64 for parks and 54 for AONBs (Defra 2018).

The lack of organisational diversity carries significant implications for the environmental sector in England. A lack of diversity means that organisations may not be aware of, let alone capable of knowing how to address, foundational issues in communities when it comes to policy, programming and outreach. This applies equally to issues of disability as it does to ethnic diversity. The absence of role models in positions of influence further reduces the visibility of 'non-traditional' members of the environmental community, reinforcing the perception of exclusivity in environmental professions in England.

> "There's no diversity in the conservation sector. The government should engage with environmental organisations that are run by minority groups who have got years of experience and build a trust and relationship with some of these groups, to give them the funding for them to become resilient and sustainable so we could use them as a vehicle to reach out to groups that we want to reach out to."
> – Representative, NGO

Without representation in positions of power and visibility, it will be difficult to shift the perception for some that the outdoors is not for them. While this makes it even more vital to use visual representations to depict the diversity that does exist, and to put a spotlight on those who are in positions of leadership who come from a diverse background, without systemic change such visuals may appear tokenistic and only serve to gloss over the underlying issues.

> "It's fine doing a photo shoot but what are the organisations doing behind that? There's no structural changes behind that so it doesn't mean anything...But what's the context? What's the background? What are you doing behind it? And I think that needs to be up front to say this is what our plan is and this is what we're doing and we would like to engage with you around this."
> – Outdoor specialist, MOSAIC

Unequal access to high-quality outdoor spaces

While urban green spaces are the most frequently visited natural areas in England, there are significant disparities in terms of access to, and safety and quality of, green spaces (Rigolon 2016; Ferguson, Roberts, McEachan and Dallimer 2018; de Zylva, Godon-Smith, and Childs 2020). Natural England's data suggests that 60% of white respondents regularly walk through local green spaces on their way to other places, compared with 44% for Asian respondents and just 30% for black respondents. According to an analysis by Friends of the Earth, nearly 40% of individuals from BAME backgrounds live in areas of England's cities deemed to be the most green space-deprived. Individuals from BAME backgrounds are nearly twice as likely to live in such an area as white populations (de Zylva, Godon-Smith, and Childs 2020). Other survey data from Natural England indicates that only 19% of BAME respondents feel that there are appealing green spaces within easy walking distance of their homes, compared to 33% of white respondents (Natural England 2019a). This issue of perceived access to high-quality green spaces is not limited to ethnicity alone: among the most deprived 20% of the population (as indexed by the multiple deprivation index; Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government 2019), just 23% feel green spaces are within easy walking distances, compared with 38% for the 20% least deprived segment of the population (Natural England 2019a).

People with disabilities face additional obstacles in terms of accessing outdoor spaces. Analyses from Natural England, including a variety of interviews with people with disabilities who are also passionate about the outdoors, highlight issues including accessibility due to stile design, limitations on where dogs are allowed to travel, poor signage, and poorly kept trailways that make it harder for those with canes, walkers or wheelchairs to navigate (Natural England 2007; Natural England 2018a). In one set of survey profiles with disabled respondents, multiple individuals cited the desire for more guided tours, audio tours and group activities so that they could feel safe and have support on their journey through the outdoors (Natural England 2007).

> *"I also find one of the things is you see a lot of people outdoors always in branded clothing, and that's problematic as lots of people can't afford that."*
> *– Outdoor specialist, MOSAIC*

Access to many outdoor activities may also be affected by concerns about the cost of gear. Hiking, climbing and swimming are expensive activities, and when funds are limited this is likely to be low on the priority list for people, particularly those who have low incomes. This prohibitive cost of access makes it even more vital for there to be free and subsidised outdoor programmes for communities who have historically been excluded from outdoor spaces in England.

> *"It's actually important to break away from the stereotype of having to wear certain things in the outdoors so that people don't feel like they have to conform to sort of uniform when they're outside."*
> *– Young ambassador, NGO*

Limited nature engagement programmes to meet the needs of a diverse population

"What I really want is someone who is as passionate about the environment as I am, and who has the knowledge to describe it accurately and in detail – friends can't always do that!" – a visually impaired outdoor enthusiast (Natural England 2007, p. 19).

Due to resources, funding and staffing limitations, there are simply not enough outdoors engagement programmes in England currently, ranging from childhood outdoor education to nature walks and guided tours for adults (Defra 2018). Such programmes are opportunities to nurture greater understanding and appreciation of the natural environment, especially when fostered early

in childhood (Natural England 2019b). The absence of relevant programmes is a significant missed opportunity to engage England's diverse population with the outdoors (Defra 2018).

Programmes related to nature are also a critical opportunity to promote inclusion in outdoor spaces, through depicting those that do not fit the traditional stereotype of an 'outdoors person' in England. In a Natural England report on people with disabilities and outdoor spaces, multiple interviewees mentioned a desire for more guided tours and audio support for the visually impaired. These are vital activities for those with impairments, which can help to make regular trail use easier (Natural England 2007). For many diverse communities, outdoor programmes can provide safe opportunities to engage with unfamiliar spaces. Without such programming, the uncertainties of going into new spaces, and lack of knowledge and resources, can create a cycle of exclusion.

Outdoor programmes have proven to be successful in promoting diverse engagement, particularly the development of community-led programmes involving diverse role models. The MOSAIC model is one such example, in which community 'influencers' are recruited, trained and given the resources to run programmes (Natural England 2016b). One of the chief promises of programmes such as MOSAIC is that it puts diverse communities in positions of leadership, visibly increasing representation while also enabling more in-depth community insights. Drawing on such approaches, another successful example comes from the Lindley Educational Trust in England and the Shadwell Basin Outdoor Centre in Scotland, in partnership with the Outward Bound Trust, who launched a year-long outdoor leadership training course specifically for ethnic minority youth. The programme focused on putting young individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds in mentorship positions to lead activities (O'Brien 2020).

"Another idea I had was that I identified that lots of teenagers want to learn how to use YouTube, so, I organised a free film-making workshop in an inner-city park for [visible minority ethnic] teenagers which was run by local TV film-makers. We used nature as a forum for the workshop, which was sold out, where the teenagers came to learn about something they were interested in. I call this 'nature by stealth'. Many of the teenagers who attended this event, then came to our nature camp a few weeks later." – Mya-Rose Craig (2019)

Such activities should be encouraged and documented visually, in collaboration with diverse groups. Diverse audiences passionately engaging in a wide variety of activities within outdoor spaces is powerful content to help reshape the visual landscape.

"Using visual images of nature can really help to transform people's assumptions and understand the natural environment and to get them interested in wanting to learn more about the environment, to take action. But if you don't approach it in that way and you want to use a scientific method, then people feel alienated. People won't have that ownership of something that they can't understand. And that's why imagery is so important in conveying that message visually for people to understand what is going on"
– Representative, Walk4Health

Fear of harassment and discrimination

"I am not like your normal white adventurer. Sometimes, prayer times fall during a walk so I might have to stop and pray, which can cause more unwanted attention and stares. It shouldn't be something to be gawked at. While I mostly welcome questions, sometimes I just want to enjoy my time outdoors and switch off." (Parveen 2020)

Concerns about harassment, discrimination, violence or simply appearing 'out of place' were a repeated theme that emerged in our review (Morris and O'Brien 2011; Defra 2018; Fatinikun 2020). Individuals in England's outdoor spaces that do not meet the traditional image of what an 'outdoors person' looks like in England may be subject to experiences ranging from uncomfortable to dangerous, and it is understandable that even one such experience may be enough to demotivate outdoor engagement. While reshaping the visual narrative of the outdoors cannot

immediately address such problems, increasing representation of diverse communities engaged in a wide array of outdoor activities could contribute to shifting cultural perceptions.

"If you don't have people around you, trying to encourage you to try and do something that's not regarded as 'normal' in our community, you're not going to do it." – Anonymous ethnic minority youth participant in an Outdoors for All programme (O'Brien 2020, p. 19).

"I'm a backpacker, I'm a climber, I'm an outdoors person. So sometimes it feels good for me if people could just take the plus size adventurer, plus size influencer label off."
– Influencer

Cultures of disengagement

One of the key issues highlighted in our review of barriers to engaging in outdoor spaces is a culture of exclusion that leaves many groups out of the traditional narrative of who participates in the outdoors, and how. Increasing the representation of diverse individuals in the outdoors, and telling new, more inclusive stories, is vital for changing the cultural narrative, increasing interest and fostering engagement among diverse audiences. This core issue of representation in outdoor narratives is echoed by advocates such as Rhiane Fatinikun, founder of Black Girls Hike: "Representation matters, it's important to see people you identify with – that's what inspires people" (Morris 2019).

Fears of harassment and discrimination create a cultural context in which entire communities may see themselves as excluded from the outdoors. This sentiment can lead to a self-sustaining cycle in which communities seek out alternative activities and form norms around avoiding outdoor experiences, thus viewing them as counter-normative and reinforcing boundaries on (dis) engagement (Scott and Lee 2018). Quotes from individuals involved in outdoor programmes in England and Scotland have repeatedly echoed this sentiment:

"I think it's an ethnicity thing too, I feel like if I were to tell a British white person [that I do outdoor activities], they probably have an idea of what it is, they probably do walking and things like that, but if I were to tell people of ethnicity that I was doing it, they have the view that it's not cool. Their families aren't people who... well, people I know who are of ethnic minority, aren't encouraging or don't have the means to find outdoor activities." – Anonymous ethnic minority youth participant in an Outdoors for All programme (O'Brien 2020, p 19).

Inclusion in visualisations of the outdoors

"Images of and articles about only white people are very alienating, especially when entire programmes, websites and magazines are without a single [visible ethnic minority] face. This reinforces the idea that nature is not for us" (environmental activist).

There is, unfortunately, a significant lack of research on representations of diversity in outdoor visuals, particularly in England. To our knowledge, there have been no analyses of dominant themes or trends in outdoor promotional materials or magazine/website imagery in England. Additionally, research on the role of visuals in climate change communication has not explicitly investigated the role of depictions of diversity in climate change imagery. In many ways this past research has reinforced the exclusion of diverse audiences, perhaps with the exception of depicting vulnerable people's experiences of climate change impacts – hardly an empowering frame of reference.

In parallel with this report, Natural England commissioned qualitative interviews with a small but diverse group of people, with ages ranging from 17 to 70, different ethnicities and including those who identified as disabled. The interviews asked what nature meant to them and about their experiences with photographic representations of nature and outdoor spaces. The findings of this

study (Acott, 2021) have been published alongside this report. Key issues emerging from Acott (2021) included the following:

- There are a wide range of different meanings of nature and a range of activities that people undertake within a range of natural settings (from urban to rural). This plurality opens up many opportunities for photographic representations of nature, yet participants felt organisations prioritised narrow, aesthetic representations of nature at the expense of other depictions (including the ugly, messy, scary and ordinary nature).
- Participants conveyed a sense of the strength of feeling about the importance of representing human diversity (including ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, among others), and the importance of nuance and intersectionality, coupled with the perception that nature/outdoor photography does not adequately represent these.
- Photography has the potential to not only reflect people's experiences of nature, but to present nature in new ways that might challenge existing preconceptions and develop more holistic representations of nature/culture.
- The conversation could be expanded from thinking about a final photograph to thinking about how that photograph was produced and subsequently used. This process-orientated perspective raises the issues of who was taking the photograph and why, with the suggestion that there needs to be a diversity of photographers as well as photographs.

Despite the limited research in the UK context, there have been several studies of depictions of diversity in outdoor visuals in the United States, the Netherlands, and on social media. In an analysis of visual imagery in three US-based outdoor magazines between 2011 and 2014, Frazer and Anderson (2018) found that nearly 98% of images depicted white-appearing people. Just 0.2% of images in these magazines depicted non-able-bodied individuals. Gender representation was better, although still inadequate, with 24% to 39.9% of imagery depicting women. Their analysis also sought to examine gender differences in high- versus low-risk outdoor activities (e.g. walking and hiking vs. mountaineering); nearly 75% of images depicting high-risk activities showed males. There were so few depictions of non-white and non-able-bodied individuals that it was not feasible to perform an analysis of low- vs. high-risk activities for these audiences. As the authors are keen to note, these numbers stand in contrast to estimates of outdoor activities across diverse groups collected by the US-based Outdoor Foundation (2014), indicating that these depictions are at odds with actual outdoor activity participation. These findings must be interpreted with caution, however, as the analysis only comes from three outdoor magazines: Backpacker, Climbing and Rock and Ice.

Researchers in the Netherlands recently performed a content analysis of depictions of race/ethnicity in four governmental and non-governmental Dutch conservation organisations (Kloek, Elands, and Schouten 2017). While a very different context from the US research, their findings were not any more encouraging. Of the 6,132 images in promotional materials that contained identifiable images of people, 94% of the images showed exclusively white-appearing individuals. Non-white individuals appeared in roughly 3.8% of images, and less than 2% of images exclusively portrayed non-white audiences. The authors also found that non-white audiences were more likely to be shown in large groups rather than on their own; in images containing non-whites, there was an average of 7.6 people present, whereas in images of exclusively white audiences the average was 3.3.

The content analysis of Dutch conservation imagery also uncovered interesting insights regarding intersectionality. In images depicting white individuals, nearly one-third depicted elderly individuals. In contrast, the vast majority of images of non-white individuals depicted children. Insights also emerged regarding race and location. Images of exclusively non-white individuals were depicted most often in urban green spaces (3.5%), compared to images of agricultural spaces, forests and bodies of water (1%, 1.8% and 0.6%, respectively). The authors also found that the majority (64%) of images did not show any people at all. The dominant activity depicted in most images was "posing", i.e. a clear stock or staged photograph of someone or a group outdoors.

A recent qualitative study examined the role of cultural narratives around race, gender, sexuality and body size and how they are represented in popular content on Instagram hiking pages. While the article itself makes no attempt to quantify patterns of representation, it does make a critical point about the importance of visual representation and how, if unchecked, visual choices on these platforms can reinforce harmful narratives. For example, while the author highlights the growing popularity of a variety of women-focused outdoor pages, many of these pages retain a 'traditional' narrative of women in the outdoors. The most popular of these accounts featured women that were "white, young, heterosexual, and conventionally attractive" (Stanley 2020, p. 9). Almost none of the accounts they examined showed depictions of women hiking alone, reinforcing the idea that the outdoors is not a safe place for women to be alone. However, these platforms can also provide a voice to diverse communities and many articles note how examples of activism and empowerment through visual depictions on these sites can be a critical aid in reshaping cultural narratives.

Some other academic scholarship suggests that past experiences and cultural heritages may partially shape different visual preferences for outdoor imagery. For example, some studies in the US find that African American and Latino/a communities show more preference for images of managed landscapes than for images of wild spaces, in part due to concerns about safety and a history of remote outdoor spaces being a place of violence imposed on their communities (Kaplan 1988; Scotland Lee 2018). A study from the Netherlands found that first-generation immigrants preferred images of managed over wild landscapes (Buijs, Elands and Langers 2009), potentially in part due to experiences in their countries of origin. This sentiment is echoed by anecdotal reports from Defra's Landscape Review:

"In conversations with non-visitors – young people at a youth club with family origins from Slovakia, Lithuania, Bangladesh and Pakistan – we heard that their perceptions of National Parks in England are influenced by national parks in their countries of origin. These are perhaps places of danger due to animals or lack of maintenance, and often incur an entrance charge, and they have no reason to expect National Parks in England to be any different." (Defra 2018, p. 70).

Several very important caveats are necessary about this work, however. First, this research primarily comes from nations with different cultural contexts to England. Further, if such preferences also apply for diverse groups within the UK, this does not necessarily mean that images of wild spaces will turn everyone away. Rather, it means that the cultural and visual narrative must be changed to ensure that these communities are able to see these spaces as welcoming, safe and exciting. Further research is needed with diverse groups in England to understand more fully how spaces can be rendered more welcoming, and how imagery can help in this regard.

Effective imagery of England's outdoor spaces must transform its practices to more authentically engage with and listen to diverse communities, spark interest in outdoors engagement and encourage a wide array of activities. As Kloek et al. (2017) state: "If visual imagery gives a limited and stereotypical picture of racial/ethnic minorities or non-whites, this may contribute to a (re) production of stereotypes in society and a view of white being the norm" (Kloek, Elands and Schouten 2017, p. 1,034). We suspect this applies equally to inclusion issues unrelated to ethnicity as well. One way to shift this narrative is to change who and what is depicted in typical outdoor visual imagery, as well as who is in control of such depictions.

"… I was so tired of seeing the same kind of person on seemingly every social media-based hiking community. The image of the outdoor adventurer is White, thin, 'fit' and straight-looking. Often, moneyed (read: top of the line gear). Often, a man." – Jenny Bruso, Founder of Unlikely Hikers (Stanley 2020, p. 2)

Disparities within outdoor experiences

Disparities in outdoor experiences vary across age, ethnicity, ability and class. Young, elderly, ethnic minority, disabled and lower-income residents of England are less likely to experience the same quantity or quality of outdoor space compared with their middle-aged, white, able-bodied economically privileged counterparts (Natural England 2019a). The need to promote inclusive access to outdoor spaces in England has been raised as an even more pressing issue in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The value of, and need for, outdoor experiences is perhaps more salient now than at any time in recent memory. Indeed, recent data from Natural England suggests that visits to outdoor spaces have been on the rise since COVID-19 (Natural England 2021c; RSPB 2021).

However, while able-bodied, economically well-off residents of England may have the means to access high-quality outdoor spaces more regularly for safe, socially distanced outdoor experiences, the same may not be true for those residing in population-dense and more deprived urban areas. Data from Natural England suggests that there have been disparities in outdoors engagement during the COVID pandemic, especially along the lines of income and age, as well as ethnicity (albeit to a smaller degree; Natural England 2021d). The pandemic makes the importance of promoting inclusion in outdoor spaces arguably more important than ever – ensuring everyone, no matter their background or where they live, has the opportunity to access green spaces.

Four generations farming / Getty Images

Diversity of visitors to England's outdoor spaces

A brief overview of the issues around inclusion from the People and Nature Survey in England

In April 2020, Natural England launched the People and Nature Survey. This survey is used to compile new official statistics using a large representative sample (25,000 people per year), which reveal views about nature and experiences from across the country and population groups. The results of the survey are released monthly and are available here.
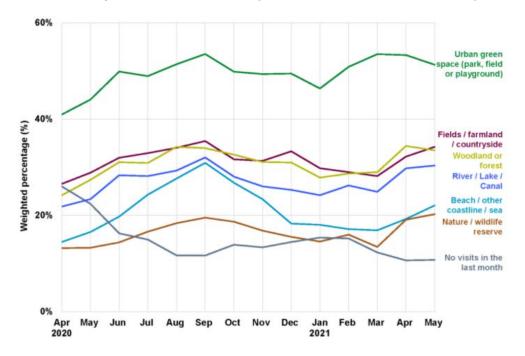
Most people's experience of nature takes place on their doorstep and there are a wide range of natural places that the population enjoys, but access is not equal across the population.

In 2021, there were over 350 million visits to green and natural spaces per month (May 2021), with urban green spaces most frequently visited.

Six out of 10 of all adults visit a green and natural space frequently (at least once in the last 14 days prior to the survey being carried out).

The likelihood of visiting a green and natural space and the total number of visits made differs by household income and age. For example, of those earning more than £50,000, 75% of adults reported spending time in nature, compared to 44% of those earning less than £15,000. Older adults aged 65+ are twice as likely not to get out in nature, compared to younger adults aged 25–39 years (30% compared to 17%).

Just over four out of 10 adults said nature/wildlife and visiting green and natural spaces had been even more important to their wellbeing since coronavirus restrictions began.

Which green and natural spaces did you visit in the last month? All adults in England (Natural England, People and Nature Survey, May 2021)

Stakeholder interviews – methodology

Over 25 hours of stakeholder interviews were conducted to 1) learn more about the implications and infrastructure behind visuals in nature communications, and 2) identify perceived barriers and solutions in regard to developing approaches to nature visuals. The network of formal and informal organisations, charities, media channels, academics, influencers and individuals that support, contribute, distribute and create imagery associated with the multitude of outdoor life across England is complex and interlinked.

The stakeholder database developed for this work includes over 90 individuals, including professional communicators from within large and small NGOs or nature-focused organisations. It also particularly focused on individuals, leaders and direct voices from ethnic minorities and diverse personal and professional backgrounds who combine lived experience with showing leadership, initiative or reflection on these issues.

The wider database deliberately spans individuals selected from:

- government communicators
- local authority communicators
- corporate communicators
- NGO communicators
- charity communicators
- community groups communicators
- grassroots organisations
- picture libraries
- picture researchers
- professional photographers
- amateur photographers

- Instagram influencers
- Instagram users
- outdoor enthusiasts
- outdoor guides
- outdoor consultants
- outdoor influencers
- role models
- academics
- media managers
- advisory panels
- EDI leaders

Stakeholders were then aggregated into subgroups related to their job title, experience and expertise to facilitate decisions around what themes and topics it would be most appropriate and insightful to discuss. The groups identified were:

- influencers and content generators
- communications staff
- photography specialists
- academic and policy stakeholders
- outdoor sector stakeholders

An honorarium was made available upon request to ensure fair participation and to recognise that people from different backgrounds and levels of income need to be compensated for their time and expertise, to avoid the concept of 'extractive consultation'.

The opinions and perspectives of our interviewees are summarised in Section 6, where quotes help to bring their contributions to life. The vast range of expertise and hands-on experience of the stakeholders is unique and is central to this work, and to the insights and recommendations presented. Interviews were semi-structured and were steered by our discussion guide. Clear and informed consent was given by interviewees before taking part (see Appendix 2).

From the discussions with over 20 stakeholders, multiple and overlapping barriers were logged. Barriers are defined here as areas where systemic limiting factors prevent effective progress towards equality, diversity and inclusion within imagery. Stakeholders were asked to describe specific problems around the use of images in publicly available depictions of the outdoors generally, which were analysed by theme. Considering both the barriers to wider representation and engagement in nature visuals and the wider context helped to yield pragmatic solutions of different scales.

Stakeholder interviews – observations

Lack of diversity within staff and of photographers

> "You can't represent something if it's not within your organisation already...I think there is a big lack of diversity within these organisations and it does show in their comms. People want to see a wider commitment to diversity. So [acknowledge] your plans this year, or what you're going to do, etc. Addressing the issues and not ignoring it, because people do know if you have said anything about this [issue] or not."
> – Representative, Black Swimming Association

Barrier

The lack of diversity that is often apparent in organisations' communications teams and operations, as well as within external stakeholders, it was the barrier spoken of most frequently throughout the majority of interviews. Without this foundation of poor diversity being addressed, there will be a perpetual lack of the intimate knowledge and understanding needed to integrate diverse perspectives. This has broad implications, ranging from developing effective organisational strategies all the way through to the activities and communication, and the commissioning and usage of images to support these.

> "We're learning all the time. I think it's such a controversial topic, and I think sometimes people shy away from doing anything because sometimes whatever you do, there's always going to be somebody that doesn't agree with it."
> – Representative, Outward Bound

Common problems

- EDI strategies exist but are not sufficiently detailed or informed to meet real staff needs
- lack of understanding or confidence in the topic and 'where to start'
- lack of diversity in opinions and ideas around storytelling and communications
- spending time and money on imagery that doesn't resonate
- creating inauthentic moments for the camera
- inability to access content from peer-to-peer or social networks
- accidental use of imagery out of context
- creation of well-intended but inappropriate tokenistic imagery

> "It's very tempting to want to try and capture the diversity issue by showing a shot that you think is diverse and it probably isn't. It's probably very samey."
> – Senior campaigner, environmental organisation

> "I think it's important work, but it's hard because sometimes if there's no one in your organisation that even looks remotely like me, I don't really want to be a part of it. And so that makes it hard, because if I'm not going to be a part of it, another person is not going to want to be a part of it."
> – Outdoor instructor and Instagram influencer

Possible solutions

Recruit or bring in more diversity and representation to teams and ensure empowerment. Successful ideas and strategies can be produced collaboratively and verified from diverse viewpoints, while avoiding 'bad' ideas.

> *"you could just have a diverse rota of photographers or people on the other side of the lens when you do a campaign without saying this is a diversity campaign."*
> *– EDI Instagram influencer*

Commissioning a diverse range of photographers, especially those with similar backgrounds or experiences to, or that are local to, communities can help develop more informed ideas, navigate cultural nuances and sensitivities, and create more authentic images.

Lack of resources to recruit external expertise

> *"We wouldn't want to go out to these people and [ask them to] work for us for free, because as much as that has worked in the past, personally, I think that's an outdated view of. If it's a marketable skill it should be paid for …We don't have funds to actually pay people to do this as part of our job. Every single organisation I can think of has an EDI working group or strategy, but not actually a full-time paid employee looking at this. And that means if you're not going to take it seriously enough, that's what comes through and it stops people getting involved. It just feels too tokenistic"*
> *– Social media manager, conservation NGO*

Barrier

Seeking external expertise, guidance and partnerships around diversity issues is not prioritised or resourced within the majority of organisations. Some have formed internal EDI steering groups or external networks of unpaid volunteers. However, without dedicated resources organisations struggle to prioritise those ideas, continue momentum with these groups or integrate them into long–term planning. In addition, from the stakeholder groups we spoke to, there seems to be little consulting on future projects or communication design with grassroots experts on the ground. Without real resourcing, consultation can be extractive.

Common problems

- development of ideas that might be 'coming from the right place' but are not grounded in experience or evidence, as well as misguided ideas
- inability to incorporate a wider pool of opinion into long-term planning
- inability to create durable and fair partnerships externally
- using images from partnerships out of context
- lack of meaningful engagement in external networks

> *"Looking at what type of images are being used by people who are doing it themselves and are you prepared to form a relationship with those organisations over time rather than just sidle up to them in order to get some shots?"*
> *– Senior campaigner, environmental organisation*

Possible solutions

Where possible, co-develop strategies around inclusion with external networks, rather than working from a top–down or internal-only approach. Identify and empower existing networks and new voices, and emulate collaborations, case studies and best practices where similar sized organisations or teams have operated successfully. Avoid tokenism and cliches through heeding

guidance that is rooted in and involves the participation of the communities you hope to reach. All inclusion work needs to be resourced and budgeted for.

> *"So we did quite a lot of awareness raising, like working with external specialists and senior management level across the organisation and all the way through to instructors that were embedded within several training pathways. So when you join the organisation, equality and diversity is a conversation that you have when you start, but you also return to continue having throughout your career with the organisation."*
> *– Representative, Outward Bound*

Photo by @flocktogether.world from Instagram

Lack of communication resources in general terms

> *"I think if you haven't got a budget, you're going to have to spend something somewhere. And if it's not financial, it's going to be time and it's going to be time talking to those organisations and talking to the people active in those organisations."*
> *– Visual content manager, NGO*

Barrier

Many organisations have under-resourced communication teams or campaigns, with a burgeoning work load and competing priorities. Multiple communications stakeholders mentioned ever-expanding social media channels or audiences to manage, without resources expanding to meet the visual content needs of those platforms. Generating better-focused, more inclusive content is now clearly on many organisations' agenda and is part of their strategy, but resources must be allocated to meet the scale of the challenge in general and specific terms.

> *"A lot of social media content, for example, tends to be turned around quickly and there's not always time to go through a new commissioning process."*
> *– External communications manager, working in government*

Common problems

- lack of a budget to create capacity and generate or acquire quality content
- authentic content is specific and resource-intensive
- no internal picture management or library system
- lack of time or a budget to source visual content
- existing content is overused
- poor-quality content is used
- visual content is sourced reactively, not generated strategically
- difficulty reaching new audiences
- EDI work backfires

> *"What we haven't got is a decent photo management software where we can actually link any permissions, so we do spend an enormous amount of time trawling through Google photos."*
> *– Marketing lead, NGO*

Possible solutions

Inclusion in communications cannot be addressed and solutions cannot be promoted without dedicated and planned resourcing, including internal budgets, time, staff and external help. Organisations should both raise the profile of this activity internally and ensure adequate funding is put towards this.

Lack of suitable content

> *"The pictures don't match with what's out there on the ground. So it doesn't give the right portrayal."*
> *– Visual content manager, NGO*

Barrier

Without strong content networks, existing financial resources or the ability to commission photography, many organisations critically lack access to any content at all, let alone successful visual content.

> *"The pictures don't match with what's out there on the ground. So it doesn't give the right portrayal."*
> *– Visual content manager, NGO*

The limited availability in image libraries of diverse and inclusive outdoor imagery creates further problems and makes sourcing strong or appropriate images extremely difficult.

> *"If you can't see yourself [in pictures] you're not going to get into it. And if you're not going to get into it, those images aren't going to exist unless you stage them."*
> *– Social media manager, NGO*

This scarcity can lead to the use of tokenistic imagery that lacks authenticity. Where precious successful authentic content does exist, it can become overused or rendered counter-productive in incorrect contexts.

> *"Mainstream media can use a very narrow spectrum of images, and the narrative that goes with those images has very little information and educational material."*
> *– Social media manager, NGO*

Another barrier can be that performance and engagement metrics for 'success' for any individual post can reinforce historic biases. Digital mediums have enabled effective and simple tracking and monitoring of audience analytics around engagement, especially on social media platforms such as Instagram. This has enabled even under-resourced teams to quickly learn, respond, prioritise and select content that appeals to, and appears at surface level to engage their, <u>existing</u> audiences. However, this attractive but limited concept of success can force a visual approach that actively weighs against the use of images that are proven to engage or impact upon new or diverse audiences.

> *"You've got to push [the boundaries of] what your current audience expects because that's how you attract new people."*
> *– Content manager, NGO*

> *"It's a vicious circle because I am supposed to find more images of Black or Asian people, but our membership is predominantly white. So it's up to us [as an NGO] to attract more people from diverse backgrounds to become members, but how do you do that if you don't have the imagery in the first place?"*
> *– Visual content manager, NGO*

Common problems

- lack of appropriate or diverse imagery within an organisation
- the content that does exist is overused
- images that do exist are used out of context
- EDI partnerships do not include content exchange
- mis-match between written content and illustrations
- higher costs

> *"rather than trying to start from scratch, get organisations looking at what they already do have and how they can portray that in a positive way."*
> *– Outdoor specialist, MOSAIC*

Possible solutions

Develop a short- and long-term strategy to identify what imagery is needed ahead of time and predict communication needs. Create future-facing timelines to proactively build more capacity, steer budget decisions or include content in both budgetary and partnership discussions. Identify and develop networks of amateur and professional content creators, where subjects overlap, who would be interested in collaborating – thus exchanging content for visibility.

> *"I think it's about taking advantage of the digital age. You can highlight people, do Spotlight Series talks with people etc."*
> *– Outdoor specialist, MOSAIC*

Connect with social media influencers and see if possible mutual (not extractive) collaborations and social media 'takeovers' can be identified. Create and factor in enough of a buffer around known deadlines to allow enough time to source existing images from image libraries if needed.

> *"previous campaigns we've run [took] several months to plan and implement. We have that time to really delve into our target audiences and work out the best possible way to reach them."*
> *– External communications manager, government organisation*

> *"we need to be better at these images becoming more natural and happening more organically than just being forced."*
> *– Picture researcher, NGO*

Using images incorrectly, with poor captions or context

> *"Unless you're really targeting a very, very specific slice of an audience, you can fall into traps about trying to have images you think are representative."*
> *– Senior campaigner, environmental organisation*

Barrier

There is an increased interest, momentum and focus in regard to inclusion issues in communications – but without increased sensitivity or understanding this can unwittingly cause major problems when images are used or captioned incorrectly.

> *"There's been incidents where a story about me has been about diversity in the outdoors and the image that's used is of a white man and a white woman."*
> *– Outdoor explorer*

> *"You really need to segment the different experiences of racialised minorities. There are different experiences in the outdoors and different scenarios."*
> *– Representative, NGO*

Common problems

- effective images used out of context by third-party teams lacking original context
- reinforcing unconscious bias by creating or using particular images
- insinuating or reinforcing derogatory stereotypes through associations
- identifying people with incorrect captions or ethnicity terminology
- describing the content of an image incorrectly
- using a single image in contrasting contexts – destroying authenticity in both uses

> *"I would say it is almost impossible for non-diverse staff to effectively create diverse content that will speak to diverse audiences….what you can have if you have some diversity is more awareness of the questions they need to ask when engaging and [they] will often be the person saying we have to show that piece of content to someone from that community to see how they respond to it, or they'll have a sense of like, oh, that's not quite right."*
> *– Director of communications, NGO*

Possible solutions

Creating and inspiring more diversity of thought by co-producing and co-creating visuals with people on the ground and focused on the story is vital. Safeguards should be built into processes, terminology and training around inclusion work, with protocols being created around usage of images, access to them and tracking them through image library software. Where possible, internal or external message testing is also important.

Developing new representations in outdoor digital media

One of the key issues highlighted in our review of barriers to outdoor spaces is a culture of exclusion that leaves many groups out of the traditional narrative of who participates in the outdoors, and how. Increasing the representation of diverse individuals in the outdoors, and telling new, more inclusive stories, is vital for changing the cultural narrative, increasing interest from, and fostering engagement among, diverse audiences. This core issue of representation in outdoor narratives is echoed by advocates such as Rhiane Fatinikun, founder of Black Girls Hike: "Representation matters, it's important to see people you identify with – that's what inspires people" (Morris 2019).

A growing number of content creators on social media have been seeking to change the dominant narrative and to tell new stories. Instagram has been a particularly powerful platform for this process. As part of this review, we scanned a wide variety of public Instagram pages to get a better understanding of their approach and how this might inform visual recommendations. Several insights emerged that can inform what a successful visual narrative that embraces inclusion in the outdoors might look like in practice. Their examples can guide environmental organisations to improve inclusion through their communications channels.

Several of the approaches to visuals taken on these pages resonate closely with Climate Visuals' past work, most notably the importance of telling identifiable, empowering stories, focusing on individuals and prioritising authenticity (Corner, Webster and Teriete 2015). The work of the creators of pages like @UnlikelyHikers and @bgh_uk meet and exceed these criteria. Unlikely Hikers (@UnlikelyHikers) focuses on depicting individuals of varying ethnicities, religions, body sizes, genders and sexualities engaged in a wide array of outdoor activities, with the goal of empowering individuals of all backgrounds to feel welcome outdoors. The photos are typically either "profile" shots, with the individual making eye contact with the camera, or "action" shots, in which the individual is engaged in some type of activity, and they are accompanied by a story about the person, their experiences and why they enjoy the outdoors.

Some accounts focus on countering stereotypes and shifting norms around specific activities, aiming to empower certain communities while also promoting a welcoming environment. Black Girls Hike (@bgh_uk) is a UK-based account that tells stories of black women's outdoors engagement and aims to foster a safe community for women to hike together. Other accounts seek to empower and educate their community about gardening while maintaining a high-quality visual aesthetic (@blackmenwithgardens, @blackwomenwithgardens). The Black Cyclists Network (@blackcyclistsnetwork) is another example of a group that has fostered a community centred around promoting diverse engagement with a specific activity. In addition to accounts that are focused on specific activities, there are also those that are more personalised, and document a person's unique story and experiences, such as the Hillwalking Hijabi (@the_hillwalking_hijabi). Many more examples abound, such as Ambreen Tariq's page (@brownpeoplecamping), Outdoor Afro (@outdoorafro) and Brothers of Climbing (@boccrew), where people have created a community that is inclusive and welcoming while using visuals to tell their stories and increase engagement.

Much like how the MOSAIC model of outdoor programmes succeeds by recruiting and empowering diverse community leaders, partnering with diverse content creators may be a promising avenue for creating content that is authentic and that creates a lasting, motivating impression on individuals.

Experiences drawn from Climate Visuals

Climate change communication is the area in relation to which we have the best knowledge of the role of outdoors visual imagery (Wang, Corner, Chapman and Markowitz 2018; O'Neill and Smith 2014; O'Neill, Boykoff, Niemeyer, and Day 2013; Sheppard 2012; Corner, Webster and Teriete 2015). Dominant themes and frames in media coverage about climate change rely on depictions of politicians, stereotypical imagery of animals (e.g. polar bears), catastrophic disasters and environmental protests (e.g. O'Neill 2020; O'Neill 2013; Corner, Webster and Teriete 2015).

Imagery of climate change's causes, impacts and solutions have been shown to have an influence on people's affective reactions, concern about climate change and intentions to engage their pro-environmental behaviour in multifaceted ways (Chapman, Corner, Webster, and Markowitz 2016). Drawing on this research, Climate Visuals has identified seven core principles for effective visual climate change communication that are recommended to visual communicators:

These principles form the foundation for a photography library (www.climatevisuals.org), which is aimed at facilitating a more effective, evidence-based approach to visual climate change communication.

> *"For all the work I do I take pictures with consent from the groups, and if you visit my web, you'll see these groups and what they've been doing. We use those images and the videos to project people's perceptions about having an opportunity to participate in those activities, which is a form of empowering them and a form of motivation and confidence for them to be seen in the space that they won't otherwise be seen in."*
> *– Outdoor specialist, MOSAIC*

From our previous work and a growing body of literature, we can be confident that visuals have a key role in awareness-raising and persuasion. Further work is now needed to translate these lessons into understanding more deeply the role of images in connecting diverse audiences to the outdoors in different contexts. We replicated our Climate Visuals methodology to develop and test the six principles for nature visuals. This involved performing a literature review and interviewing stakeholders. The final six principles were tested by both the research and commissioning team and refined into their final concise form.

An introduction to sourcing imagery

Visuals or imagery can be sourced or commissioned via several overlapping processes:

- individuals, organisations and/or partners producing 'live' social media content
- commissioning professional photography of a planned or scheduled activity
- creating a photographic brief and opportunity for contributions from volunteers
- sourcing photography from an existing internal library, collection or relationships
- proactively licensing existing photography direct from partners or networks
- licensing existing photography from commercial libraries.

Any organisation or individual can benefit from these sources, and can track their use by using a scalable and shareable image library system.

In this section of the report, we consider a simple, scalable and adaptable search strategy before considering the advantages and disadvantages across the available sources of imagery.

A simple but adaptable search strategy

To find relevant images, keywords must be decided upon, based on a visual or conceptual starting point, and then entered into image library search systems or used in photographic briefs.

Searching with a single, non-specific or isolated term in any system is likely to produce a poor and an overwhelming search result. without specific instructions, the algorithms behind search features will return visuals that are dominated by the most numerous, recent and popular images in that repository. These may include popular but un-impactful picture-postcard scenes and non-diverse people. However, due to the comparatively small number of diverse or representative images of people within nature in England that is offered by most image libraries, searching using overly specific terms, exact locations or excessive combinations of keywords produces extremely narrow or zero results.

Search for 'English Nature' on Getty Images Creative Collections (26 March 2021)

Therefore, no single search strategy or keyword combination is applicable across the different libraries that will be effective for different needs. Experience, perseverance, time, record-keeping in lightboxes or databases and search strategies from successful images or keyword combinations can help, as can working with either internal or external image professionals.

"I think one of the big barriers is we don't have images of people in them. We have beautiful scenic images because that is what is a traditional thought of a National Park. And then because our visitation does not reflect the demographics of our country, when we do have those images that do have people in them, they often are not representative."
– Community engagement officer, NGO

Experimenting with conceptual keywords in combination with descriptions of specific activities and people will likely generate improved results compared to singular search terms, which tend to reach past generic and inappropriate content. Additional expertise or experience in diversity can help to improve search terms and facilitate the creation of an improved image library.

> *"When we first started recruiting our youth reps, for example, we really struggled to find images of young people engaging in nature that felt natural. I think in a couple of the adverts we put out to recruit them, we actually used stock images of young people in a forest with binoculars, which wasn't very realistic."*
> *– Social media manager, NGO*

Cross-referencing our literature review, stakeholder interviews, internal expertise and visual recommendations has resulted in the development of a search or commissioning strategy that can be adopted by organisations looking to improve their imagery. Combining conceptual keywords with descriptions of specific activities and people will likely generate better results than relying on individual or vague terms.

We informally tested multiple keywords and search combinations across Getty Images, Alamy Stock Photos and Google Images, examples of which are presented below:

CONCEPT (example terms)

Healthy	Nature	Exploring
Adventure	Outdoor	Discovering
Accessible	Relaxing	Environmental

+

ACTIVITY (example terms)

Conservation	Exercise	Cycling
Hike	Activity	Running
Camp	Birding	Training

+

PEOPLE (example terms)

Ethnicity	Beginner	Disability
Diversity	Group	Adventurer
Enthusiast	Female	Age

In the following sections, we present a broad review and helpful tips that consider the most popular and accessible ways that organisations and individuals can source new or existing imagery. We look in detail at the following:

- major commercial image libraries
- editorial or independent image libraries
- Instagram and other social media
- commissioning original content

Major commercial image libraries

Examples include: [Getty Images](#), [Alamy](#), [Adobe Stock](#), [Shutter Stock](#), [Image Source](#)

Advantages

- quality-controlled content, with high production values, image quality and resolution
- advanced, variable search functionality across content, keywords and themes
- searches can be tailored to ethnicity, age, location and a number of other factors
- lightboxes enable multiple images and projects to be curated, stored and edited online
- 'royalties-free' images can be used across an organisation in multiple campaigns
- 'rights-managed' images can be sourced more exclusively, at increased cost
- robust and simple licensing packages, without the need for negotiation
- model and location releases negate any liability and reduce risk
- clear pricing and purchasing integrates with organisational procedures
- instant acquisition, download and usage can precede the billing phase

"Even when there's an attempt to show multiracial imagery, it still shows people of colour doing things that white people will do. Take a picnic [it won't] look like the picnics a South Asian family would have or the picnics that an African family would have."
– Outdoor specialist, MOSAIC

Disadvantages

- royalties-free content is not sold exclusively
- rights-managed content is often prohibitively expensive
- aesthetic of images can appear separate and inauthentic by comparison to reality
- aesthetically removed in style from social media content
- geared towards commercial clients, meaning images can be too tidy and perfect
- images are considered as individual assets, not narrative or story content
- material lacks written context beyond descriptive or thematic keywords
- content can age quickly due to clothing, trends, lighting style, etc.
- images may be digitally retouched and rendered inauthentic
- subjects are often professional models – so may appear overly staged, disconnected or distant from the activities they are performing for the camera
- forced grouping of ethnic diversity or staged activities can be tokenistic
- dominated by urban, built environments or accessible environments
- enormous volume of content can obscure successful searches without a search strategy
- lightboxes are restricted to single libraries, making comparisons difficult
- libraries aspire to fill content gaps they can identify, but delivery can be slow

"I was looking for free stock image sites to try and find some imagery that we could potentially use for some of our social media content. And there is such a gap there, I couldn't find much about BAME groups. I couldn't find anything on disabilities."
– External communications manager, government organisation

Helpful tips

- most libraries have dedicated, expert sales staff who can assist with particular searches
- purchasing content in bulk or by subscription can yield large discounts on list prices
- libraries hope to address issues of authenticity and EDI, offering opportunities for partnership

Editorial or independent image libraries

Examples include: [Panos Pictures](#), [Redux](#), [Institute](#), [VII](#), [Climate Visuals](#)

Advantages

- content is focused around journalist principles of integrity and authenticity
- library is oriented around particular themes, stories, locations or subjects
- content respects the authorship and style of the photographers
- detailed accompanied essays, captions and additional context
- real people, locations, stories and combinations thereof
- wider variety of photographic styles and compositions
- wider range of emotions and nuance captured

"Finding images that are representative is incredibly difficult in all aspects. So from people in wheelchairs to going birding all the way through to young black birders in urban areas, for example, it's really hard."
– Social media manager, NGO

Disadvantages

- low volume of content covering only specific stories
- less sophisticated, weak or obstructive search engines
- pricing and usage can be harder and more time-consuming to understand
- content is editorial only – so is rarely model or location released – and so is prohibitive
- much smaller archives that can include historic content
- less responsive sales or search staff

Helpful tips

- keywords and search terms vary for each library
- greater interaction with editorial news media contacts

"To me it's about seeing people who do lots of different things and enjoying the landscapes in different ways."
– Outdoors specialist, MOSAIC

Instagram and other social media

"If you have something which has that authenticity and it's shot in the field and it's showing us such a developing situation, it's going to have huge value, even if it's a not great image, it's got that level of authenticity which is going to work with the audience because they know they can sense its authenticity."
– Visual content manager, NGO

Examples include: [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Tik-Tok](#), [Snapchat](#)

Highly successful, credible and inspiring images exist on social media from authentic voices. Social media platforms are structured on a strictly peer-to-peer, follower-to-followed network structure that requires investment in both genuine relationship building, curation and negotiation skills. Relationship building and connections with content generators are extremely advantageous

in themselves and can produce meaningful and mutual opportunities to share, publish or commission content.

> *"I think [Instagram] has been a really good way to just bring a voice and also be that representation. People say how nice it is to see someone that looks like me doing this."*
> *– Influencer*

Advantages

- Instagram is ubiquitous, especially with grassroots, small organisations and individuals
- genuine sense of community, discussion, information sharing and appreciation
- range of content, aesthetics, compositions and quality that are hugely variable across users
- most content is seemingly authentic and captures real moments
- time investment in networking has multiple benefits
- new smartphones produce images fit for use across digital platforms and limited print

> *"If you are going to use that photo, what's the relationship with that person or that organisation over time? So the backstory to it has got to be credible. Because otherwise they'll think 'hang on, you're just using a photo of us, we gave you permission for that but it's almost being used to tick a box'."*
> *– Senior campaigner, environmental organisation*

Disadvantages

- designed around mobile devices, so harder to integrate into formal research or curation
- searches are limited to users or # themes, so excessive scrolling to search is required
- all content licensing and sharing of hi-res images must be done off platform
- content sharing can make the copyright holder or original hard to verify
- all conversation is public, unless mutually following and using direct messaging
- organisational and ethical risks around safeguarding of minors and private communications
- popular influencers can have opaque commercial interests or brand contracts

> *"I think imagery tends to be the thing that catches your eye, but the content of what the post is, is what will cause the conversations…..Images are more of the hook."*
> *– External communications manager, government organisation*

Helpful tips

- most professional users set their 'bio-link' to their individual webpage or organisational contact
- direct messaging can be used to establish real names and trusted communication
- an organisation account can be more credible when approaching new users
- build genuine non-extractive relationships with users before approaching them for images
- have a clear and fair image licence procedure and terms when acquiring content

> *"Social media takeovers and profiling people are good ways of engaging people."*
> *– Outdoor specialist, MOSAIC*

Commissioning original content

With the availability of affordable camera equipment, high-resolution smartphones and a drive for authentic images there are multiple opportunities to commission new and affordable image content.

Advantages

- opportunity to deploy a photographer who understands and has experience
- diversify communication team and capacity build with individuals or partners
- images can be commissioned with unlimited usage rights for the organisation
- images can be shared with production, location or community partners
- photographers bring their own experience, sense of place, community and aesthetic
- ability to produce work to an exact brief, location or community
- easier to create authentic material if photographing a real event or moment
- diverse set of images from a single location
- the shoot itself is a story

Disadvantages

- resource-intensive, both logistically, practically and financially
- multiple production factors, permissions and explainers must be set
- challenge of combining different photographers' styles into a cohesive document
- no single or equitable database of photographers
- procurement or legal barriers may exist
- practical risks of weather, illness, risk assessment and liabilities
- risk of overusing images if limited shoots are commissioned

Helpful tips

- choose a photographer that already creates and understands the visuals needed
- use photographers from existing groups with specific subject or community knowledge
- develop as comprehensive a brief as possible, maximising the value of location and people
- create a mood board of what works and what doesn't
- work collaboratively with both photographers and those in the photographs
- create clarity on contract and usage as early as possible
- complete multiple smaller shoots and learn from the experience

Conclusion

Improvements in diversity, strategy, resourcing, evidence, visual principles and message testing can bring significant improvements to the effectiveness and impact of communications. However, it is impossible to produce a 'one size fits all' structural recommendation or guide to image sourcing for any given organisational or campaign need. Ultimately, we recommend the development of a new open library of evidence-based, appropriate, impactful, diverse visual content, that is built in direct collaboration with diverse team members spanning NGOs, campaign groups, communicators, EDI leaders and influencers.

While commercial and independent image libraries offer the convenience of search engines with instant 'rights-ready' access to premium photography, the high licence price and generic attributes of these single images mean the content may be inaccessible, ineffective and tokenistic, as well as lacking in authenticity. Commissioning new photography and working with influencers and creators to curate social media content provides opportunities to produce narrative-rich, authentic and localised images that are likely to be more effective in the long term. While doing this may require significant time and resources, we believe the payoff in terms of quality and impact are worth the effort.
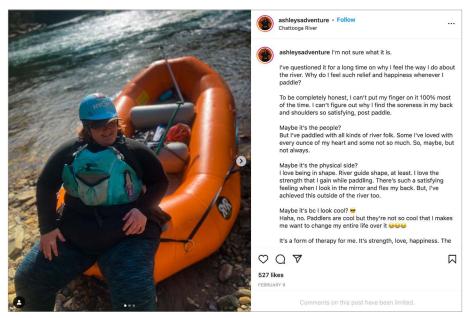

Photo by @ashleysadventure from Instagram

A simultaneous investment in communication resources and fostering connections at the grassroots, local and human level can improve communications, photography skills and content. Being pragmatic, these activities do require additional funding and coordination – a significant challenge for small organisations or community groups.

There are also medium- and large-sized organisations that have already developed a diversity and inclusion strategy that is linked to and is allocated a new communication plan. However, they may still struggle with their own internal communications preferences and measures of success. The need to satisfy and entertain the visual and virtual preferences of existing audiences can be at direct odds with strategies that are proven to engage new or diverse audiences.

One possible solution is the creation of an ambitious, centrally or collaboratively funded evidence-led image library of nature visuals. This could be a dedicated programme that seeks to strategically develop multiple targeted local photographic briefs – to address and bridge content gaps in order to build a solid national picture. These briefs must consider a broad spectrum of diversity, social or access issues, and both urgent and present needs, taking a pragmatic view of how content is actually produced. It must be developed as an opportunity in partnership with representatives,

communicators and participants across England, to ensure it is simultaneously led by, and effectively serves and interacts with, the diverse audiences it wishes to attract.

The outdoor and photography sectors alike have been slow to acknowledge and take concrete steps to address issues of representation. Recent momentum and widespread interest is to be celebrated but must be sustained. Additional research, especially message or image testing, and expertise in this area will help ensure that strategies and decisions are effective, impactful and can avoid common mistakes.

If we are to be guided by robust evidence, free of bias, then image and message testing, such as that conducted by Climate Visuals in 2015 (Corner, Webster and Teriete 2015), is essential to understand true effectiveness and preferences. However, the content around successful or appropriate imagery in this context is so limited that further work should first be focused on consolidating and catalysing new content, informed by the six principles suggested and other stakeholder recommendations in this report.

| Use images to tell positive, identifiable stories | Create authentic representation, not tokenism | Depict diverse activities in diverse landscapes | Connect people to the wonderful diversity of natural places | Include more real people in images | Diversify who is behind the camera and the message |

Content from, or commissioned in participation with, a selection of stakeholder groups could be held within a central and equitably accessible library and used in a pilot campaign to build momentum and raise awareness, benefitting campaigners and media coverage alike. This would represent an immediate opportunity for the myriad of small independent content producers to raise their profile and directly benefit from an investment in their communications and content while reaching new audiences.

When a critical mass of likely successful and diverse content is assembled with the appropriate rights and context, image content can then be tested with a range of people, to determine impact. This tiered approach to building a campaign and evidence base that interact can be built into an organisational strategy and can produce the raw materials so desperately needed by communicators.

Photo by @themirnavator from Instagram

Appendix 1: Focus, scope, and definitions of key terms

Natural and outdoor spaces

Our review examines perspectives relating to inclusively representing engagement in England's natural spaces. In accordance with Natural England's People and Nature Survey (Natural England 2021a), the term 'natural spaces' is inclusive of any outdoor spaces, both in and around towns and cities (e.g. parks and canals), along the coast (e.g. beaches), and in the countryside (e.g. farmland, woodlands, hills, and rivers). This term is also inclusive of England's National Parks and AONBs. At times, we also use the term 'green spaces', which refers to any natural spaces on land, and 'blue spaces', which refers to bodies of water.

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

'EDI', which is used throughout this report, serves as an umbrella term through which we examine issues affecting ethnic minorities, the young and elderly, the economically disadvantaged, and those of varying ability and body size. While we examined EDI-related issues as broadly as possible for these different audiences, our searches overwhelmingly returned insights pertaining to ethnic minorities. As such, at times in our discussion there is an undeniable slant in coverage towards ethnic representation issues. We have done our best to consider all aspects of EDI in discussing barriers and structuring our recommendations for new visual narratives, although future efforts are necessary to faithfully assess the complete scope of EDI.

Ethnic minorities

In line with the UK government guidance on writing about ethnicity (Cabinet Office 2021), our report adopts the term 'ethnic minorities'. The use of 'BAME' within this report has been restricted to sections discussing or presenting contemporary research, evidence, insights, comments or quotes from external sources that adopt the term – to ensure that the context or original meaning is not changed.

Appendix 2: Stakeholder interview framework and discussion guide

A discussion guide was converted into a framework for interviews and developed to informally help steer or frame our conversations with the different subgroups. The discussion guide focused on how visual communication and the ecosystem that surrounds it approaches equality, diversity and inclusion. Although exhaustive in design, all interviews were conducted in a conversational manner to ensure there was space for additional, perhaps new or unexpected, insights to be captured. Where appropriate, the conversational style and sharing of parallel information also helps negate the concept of extractive consultation.

Project goals in focus:

1. Gather and highlight barriers, perceived or otherwise, that exist to diversifying and broadening photography and the visual language surrounding nature in England.
2. Learn and share ideas, examples and best practices for new guidelines, to encourage, inspire and enable greater diversity within visual communication of who, where and how people access nature across England.

Informed consent

We ensured a clear explanation of the following points:

- the aims of the research
- who else is involved
- how the responses will be used
- what will be publicly available
- how/where will it be publicly available

Conversational framework

The following questions will frame conversations with influencers, content generators, communications staff, photo specialists, academics and policy experts. The research will focus on how visual communication and the ecosystem that surrounds it approaches equality, diversity and inclusion.

How can this research promote a more inclusive and authentic representation of England's outdoors through photography?

Through anecdotes and examples it hopes to highlight what barriers are currently faced, and what steps might be taken to enable the production and distribution of images that better reflect the diversity of who, where and how England's natural environment can be used.

Alongside a literature review and these insights will be a series of best practice guidelines and example images, all contained within a final report. This will be shared with stakeholders, the public and industry experts, who can promote and utilise the findings.

Key areas of questioning

- awareness of barriers to developing visual communication with greater representation across industry ecosystems
- understanding best practices from influencers and content generators, as well as their own metrics for success
- ideas and anecdotes that can inform NGOs and organisations seeking to create more successful imagery around equality, diversity, inclusion and representation

Suggested questions by stakeholder category

Influencers and content generators

- Can you talk about why you have chosen the mediums you use in relationship to the work you do?
- Can you talk about how you use images, and the importance they play in your platforms?
- What do you think followers expect from your account?
- What are the main considerations you make when deciding what to post?
- Do you have any guidelines that you try to follow for your postings?
- How do you measure success with postings?
- Are there any postings that have had a surprising impact on your audience, and why might that have been?
- Can you talk about what types of images resonate the most with your audiences and why that might be?
- What do you see as the biggest challenges for formal organisations seeking to attract and engage with more diverse audiences?
- Can you share any thoughts or advice you have that might be useful for communications/ marketing teams to think about before approaching influencers like yourself?
- Can you share any stories or anecdotes of good practice or bad practice by organisations, companies and photographers around capturing diversity and inclusion?
- How do you view representation of EDI initiatives within companies and organisations?
- Did you receive any formal training or advice on social media and/or taking photos?

Communications staff from NGOs and organisations

- Which mediums do you get the most engagement through?
- What are the main aims of using social media in your organisation?
- What are the strengths in using photography for your organisation?
- What are the biggest obstacles in reaching new audiences?
- How do you know when you've successfully engaged a new audience? Do you have examples of this?
- How much photography do you use from professionals vs amateurs and your users/customers?
- How important is authenticity in the images you use in marketing and communication?
- What examples of photography by other organisations have impressed you, and why?
- Why is there so little diversity represented in visual communication around nature in England?
- What do you see as the biggest barriers to a more diverse audience engaging with your activities/organisation?
- Can you explain why an image you post may have much more engagement, interest and/or likes than others?
- What types of considerations do you have when commissioning a photographer?
- How much importance is given to who is behind the camera for particular shoots?
- What are the barriers to using photographers from more diverse backgrounds, and what can be done to remove those barriers?
- What types of subjects do you think need more exposure?
- What types of considerations are there for images that you share with your audiences, beyond aesthetics?
- Does your organisation have brand guidelines around communication to your audience? Does that extend to photography?
- Can you comment on your budget for image library purchases or commissioning?
- Do you have an existing library of images?
- Which mediums do you get the most engagement through and can you explain why that is?
- What are the key strengths in using visual media within your organisation?

- What are the biggest challenges in reaching new audiences?
- What are some of the key considerations when wanting to use images in marketing materials?
- How do you know when you've successfully engaged a new audience? Do you have examples of when this has happened and with what?
- Do you use imagery and media created by non-professionals? Can you talk through the process of getting that content (are there contracts, payments, ethical guidelines, etc.)?
- What do you see as limitations (if any) to using non-professional media?
- How important is authenticity in the images you use in marketing and communication, and why?
- Can you talk about examples of how imagery was employed to successfully draw in new audiences, and why it worked?
- Do you have any thoughts on why diversity is so under-represented in visual communication for outdoor interests and pursuits in England?
- Do you have any ideas on how nature organisations can effectively utilise visual communication to diversify their audiences and reach?
- Do you have any thoughts on how the media ecosystem could be better diversified?
- What do you see as the biggest challenges for formal organisations seeking to attract and engage with more diverse audiences?

Photography specialists or experts

- How do you see diversity and inclusion being depicted in photography currently?
- How would you define an authentic image?
- Can you explain why an image you posted may have much more engagement, interest and/or likes than another?
- If a commission you are given isn't sensitive towards diversity and inclusion, do you feel you can address that with the client?
- Do you have advice for photographers in regard to how they can address similar situations with clients?
- Roughly what percentage of your shoots involve an awareness of diversity and inclusion?
- Do you think COVID has further compounded any of the topics we've spoken about today?

Academics and policy stakeholders

- What are your thoughts on how the concept of English nature is represented throughout mainstream media and popular culture currently?
- Is there an area of outdoor life and activity that you think is particularly under-represented within visual communication? If so, why?
- What do you think are the effects or implications of not having better imagery that is more representative of all people using outdoor spaces?
- How do you see those implications playing out in a broader context?
- What types of barriers do you believe are stopping organisations and outdoor companies from creating more inclusive visual communication?
- Do you have any ideas of how those barriers can be overcome or removed?
- Do you have any suggestions on how an outdoors organisation can capture what might be a truer picture of how their space is being used?
- Or suggestions about how they might engage communities who don't use the space, to come and use it more?
- Do you have any suggestions for guidelines on how outdoor organisations can approach the creation and usage of images that are more representative?
- Do you think COVID has further compounded any of the topics we've spoken about today?

Appendix 3: Additional stakeholder quotes

"Having image guidelines, which actually a lot of organisations don't have, could be very helpful."
– Director of communications, NGO

"If you analyse [usage] there's a lot of recycling of the same images again and again and again. If you can put a pot of money aside specifically to commission content creators of colour to document and create content that speaks to a different audience, and that becomes part of a pool of imagery that people have access to, I suspect you would see it start getting used a lot more."
– Director of communications, NGO

"if you want to build up that library, I think you've got to be honest and try to bring people on board, train them up, give them something, build their capacity."
– Visual content manager, NGO

"We have tried and tested some of our materials and what it actually means to use certain words or images for particular campaigns that we might have been developing. So it's not foolproof but it can be part of the development of the campaigns or comms."
– Senior campaigner, environmental organisation

"We'd be really clear that this person is going to work with that community in a way that isn't just parachuting in. Who do they feel comfortable working with and are they going to represent you well in the field?"
– Senior campaigner, environmental organisation

"I don't think staging an image is a good thing, there's enough people to find to take these images in a natural setting."
– Outdoors explorer

"Find the people you want to reach and figure out what else is important to them. Who are we trying to get outdoors and then talk to them about what they want. Understand what else matters to them. And that might sort of present windows into how to reach those people? What kind of messaging will appeal to them?"
– Instagram influencer

"But I think you start seeing that more and more where previously people almost expect a slightly inauthentic image in promotional materials, in adverts, in magazines. They're now being picked up more and more on those informal platforms to be called out for that. So I think that tolerance is slipping a little bit."
– Social media manager, NGO

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