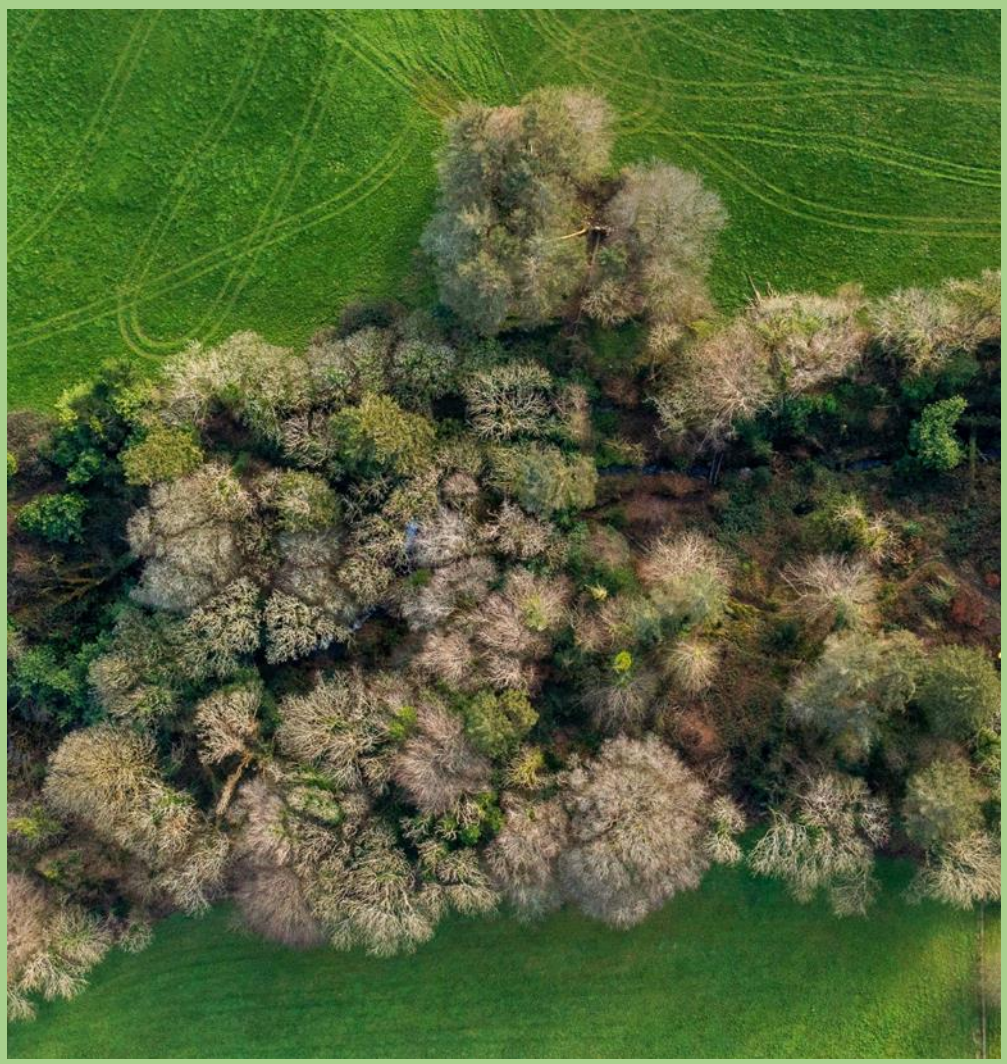
West Corks Woodlands

Survey of views on woodlands in West Cork

By Richard Gordan



Cork Nature Network

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1. Introduction

In the summer of 2022, Cork Nature Network undertook a project on West Cork Woodlands. The working title and inspiration behind the project was the question, “What is the value of trees?”

Trees present a difficulty when discerning their value, as when they’re in their natural state, they are not traded on any market. The focus of this report was an online poll in which peoples’ opinions, preferences, and interactions with their local woodland were invited. The results of this social media poll are presented and discussed below.

2. Method

The survey, Cork Nature Network’s West Cork Woodland Project, was promoted through Cork Nature Network’s social media channels – specifically Facebook (see Appendix).

The survey ran for the month of August 2022. The survey designing website, Survey Monkey was used. This service enabled the design of multiple-choice questions and some open-ended answer questions. A total of 438 people responded to the survey. A prize was offered as part of a raffle by Lissard Estate for responding to the survey.

3. Results

Q1. How often do you visit a local woodland?

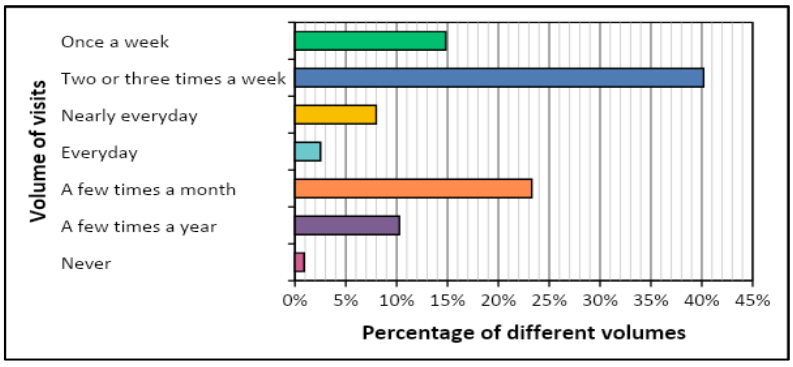

Figure 1: Comparing the volume of visits and the percentage of survey participants.

Q2. If you drive, how many kilometres a month do you drive to get to your local woodland?

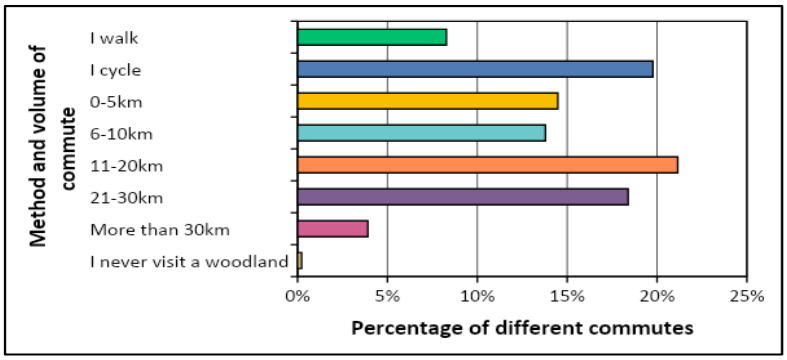

Figure 2: Comparing the commute types and the percentage of survey participants.

Q3. Do signed entry points, car access, and clear walking trails determine whether you visit your local woodland or not?

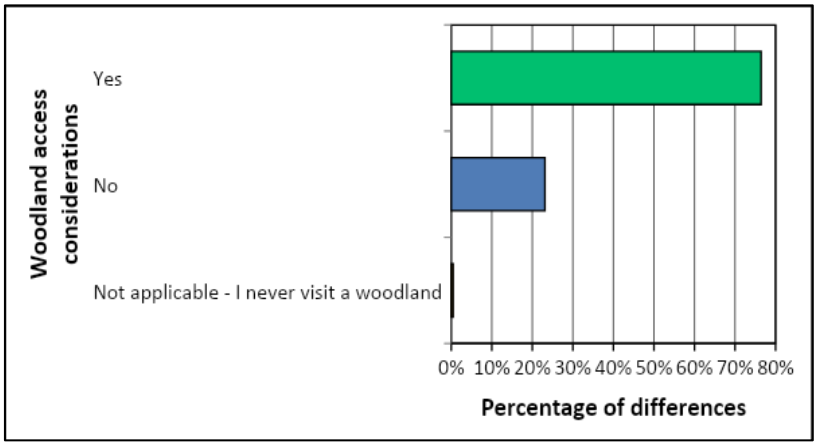

Figure 3: Comparing woodland accessibility and stated percentage of survey participants.

Q4. Approximately how many hours a month do you spend in your local woodland?

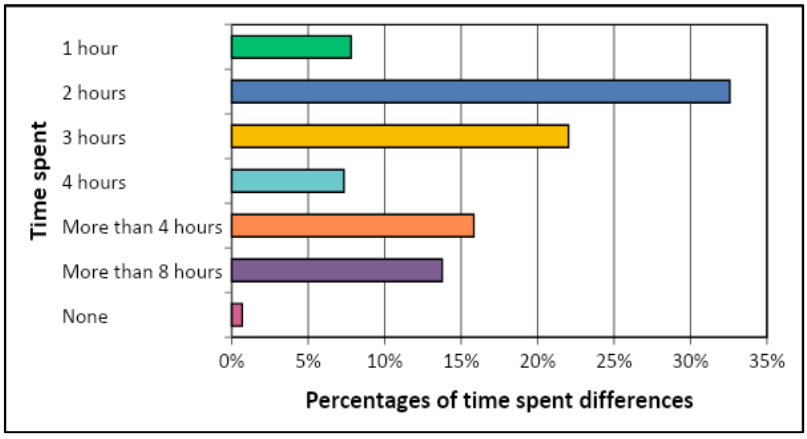

Figure 4: Comparing time spent in a woodland and percentage of survey participants.

Q5. Would you pay a one-off 50 euro payment to ensure that your local woodland was protected from felling and managed for native biodiversity to flourish?

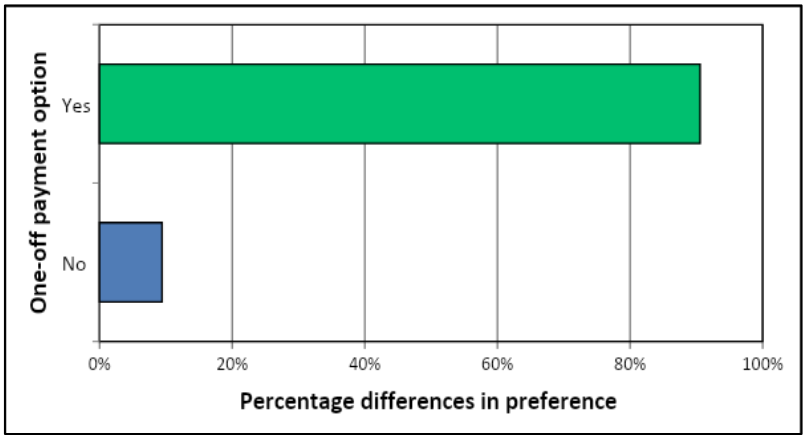

Figure 5: Comparing a payment option and the stated preference of survey participants.

Q6. How much do you value the presence of trees in your everyday surroundings?

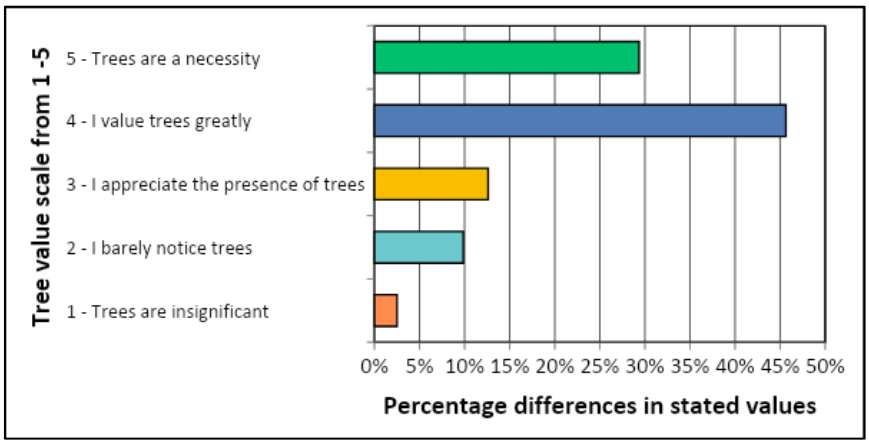

Figure 6: Comparing the value scale options with the percentage differences in stated personal values.

Q7. What is the single most important aspect of a woodland to you?

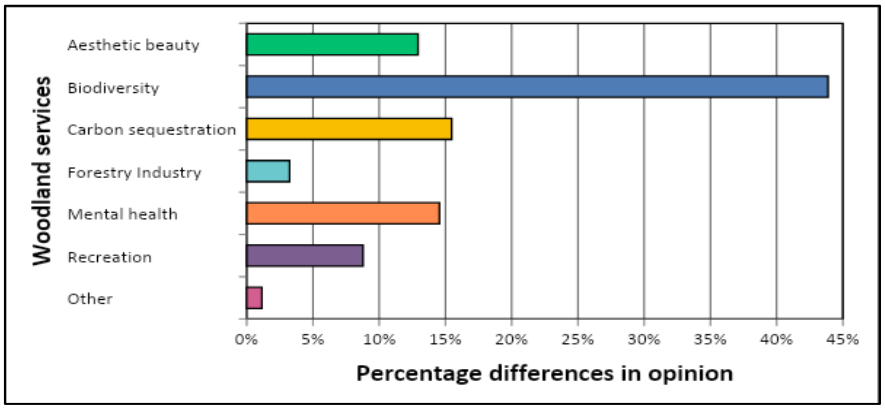

Figure 7: comparing the various woodland services and the percentage differences in survey participants.

Q8. What do you use your local woodland for?

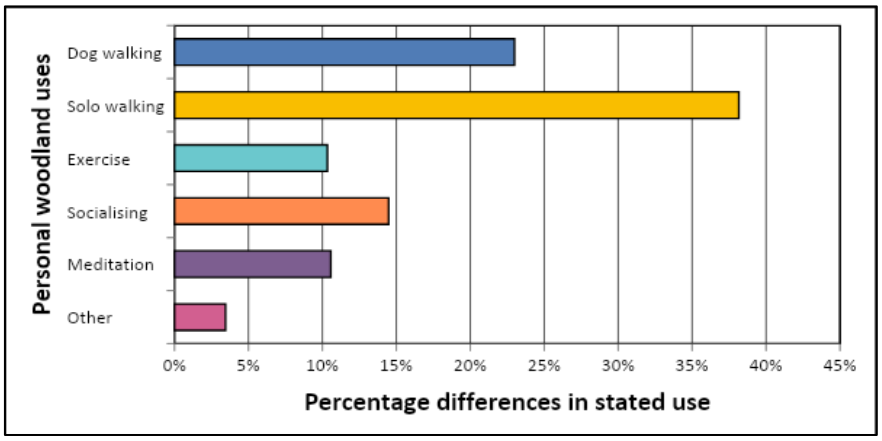

Figure 8: Comparing various personal woodland uses with the percentage differences in stated uses.

Q9. Where do you live?

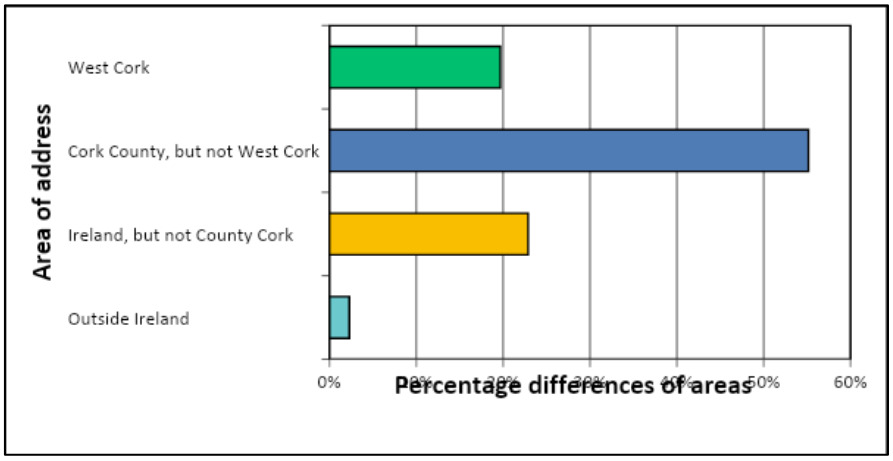

Figure 9: Comparing the areas of respondent addresses with the percentage differences in areas.

Q10. What is your age range?

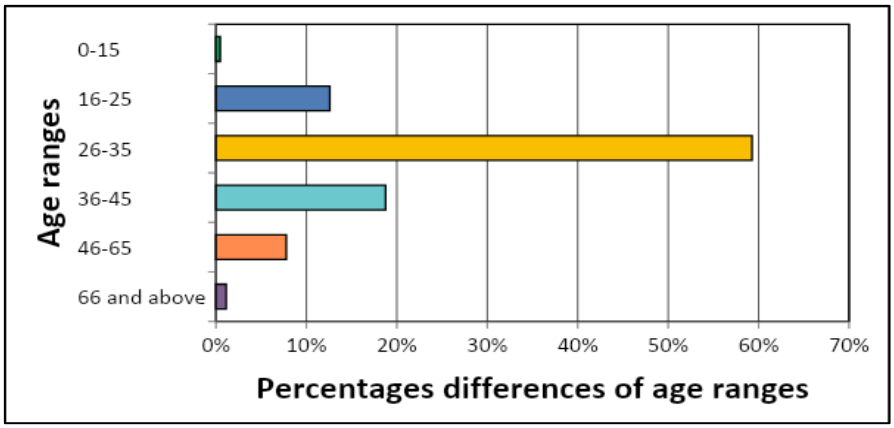

Figure 10: Comparing the age ranges of respondents with the percentage differences of the age ranges.

4. Analysis

Initially, there was a large influx of responses, with the figure reaching approximately 350 within a few days, and then over the course of the month, a slow drip of responses until eventually it stopped at 438 and the survey was taken offline. This would suggest that Cork Nature Network's followers quickly took part in the survey and possibly shared it somewhat with their immediate circle, but then it went no further than that. It's safe to assume that it stayed within the relatively small demographic of Cork-based nature enthusiasts, even more specifically, Cork Nature Network followers.

Q2. If you drive, how many kilometres a month do you drive to get to your local woodland?

The most commonly registered passenger cars in Cork over the last decade have been the Small Standard (C1), the Mini Standard (B1), and the Jeep/SUV Standard (H1) (1). These vehicles generally range from 1.4 to 2.0-litre engines. For the purposes of this analysis, this report is using the median figure of 1.7 to calculate kilometres travelled and the fuel used.

These statistics have been taken from the Official Statistics of the Irish Motoring Industry (SIMI) website (1). They are also in line with car dealer websites (such as Autotrader), where vehicles with engine sizes of 1.4, 1.6, and 2.0 litres are by far the most commonly advertised.

5.2 litres per 100 km seems to be a good average for a 1.7-litre engine. This can be observed across car dealer websites.

According to Ireland's Gasoline Prices on the Global Trading Economics website (2), the average cost for the year from October 2021 – September 2022 was 1.88 USD which converts to 1.89 EUR on 06/09/2022. This means an expenditure of €9.83 per 100km.

It is clear that there are many limitations to this analysis. Broad averages are being extrapolated from various websites that aren't all governing bodies. Also, the nuances of petrol, diesel, and electric cars are not being considered.

However, using these rough figures the aim is to offer some form of economic estimation as to how much implicit value people place on travelling to their local woodland.

Table 1: Estimated values of fuel costs for monthly woodland visits based on average fuel costs in Ireland, typical passenger car sizes, and kilometres per litre.

Monthly commute	Median value	Percentage of respondents	Approximate cost of fuel
0 – 5km	2.5km	14.48%	€0.25
6 – 10km	8km	13.79%	€0.79
11 – 20km	15.5km	21.25%	€1.52
21 – 30km	25.5km	18.39%	€2.51
30km +	35km	3.91%	€3.44
Walk or cycle	-	28.05%	€0
Never visit	-	0.23%	€0

5. Discussion

Q1. How often do you visit a local woodland?

The majority of respondents claimed to visit their local woodland, with frequency varying from 'Every day' to 'A few times a year'. The most common answer was 'A few times a week', with 40.18%. This was followed by 'A few times a month (23.9%) and 'Once a week', 'Nearly every day', and 'Every day', which made up for a total of 25.34%.

The above categories could be considered regular woodland visitors and makeup 89.42% of respondents.

Q2. If you drive, how many kilometres a month do you drive to get to your local woodland?

Determining the value of woodland based on recreational parameters is difficult for this reason, as no clear cost is incurred. For this reason, an attempt at pricing the cost of fuel for monthly commutes was detailed with minimal fuel charges incurred (See Figure 2 and Table 1).

Q3. Do signed entry points, car access, and clear walking trails, determine whether you visit your local woodland or not?

Car parking, clear signage, walking trails, and picnic benches seemed to be the optimum level of accessibility observed and 76.43% responded yes to this question.

Q5. Would you pay a one-off 50-euro payment to ensure that your local woodland was protected from felling and managed for native biodiversity to flourish?

This method of surveying is called the Stated Preference Method, in which people are asked a question in order to evaluate the value they attach to a particular good. In this case, the good is not traded on the market, therefore, attaching a value through a simple question has been decided. Yes was the most popular response and 90.57% responded 'Yes'.

There may be ambiguity here because no actual transfer of capital is required for an individual to respond with "yes". However, it's clear that there was a positive response to the question in favour of the protection of woodlands against felling and the management of native biodiversity.

Q6. How much do you value the presence of trees in your everyday surroundings?

'Trees are a necessity' and 'I value trees greatly' made up 75% of responses. This clearly shows that the vast majority of respondents value the presence of trees in their lives greatly.

The response "'I appreciate the presence of trees" made up 12.61% of respondents. This still suggests a positive impact imparted by the presence of trees.

The response "I barely notice trees" made up for 9.86% of respondents. This would suggest an apathetic attitude towards trees.

Lastly, the response "Trees are insignificant" made up 2.52% of respondents. This would suggest a borderline negative attitude towards trees.

Overall, 87.61% of respondents shared that trees impart a positive value to their lives.

Q7. What is the single most important aspect of woodlands to you?

'Biodiversity' made up the majority of votes with 43.88%. The term biodiversity, and hence the want to conserve it, has become more widespread in recent times and it is evident here in the fact that nearly half of the respondents gave it the utmost position of importance.

The next three categories were in relatively close proximity to one another.

- 'Carbon sequestration' made up 15.47%
- 'Mental health' made up 14.55%
- 'Aesthetic beauty' made up 12.93%.

'Carbon sequestration' and 'Mental health' were separated by 1.02%. Both categories exhibited high levels of positive response, showing that people are aware of the implicit value of woodlands for differing purposes. 'Carbon sequestration' is considered a greater good for society, humankind, and the Earth's functioning ecology; whilst 'Mental health' is for the inner, individual's good, which can then have beneficial societal effects. Two vastly different purposes show value in very different, but still important ways.

'Aesthetic beauty' is an age-old value and makes an appearance in the fourth position.

‘Recreation’ made up 8.78%. This is expounded upon in Q8.

‘Forestry Industry’ made up 3.23% of respondents and is the only category listed that actually extracts a commodity from woodlands that are traded on the market. This was given the least value.

Q8. What do you use your local woodland for?

‘Solo walking’ made up 38.16%, which can be seen as a form of exercise. ‘Exercise’ made up 10.34%. This clearly shows that nearly half of the respondents value their woodland as a resource for personal fitness and solitude.

‘Dog walking’ made up 22.99% which could be linked to ‘Solo walking’ and ‘Exercise’ also.

‘Socialising’ made up 14.48% and was the third most common answer, showing how woodlands are an important area for people to meet and chat.

‘Meditation’ made up 10.57%. This shows how people value their woodland for purposes of peace, solitude, and mental relaxation.

Q9. Where do you live?

Expectedly, the majority of people lived in Cork with 19.68% from ‘West Cork’ and 55.15% from ‘Cork County, but not West Cork’. The survey also found that 22.88% responded as living in ‘Ireland, but not Cork’. The remaining 2.29% of respondents live ‘Outside Ireland’.

Q10. What is your age range?

The survey participant age range included:

59.27% of respondents ranged from 26 – 35.

13.05% of respondents were below 26.

27.68% of respondents were above 35.

This was not surprising as they are the ages that use social media most frequently and are most invested in matters of conservation.

6. Summary

This survey found that the majority of respondents (89.4%) visited woodlands regularly and prefer signed entry points, car access and clear walking trails. The majority also said that trees impart a positive value to their lives.

When asked what the most important aspect was the responses were more mixed with the highest response (43.8%) for biodiversity. Other lower responses were for carbon sequestration, mental health, aesthetic beauty and recreation. Therefore, this survey concluded that people who used woodlands valued them for biodiversity and were supportive of protecting them.

7. Citations

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8. Appendices

Appendix 1.

Woodland Survey Facebook and Instagram Post Analytics

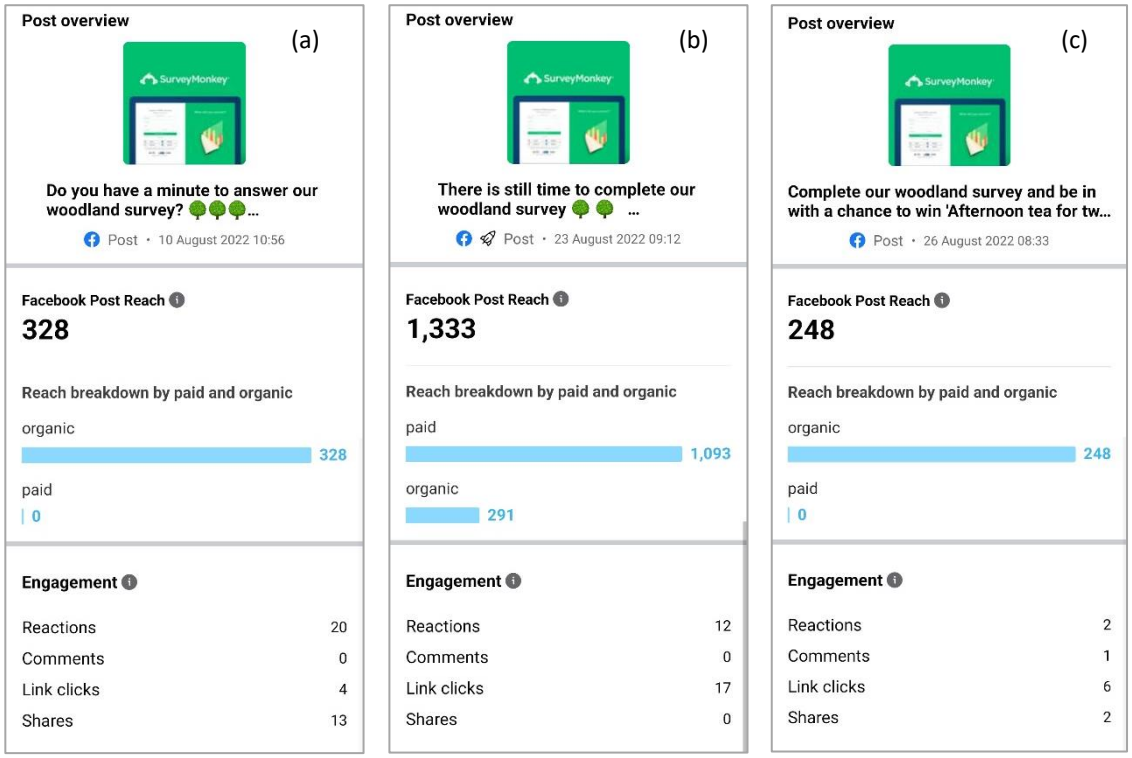

Figure 11: Screenshots showing the analytics of the three Facebook posts which shared the Survey Monkey woodland survey on (a) 10th August (b) 23rd August (c) 26th August 2022. Analytics via Business Suite.

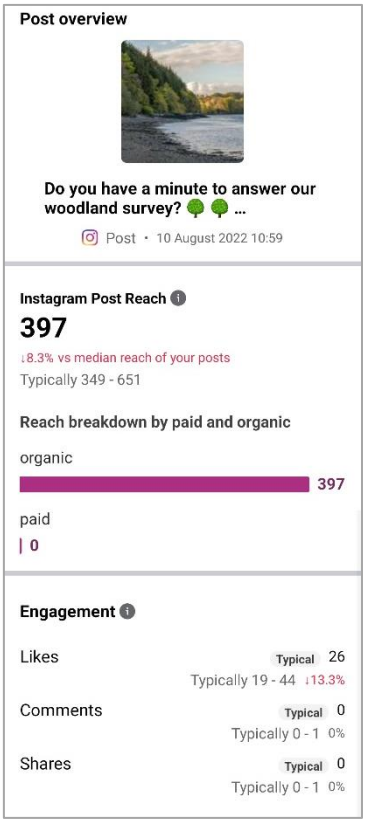

Figure 12: Screenshot showing the analytics of the Instagram post which shared the Survey Monkey woodland report on 26th August. Analytics via Business Suite.