WLI information sheet No.4:
Visitor Segmentation

Introduction

Our wetland centres attract a variety of visitors, and they come for a variety of reasons. Whilst every person is unique, we have recently developed a model which proposes recognisable visitor groups or 'segments'. Understanding our visitors' wants and needs helps us to better meet their requirements so that they have an enjoyable, inspiring and informative visit to our wetland centres.
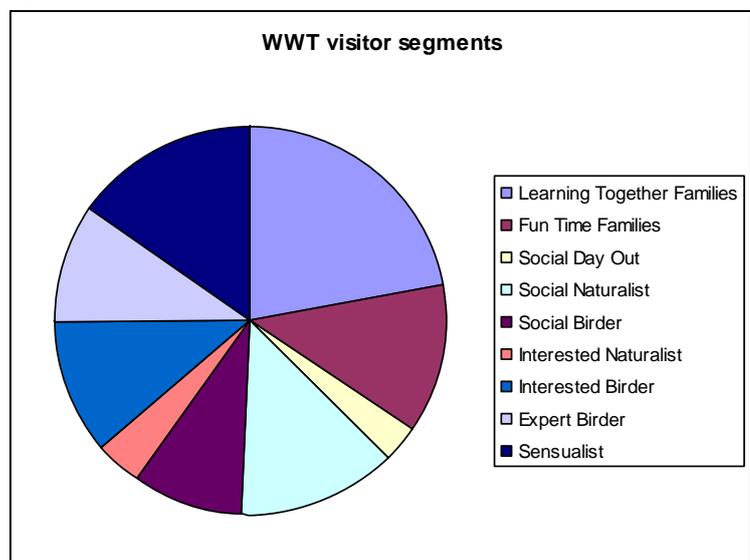
WWT's Head of Learning worked with external consultants (Morris, Hargreaves, McIntyre) to survey staff, volunteers and visitors, collate results, create defined groups that share similar characteristics, and then analyse how these groups used our centres.

The segmentation model helps us in that it encourages staff and volunteers to think more from a visitor's perspective. It also gives us some common language across the organisation to talk about differing audience needs, and is useful in planning and delivering our work as well as setting our audience focussed objectives

Further detail

The WWT visitor segmentation model was based on research data collected over a period of five months in 2010. Surveys were run with staff and volunteers, and with visitors, to find out how we could group them into similar 'segments'. We asked questions such as 'who do you come with?', 'what's the main reason for your visit today?', and 'would you call yourself a bird watcher?' and showed them a series of pictures, asking them to pick those that made them want to visit or they thought described the most important things that would make up a 'perfect' visit.

We collected the visitor data from our three largest centres – Slimbridge, Martin Mere and London, but we liaised with staff across all centres to ensure that the model we came up with would be equally applicable at all of our centres. After some considerable data analysis and discussion, the model was confirmed and describes nine visitor segments (see 'further resources' for a downloadable booklet.) As well as a description of their interests and

WWT visitor segments

- Learning Together Families
- Fun Time Families
- Social Day Out
- Social Naturalist
- Social Birder
- Interested Naturalist
- Interested Birder
- Expert Birder
- Sensualist

activities, it also outlines their information needs, knowledge of environmental issues and our organisation, styles of learning and requirements in terms of on-site facilities such as food outlets, shop, and interpretation. All of these things can help us to plan our work, market our resources and support our visitors better.

Your wetland centre

Your centre will have its own unique visitor profile, some of which may be similar to ours, but may be quite different. Depending on your location and 'offer', visitors may come for sport, higher education, community involvement or a host of other reasons. Note that individual visitors may change groups depending on who they are with or when they visit, e.g. if they come with or without children.

Visitor segmentation is an expensive process for many smaller visitor centres to undertake in a bespoke way, requiring a lot of staff time and external help to carry out interviews and analyse the data. Working at a wetland centre or site, you are likely to recognise some of these visitor segments, and this could form the basis for an analysis of your own visitors. When thinking about this here are some pointers for your site:

- WWT's visitor segments may be relevant to yours too, but it is unlikely to be a perfect fit. But - you could use this approach to talk to your visitors and work out what types of people are visiting your site.

- There may be some specific reasons why this model doesn't work well for you. For example, cultural differences.

- Once you've identified segments you think apply to you, you need to find out how many of the different types of visitor come, and when (for example there will be a different mix on weekdays versus holidays, or at different times of year).

- Use the results to target the activities you run, modify your interpretation and exhibits, or plan new buildings and habitats.

Summary of segments at WWT
Learn Together Families – families that actively encourage their children to learn about nature
Fun Time Families – families that come mainly for recreation
Interested Naturalists – adults visiting to further an intellectual interest, about nature in general
Interested Birders – as above, with a particular interest in birds
Expert birders - adult visitors with in-depth knowledge and kit
Social day-outers – see the centre mainly as a venue to meet or socialise with friends or family
Social naturalists – friends that like to see wildlife together, using what they see being something interesting to talk about
Social Birders – as above, but with a particular interest in birds
Sensualists – visitors that feel a spiritual bond with nature

WLI is recognised as a key implementer of the Ramsar CEPA programme