



CAIRNGORMS  
CAPERCAILLIE  
PROJECT



Cairngorms  
National Park  
Pàirc Nàiseanta a'  
Mhonaidh Ruaidh

# Working with the dog walking community

September 2022  
to September 2024



# Stages 1 and 2: Listening



We listened to  
265 members of  
the dog walking  
community in  
Badenoch and  
Strathspey.

**265 ...**

Dog owners

Commercial dog walkers

Dog trainers

Dog breeders

Vets

Dog groomers

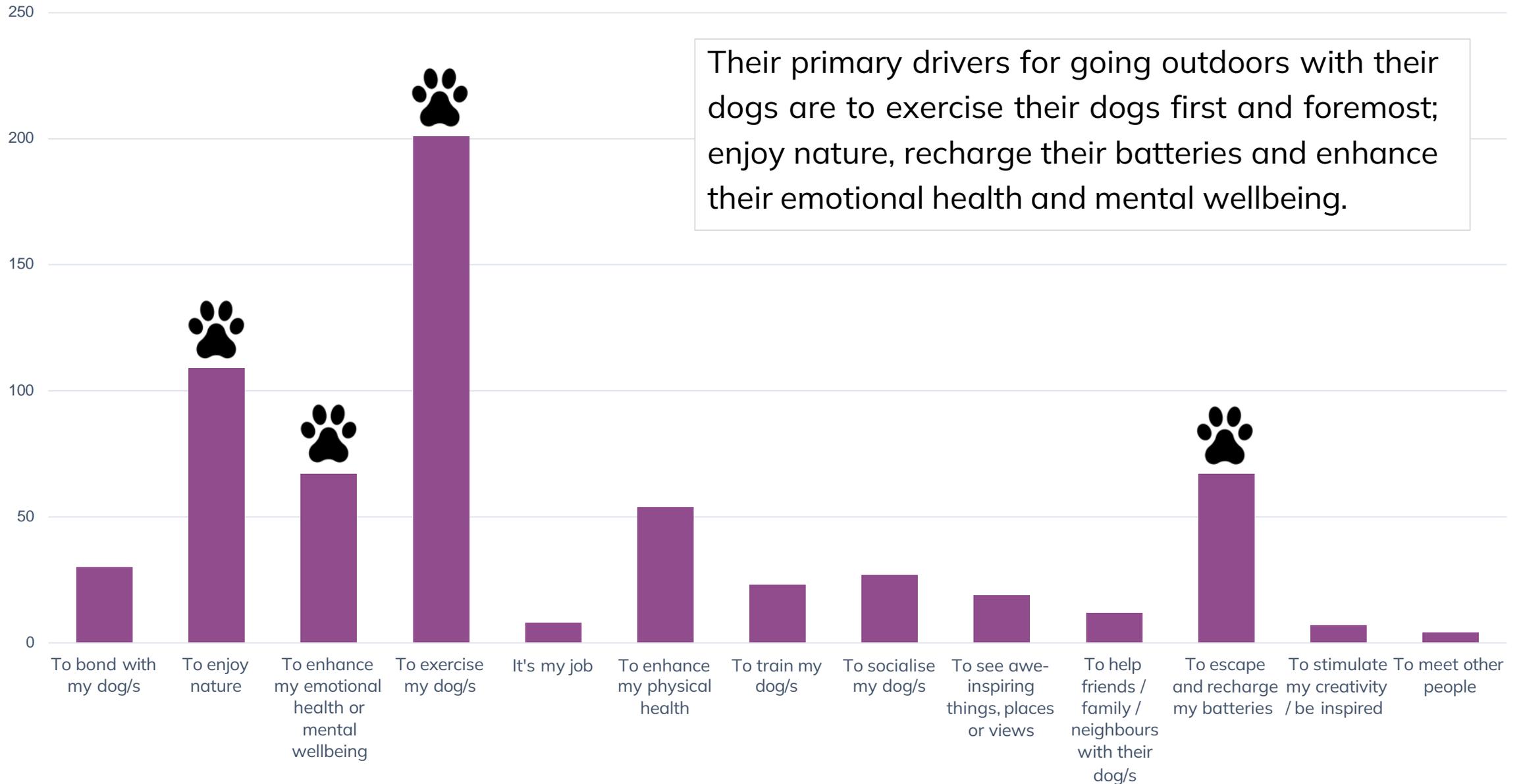
People who work dogs professionally

People with assistance dogs

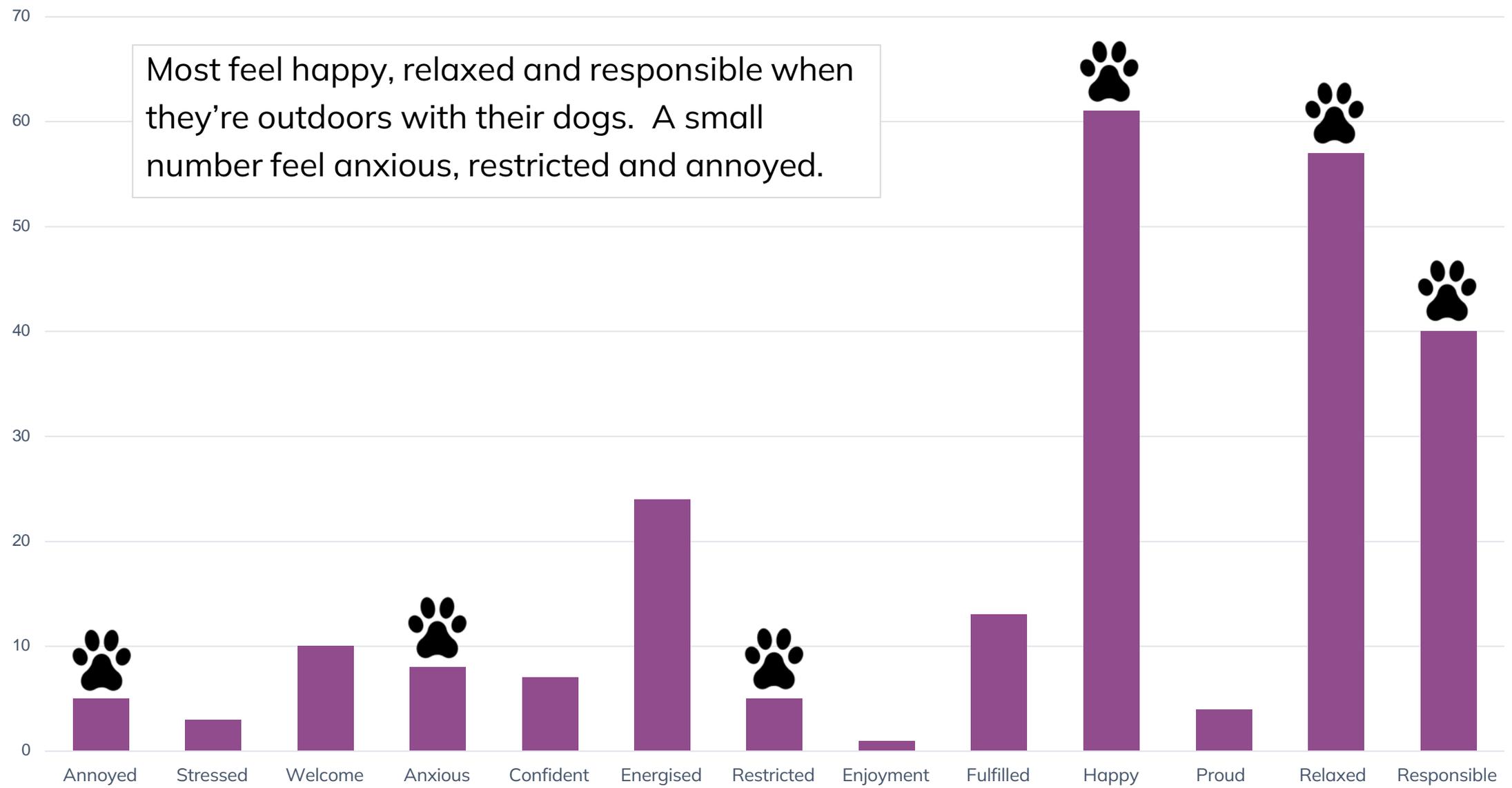
They told us that ...

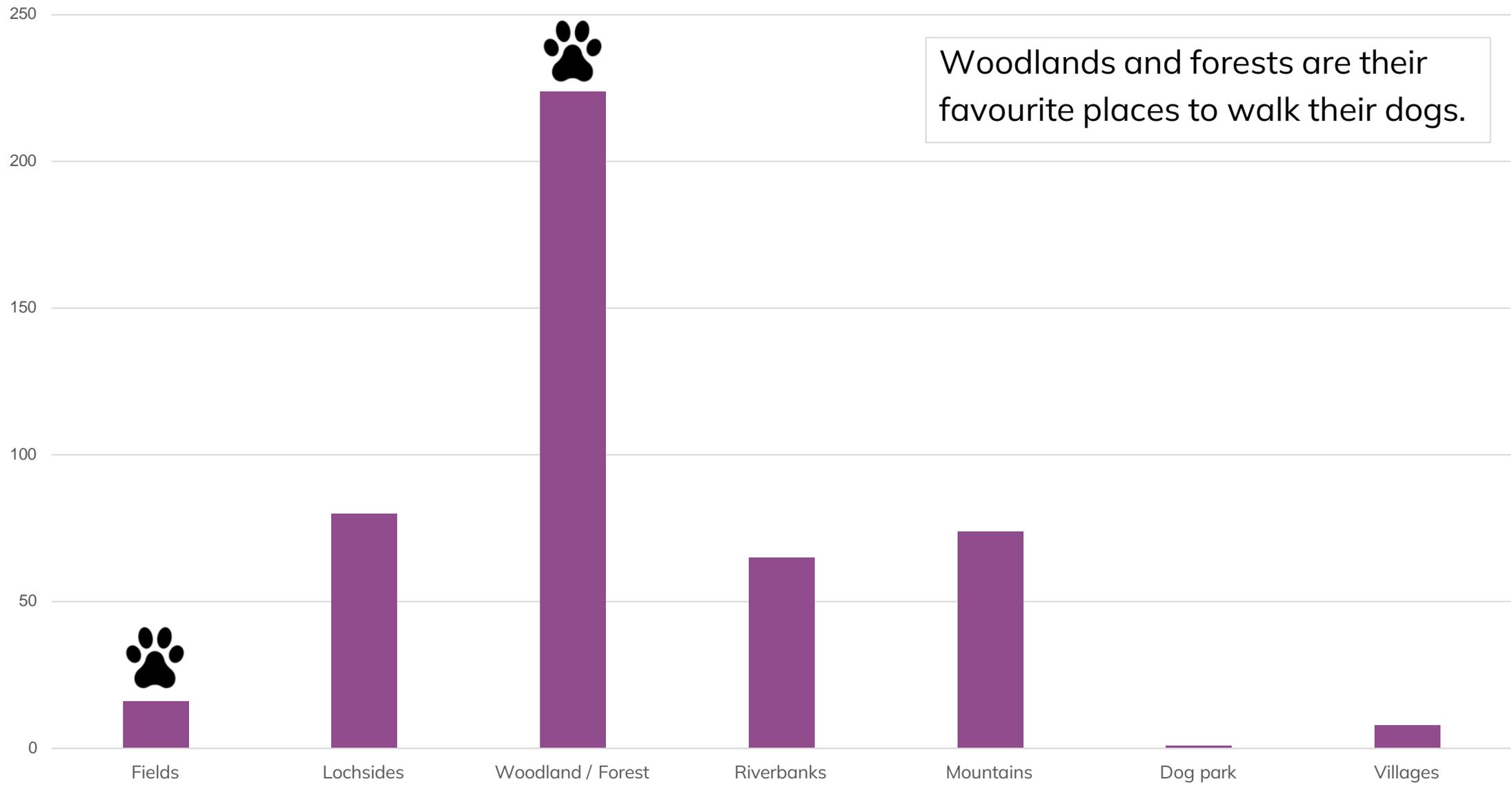


Their primary drivers for going outdoors with their dogs are to exercise their dogs first and foremost; enjoy nature, recharge their batteries and enhance their emotional health and mental wellbeing.

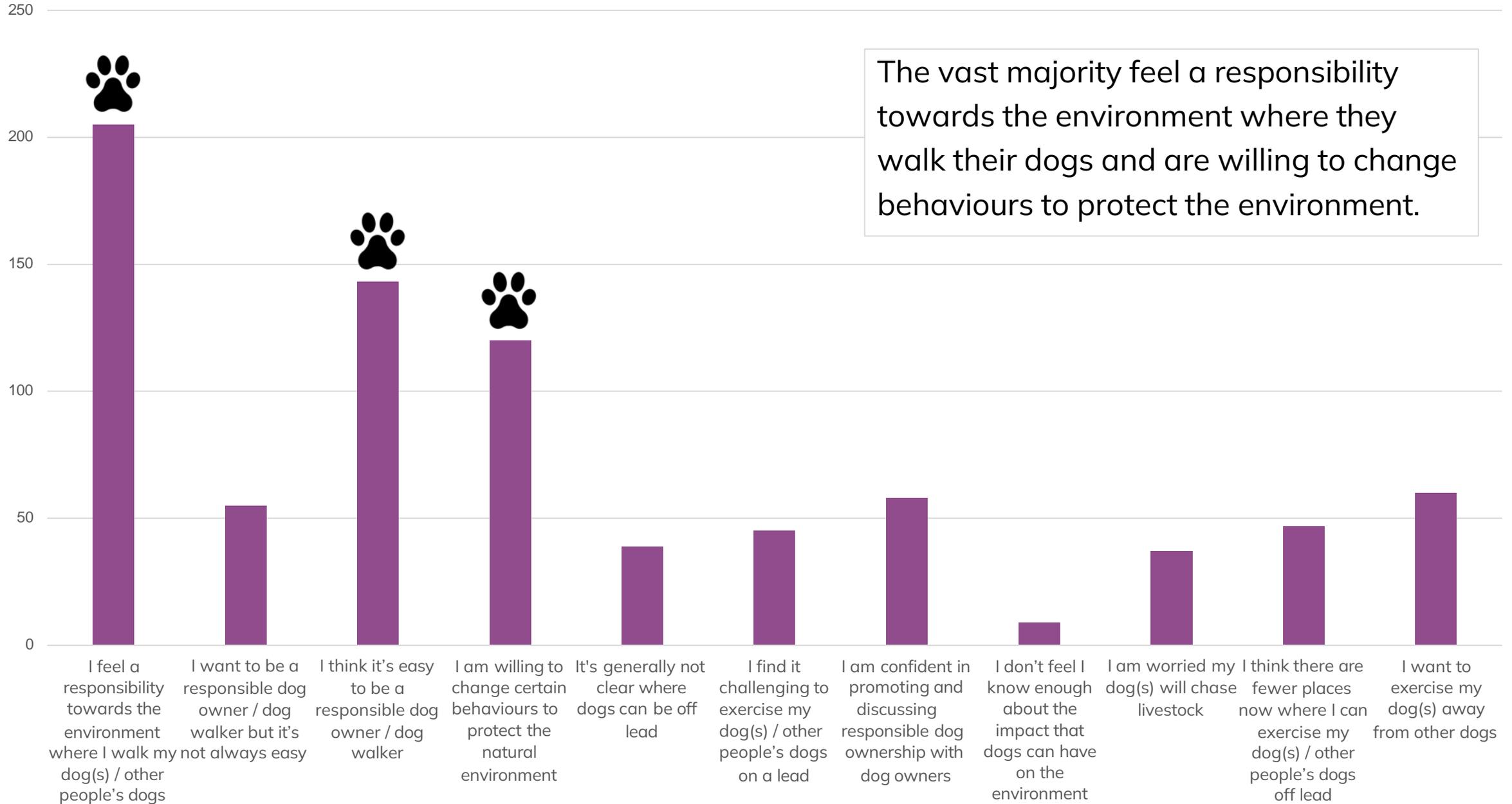


Most feel happy, relaxed and responsible when they're outdoors with their dogs. A small number feel anxious, restricted and annoyed.

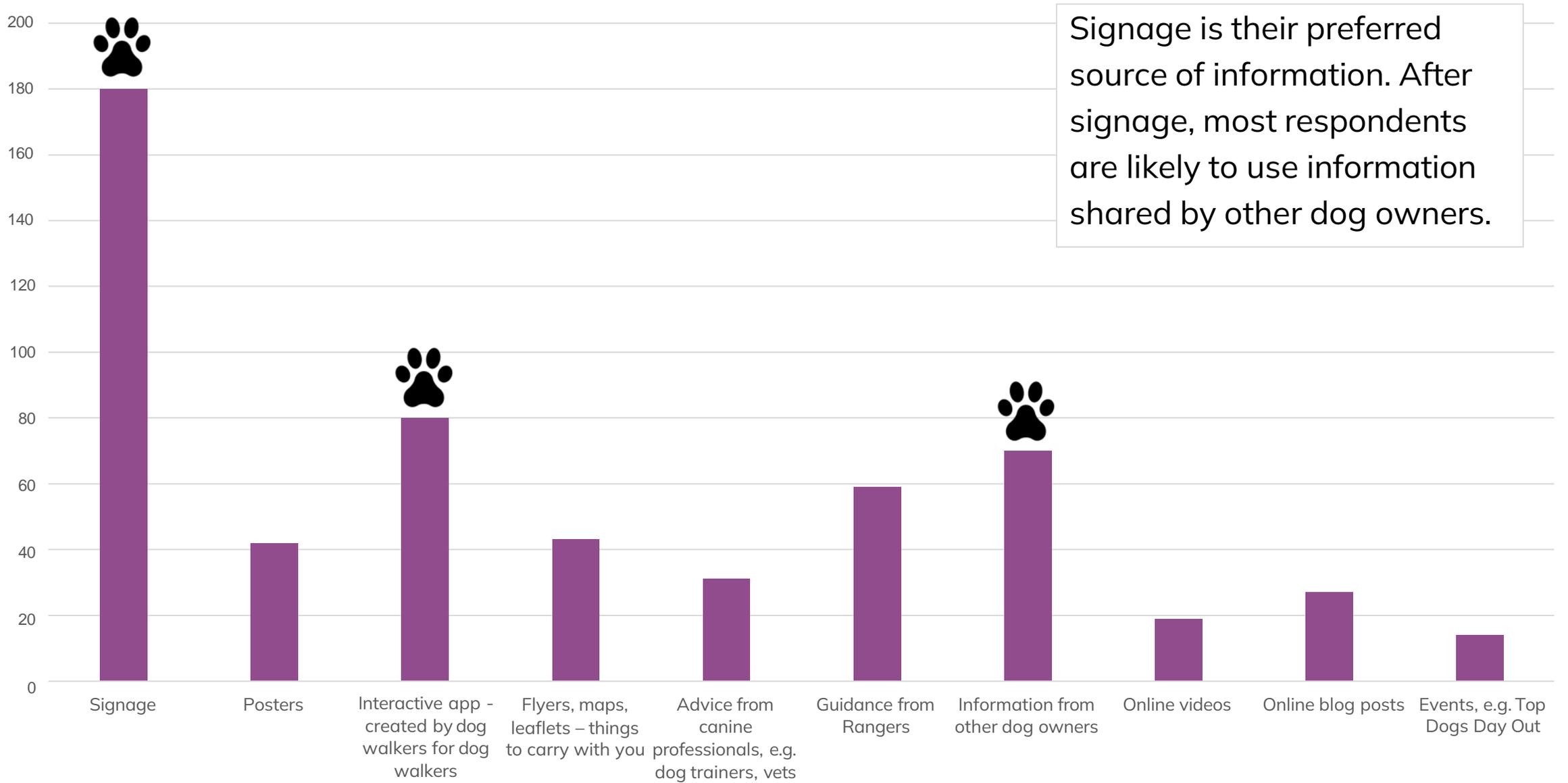


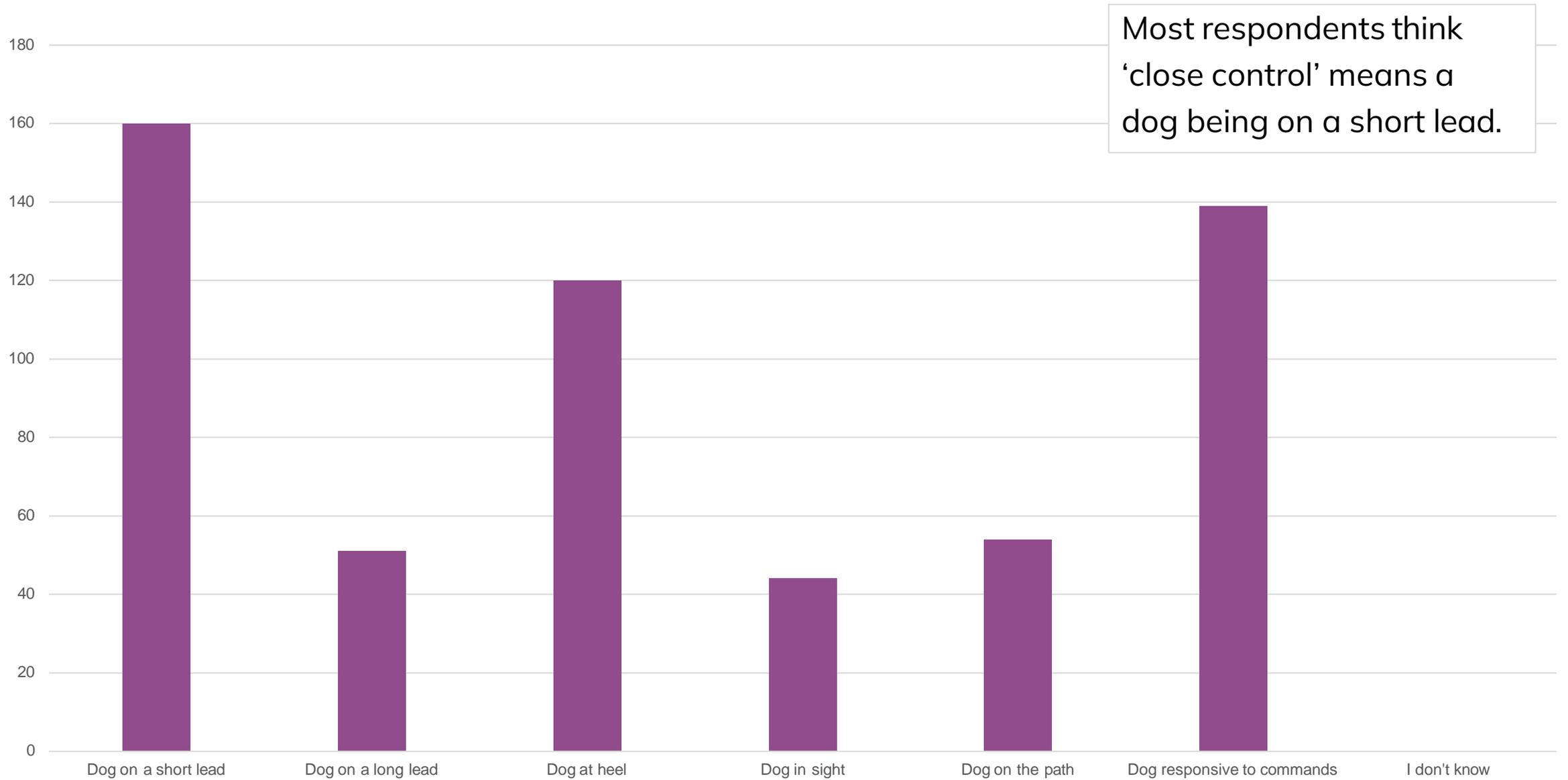


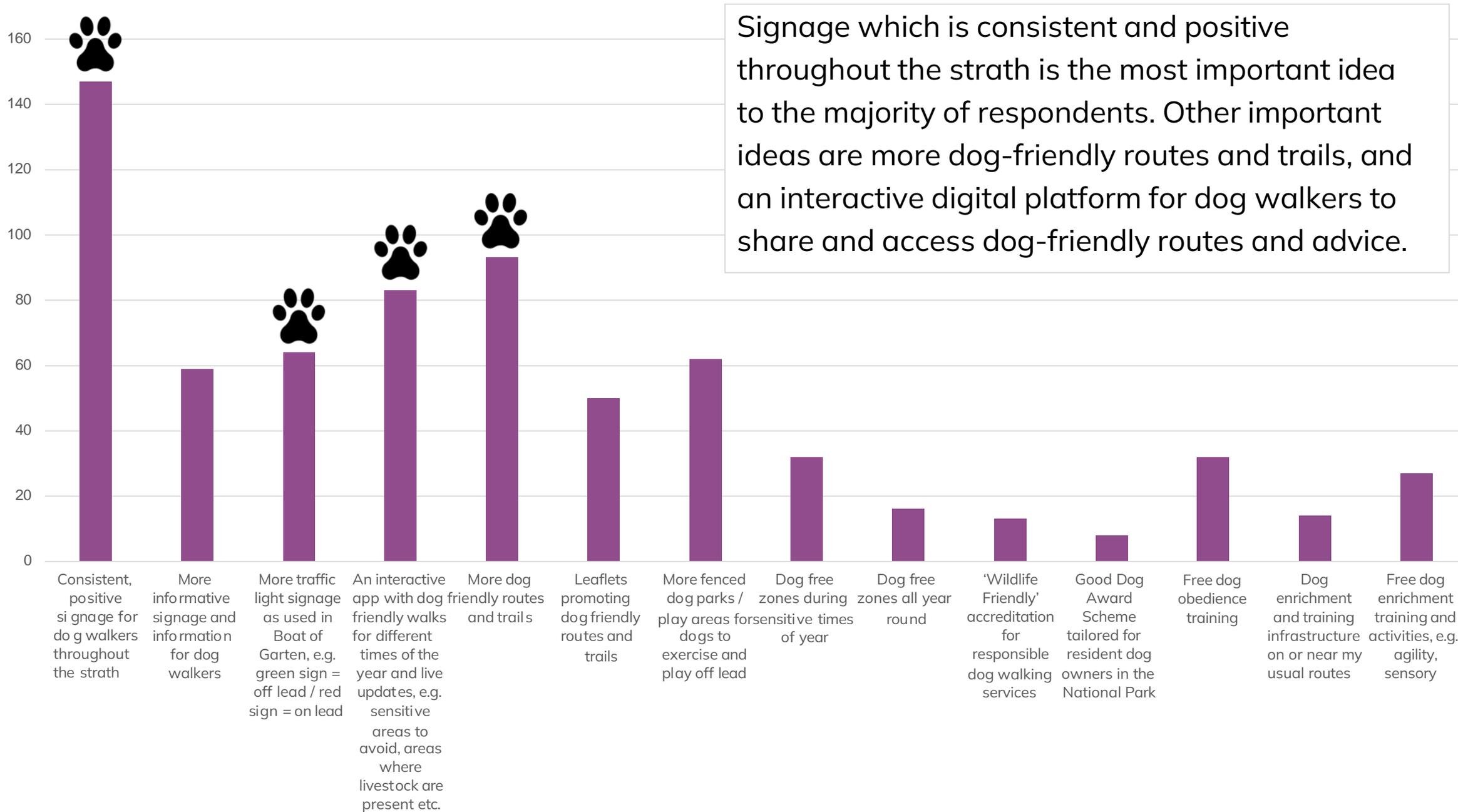
Woodlands and forests are their favourite places to walk their dogs.



The vast majority feel a responsibility towards the environment where they walk their dogs and are willing to change behaviours to protect the environment.







Their other most important ideas?

### **Top two ...**

1. Free, bookable dog exercise areas, specifically in woodlands and accessible by foot from communities.
2. More information and knowledge shared to enable more responsible dog walking.

## Stage 3: Action planning



Using the research and through a series of facilitated workshops, we developed an Action Plan with members of the dog owning community.

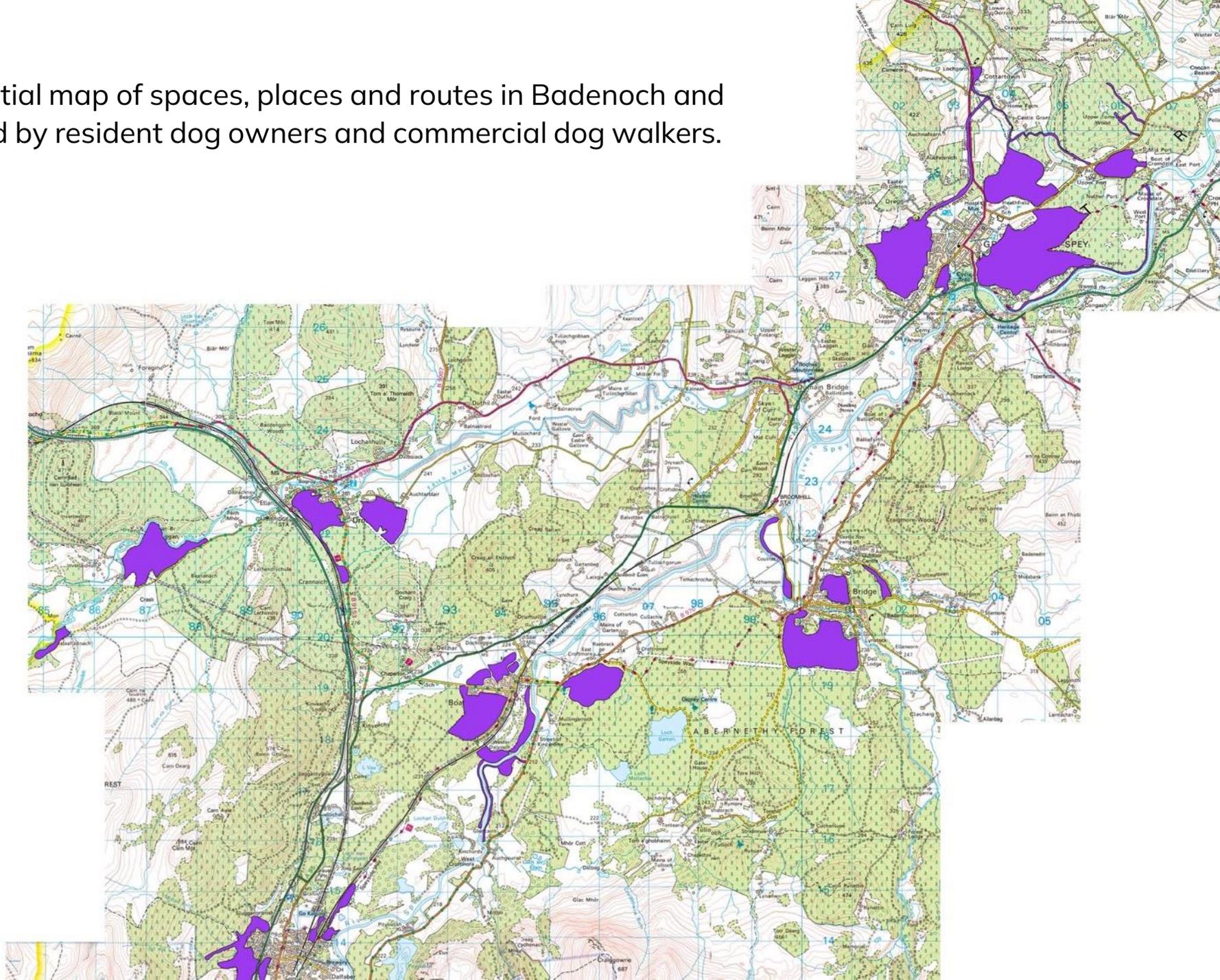
## **The vision**

A dog friendly Cairngorms where wildlife can thrive.

## **Priority actions**

1. Develop free dog walking spaces in Badenoch and Strathspey, ideally in woodlands and accessible on foot from communities, to meet the needs of dogs and their owners away from sensitive areas for wildlife.
2. Build knowledge around capercaillie by developing an active community of dog owners in Badenoch and Strathspey with information and understanding at its heart.

We created an initial map of spaces, places and routes in Badenoch and Strathspey valued by resident dog owners and commercial dog walkers.



We scoped a pawprint rating system for the mapped areas used by dog owners. A similar rating system is used successfully by the National Trust as part of their Dogs Welcome project.



*“The project provides dog owners with essential information ahead of their visit to help them get the most out of their day. The information is also designed to help those without a four-legged friend enjoy their visit too.”*

We developed the pawprint rating system with a view to piloting it in Boat of Garten and Abernethy.



Dogs are welcome here.

Opportunities for walking your dog off the lead are limited because protected wildlife lives here and is easily disturbed by dogs.

Other hazards to your dog include livestock and open access to roads.



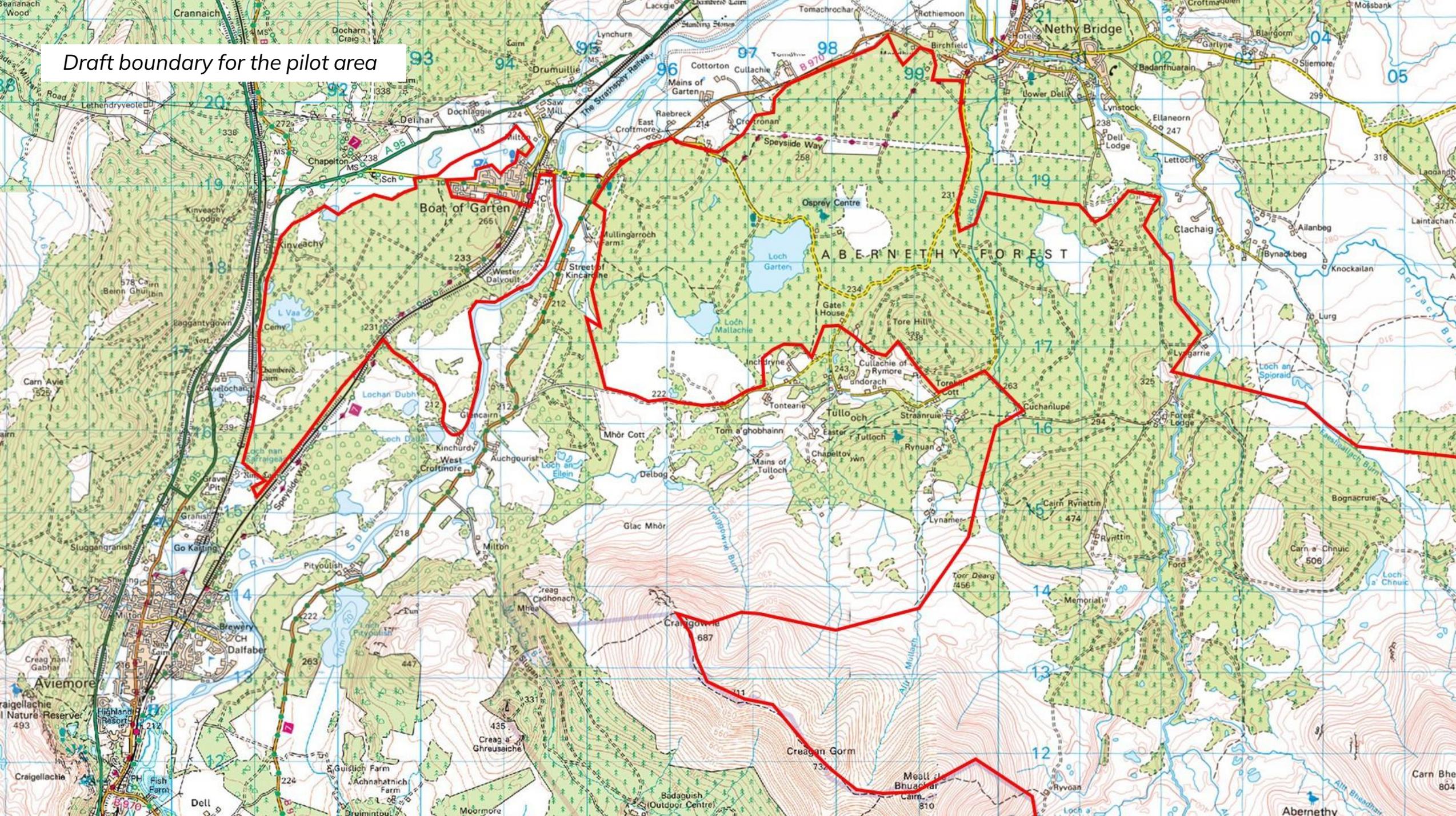
Dogs are very welcome here.

You will find the best opportunities for both you and your dog to enjoy.

It is very unlikely that protected wildlife will be disturbed by your dog here, or that you will encounter livestock or open access to roads.

*\* These are draft descriptions to give a flavour of the approach.*

Draft boundary for the pilot area



To increase the likelihood of a successful pilot within the short project timescales, we narrowed the focus to Boat of Garten and commissioned the Lane Agency to help us develop and deliver the pilot using 'nudges' based on behavioural principles.



We focused on four key behavioural principles and created the 'Neighbourly Advice' campaign.

# NEIGHBOURLY ADVICE

We defined the intended outcome for the campaign and launched the campaign in April at the beginning of the capercaillie breeding season.

Boat of Garten dog walkers have changed their mindset and habitual dog walking practices to prevent disturbance to the local Capercaillie population.

**Project outcome**

# Stage 4: Delivery



# Behavioural principle #1

## Mere exposure effect

People tend to develop a liking or disliking for things merely because they are familiar with them, so the campaign consisted of multiple touch points with universal imagery deployed around the village and online on the community channels.



## Behavioural principle #2

### Mere ownership effect

People who feel ownership over something tend to evaluate it more positively than people who do not, so the campaign messaging was framed around the community's ownership of local capercaillie conservation, in partnership with the land manager.

## Keep up the good work

Thanks to the care taken by Boat of Garten residents and Strathspey Estate, there are now twice as many capercaillie living in Deshar Woods compared to just four years ago. **In fact, the birds in our woods now account for 2% of the national population!**

But, with **only 532 capercaillie left in the UK**, keeping them safe has never been more important.

### facts about capercaillie

**They are rare**  
Now one of the rarest birds in the UK, the capercaillie population has declined by over 50% in the last five years.

**They mate in April**  
The birds gather at traditional mating sites called leks where the males perform



## How our do be good cap neighbours

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**in the w**  
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likely to be distur

## Behavioural principle #3

### Commitment and consistency

After an initial commitment, people feel compelled to align future actions with that commitment for consistency, so at the end of the campaign we invited residents to an event to tell them about the positive impact of their commitment and to inspire consistency.



# NEIGHBOURLY GET TOGETHER

This Saturday, 10am to 3pm

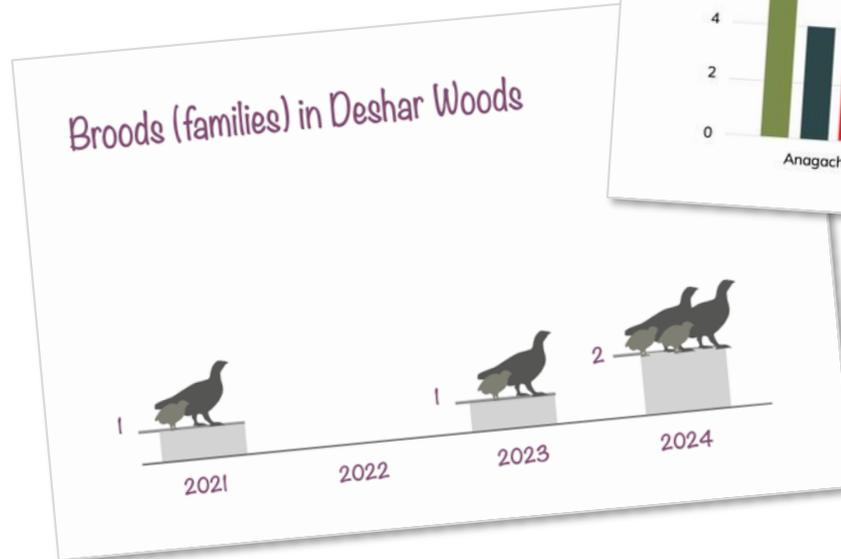
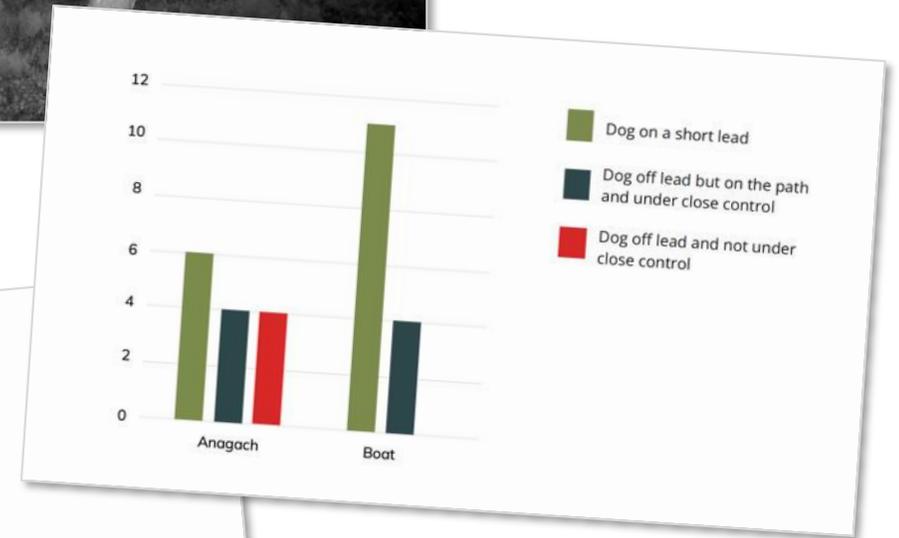
Boat of Garten Community Hall 

Capercaillie talks | Home baking | Childrens' activities | Raffle | Stalls  
Scentwork | Dog grooming | Mantrailing | Bonfire Field proposal

# Behavioural principle #4

## Feedback loops

Feedback can reinforce positive behaviour and motivate continued effort, so we shared capercaillie and Ranger patrol data with residents to provide feedback on their progress towards the goal of continuing to keep capercaillie safe whilst still enjoying the woods.



## Campaign element #1

### Leaflets delivered to all homes

We delivered a campaign leaflet to every home in Boat of Garten to share with all residents, including dog owners, information about the local capercaillie population, the challenges they face and ways to help look after them.



# Campaign element #2

## Posters in community spaces

Businesses in the village including the café, village shop, caravan park and community hall, displayed posters reinforcing the messages shared in the leaflets delivered to all homes.

**PLEASE TRY NOT TO DISTURB US**

CAIRNGORMS CAPERCAILLIE PROJECT Cairngorms National Park The Scottish Government Scottish Natural Heritage

### How can you and your dog continue being good capercaillie neighbours?

From 1 April to 31 August in Deshar Wood...

- Please keep your dog on the path and under close control wherever you are in the wood.
- Walk your dog on a short lead where asked in the area marked as sensitive for capercaillie.
- Use our new capercaillie-friendly map of the wood if you want to plan a route that avoids the area where capercaillie are most likely to be disturbed.
- Bag and bin your dog's poo, or take it with you.
- Keep an eye on the bohfire fied (the moor at the top of the village) which we're working to make dog-friendly.

Find out more about capercaillie at [cairngormscapercaillie.scot](http://cairngormscapercaillie.scot)



# Campaign element #3

## Information panels and leaflets

We installed information panels and leaflets at the entrances to the woods reinforcing the messaging elsewhere in the village.



## Campaign element #4

### Signage on paths in the woods

We installed signage on paths and at key junctions in the woods to reinforce the messaging on the information panels at the entrances to the woods.



## Campaign element #5

### Park Authority Rangers

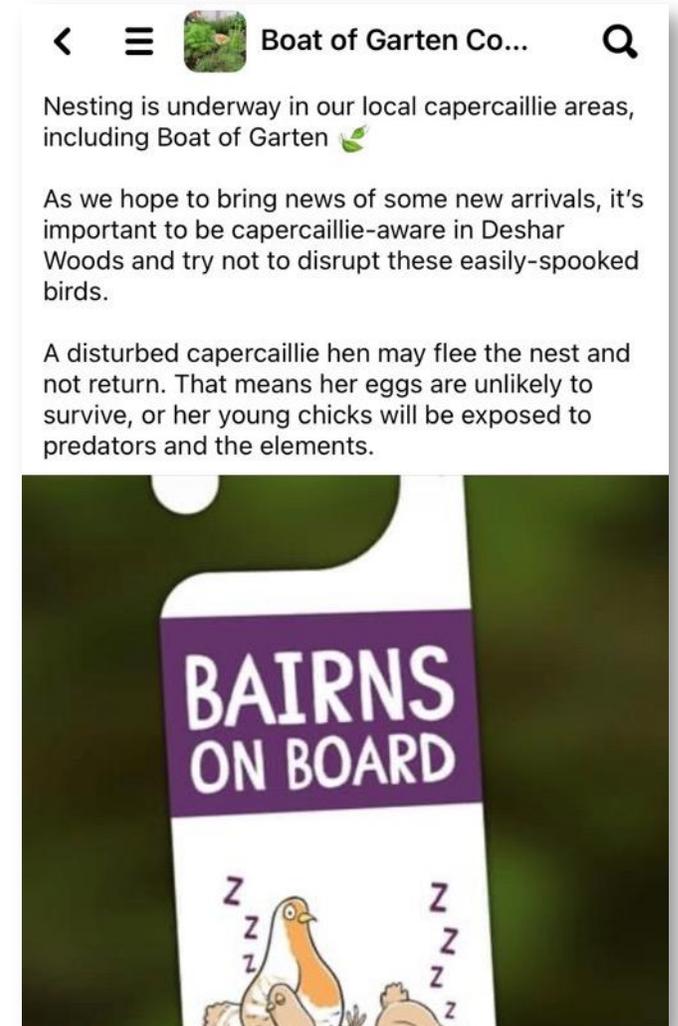
The Park Authority  
Ranger team were on  
hand in and around  
the woods throughout  
the campaign  
promoting adherence  
to the messaging.



# Campaign element #6

## Social media assets

Businesses in the village and the community Facebook group shared information online, reinforcing messaging on the ground.



# Campaign element #7

## End of campaign event

We invited residents to an event at the end of the campaign to thank them for being great capercaillie neighbours and tell them about the positive impact they had on helping to keep capercaillie safe from disturbance this spring.



# NEIGHBOURLY GET TOGETHER

This Saturday, 10am to 3pm  
Boat of Garten Community Hall 

Capercaillie talks | Home baking | Childrens' activities | Raffle | Stalls  
Scentwork | Dog grooming | Mantrailing | Bonfire Field proposal

# THANK YOU



BOAT OF GARTEN

# FOR BEING GREAT NEIGHBOURS



## HELLO BOAT FOLK!

Thanks to the care taken by Boat of Garten residents and Strathspey Estate, Deshar Woods is home to 2% of the national capercaillie population.

### YOU'VE MADE A POSITIVE IMPACT

Capercaillie are an easily-spooked bird, so any unexpected visitors can scare them away. But in Deshar Woods this year, because more residents have been following the signs, walking their dogs on a lead and using the new capercaillie-friendly map, nesting capercaillie and mothers with chicks have been given the best chance of thriving.

This has helped the birds have a successful breeding season, welcoming **TWICE** as many new feathered families than last year.

When there are so few of these magnificent birds left, every healthy chick is something to celebrate!

## HERE'S TO NEXT YEAR

Let's keep up the good work. If you've any ideas or feedback, we'd love to hear it.



Our findings ...



# Potential influence of the Lek It Be campaign

The Lek It Be campaign targeted at birdwatchers, photographers and wildlife guides was running at the same time as the Neighbourly Advice campaign, so may have also influenced the behaviour of dog owners in Boat of Garten.



Cairngorms  
National Park  
Pàire Nàiseanta a'  
Mhonaidh Ruaidh

**Please do not go looking for capercaillie this spring.**

This breeding season **lek it be.**

Capercaillie are protected under UK law. This means it is a criminal offence to disturb the birds during the breeding season.

Disturbance is one of the pressures that is pushing the species closer to extinction.



 **#LekItBe**   

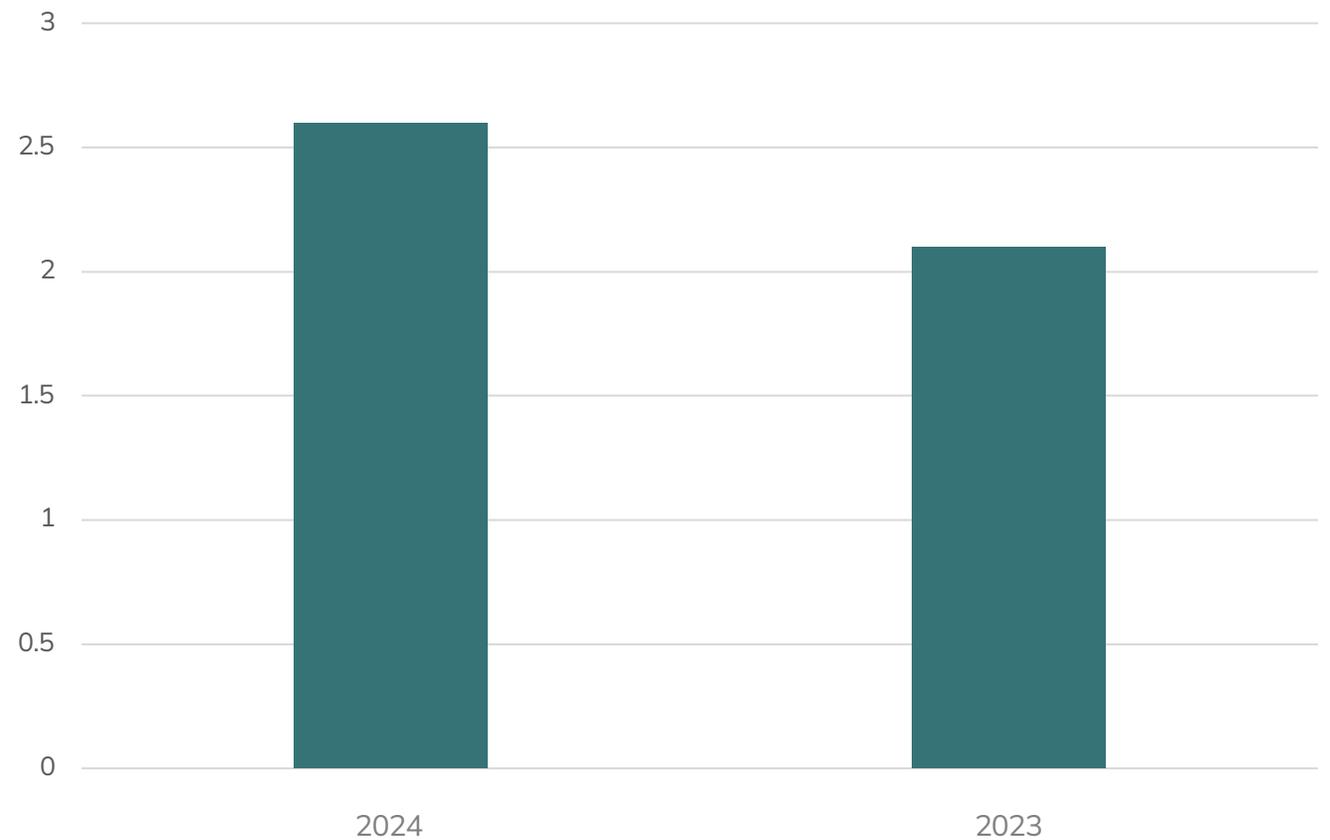
**SCOTTISH OUTDOOR ACCESS CODE**  
outdooraccess-scotland.scot

**POLICE SCOTLAND**  
Keeping people safe  
POILEAS ALBA

## Slightly more people walking dogs

From 1 April to 5 May, between the hours of 5.30am and 9am when capercaillie are lekking and highly vulnerable to disturbance, Rangers on patrol encountered slightly more people walking their dogs in Boat of Garten compared to the same period in 2023.

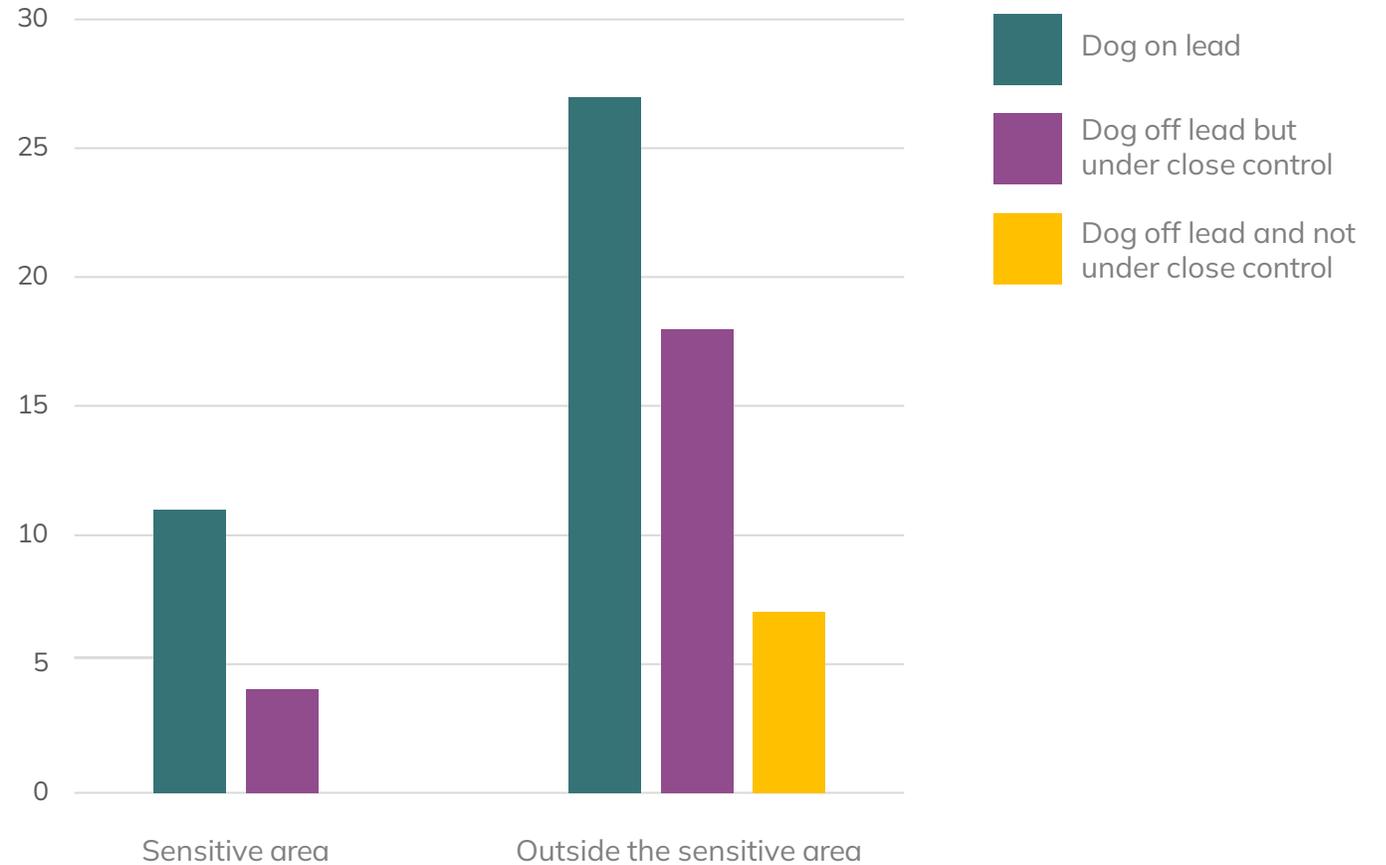
Average number of dog walkers encountered each day during dawn patrols in Boat of Garten in 2023 and 2024



## More dogs walked away from the sensitive area for capercaillie

Rangers encountered more dogs being walked in less sensitive parts of the wood in Boat of Garten.

Dog walking behaviour in and outside the capercaillie sensitive area in Boat of Garten in 2024

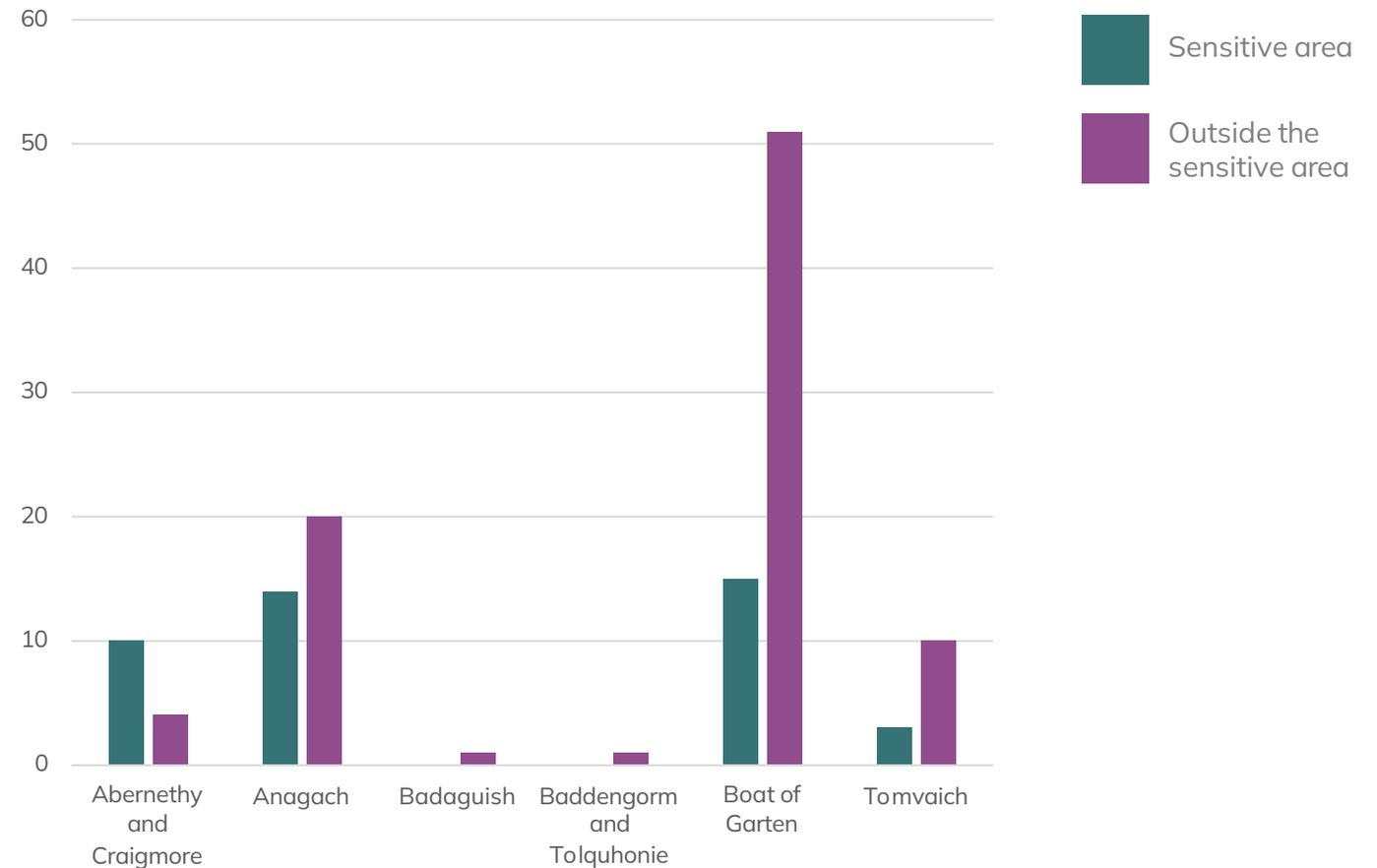


\* Comparative data not available for 2023

## More capercaillie friendly behaviours compared to Anagach

Anagach is a comparable site also patrolled by Rangers – there, 60% of dogs encountered were being walked in the sensitive area for capercaillie compared to 23% in Boat of Garten.

Number of dog walkers encountered in and outside capercaillie sensitive areas across five different sites in 2024

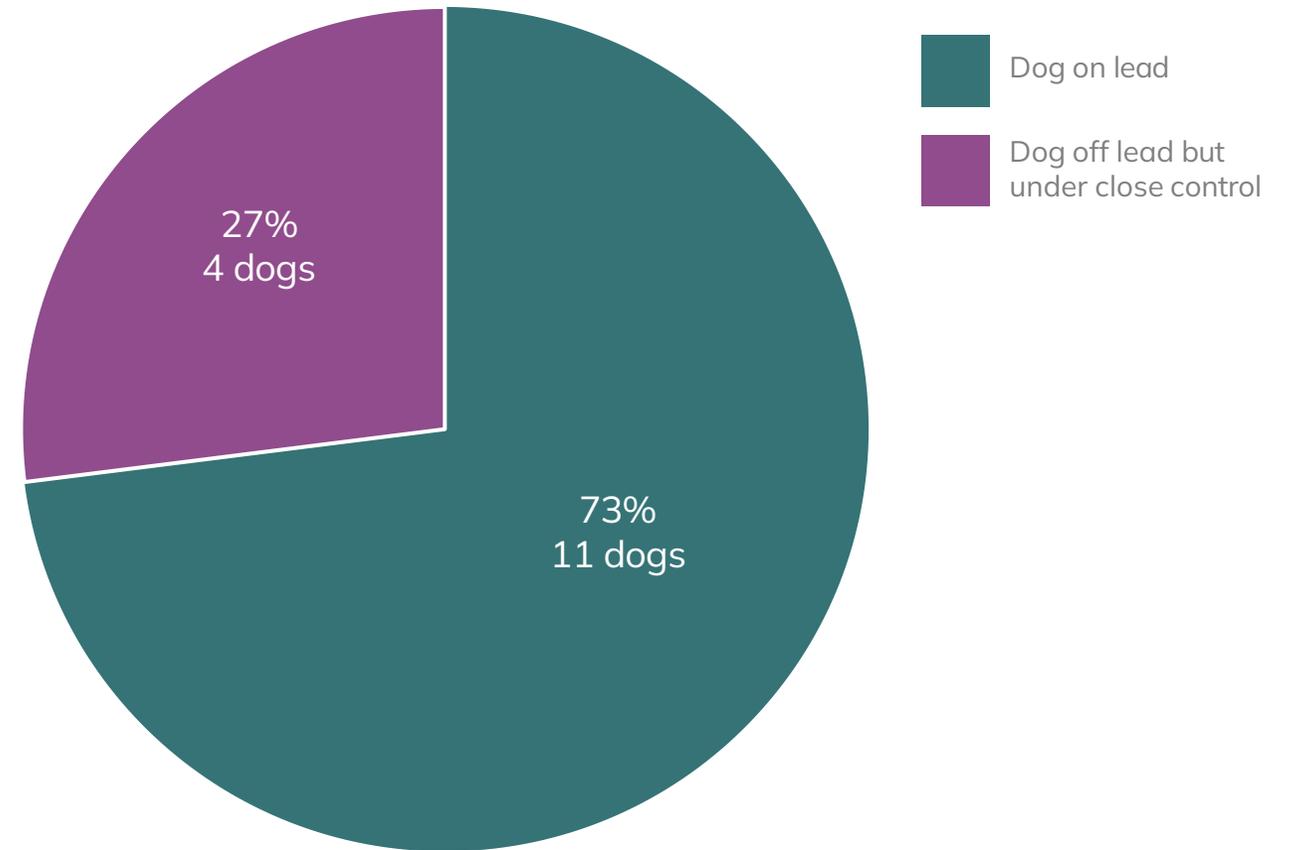


\* Comparative data not available for 2023

## All dogs encountered in the sensitive area were under control

All dogs encountered in the capercaillie sensitive area in Boat of Garten were under control with the majority of dog owners adhering to the campaign messaging and walking their dog on a lead.

Dog walking behaviour in the capercaillie sensitive area in Boat of Garten in 2024

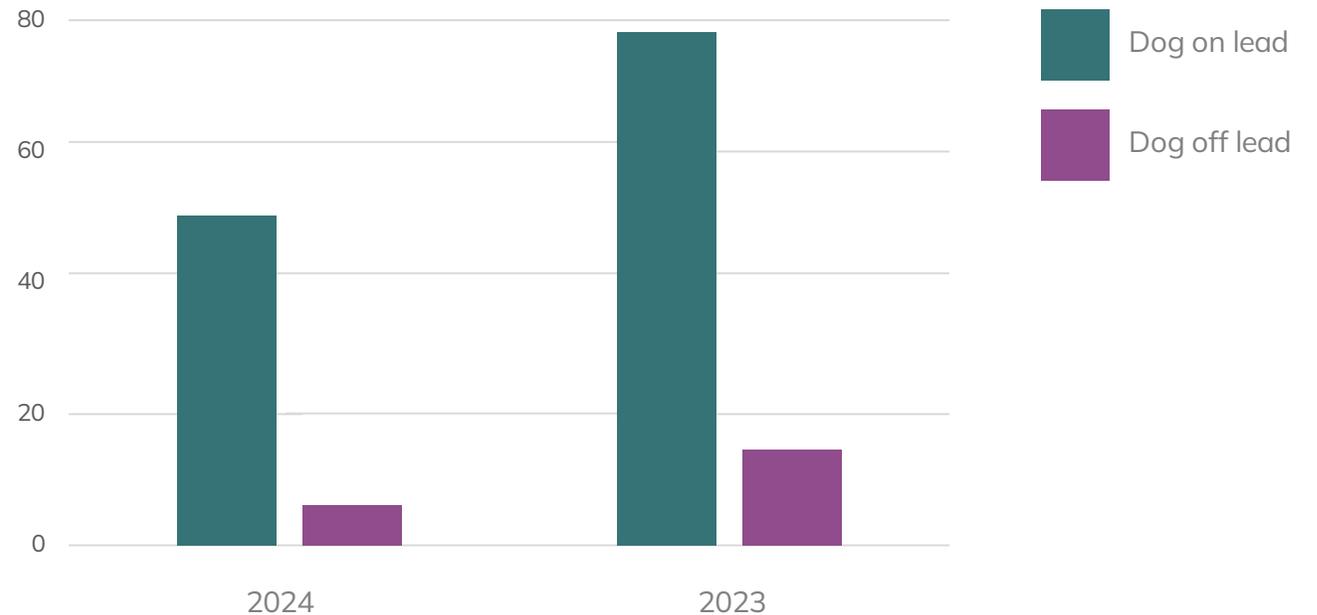


\* Comparative data not available for 2023

## Proportionally more dogs were encountered on a lead compared to last year

In Boat of Garten woods overall, Rangers encountered 91% of dogs being walked on a lead this year compared to 85% of dogs in 2023.

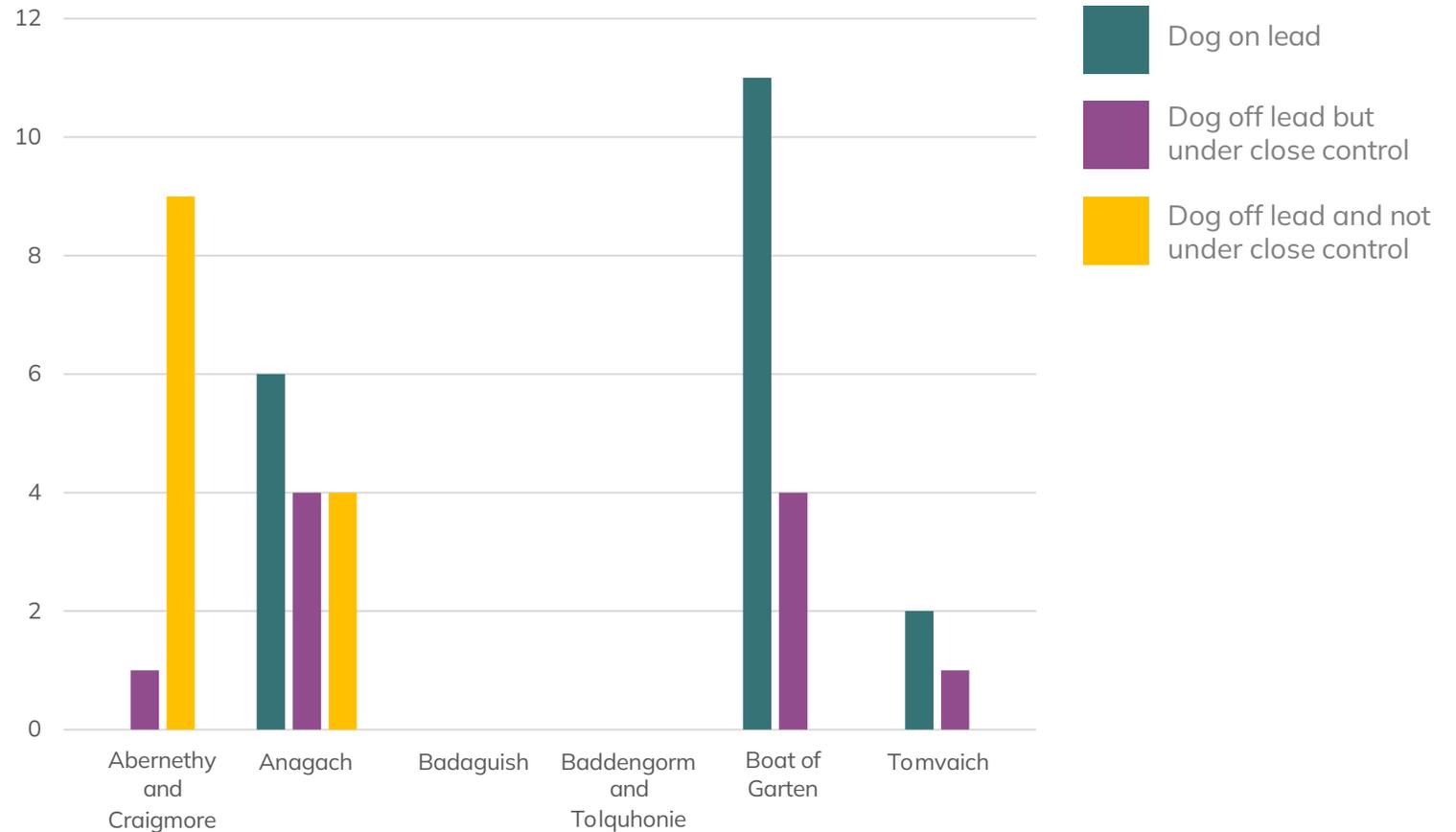
Number of dog walkers encountered walking their dog on and off lead in Boat of Garten in 2023 and 2024



## More dogs walked on a lead compared to other patrolled sites

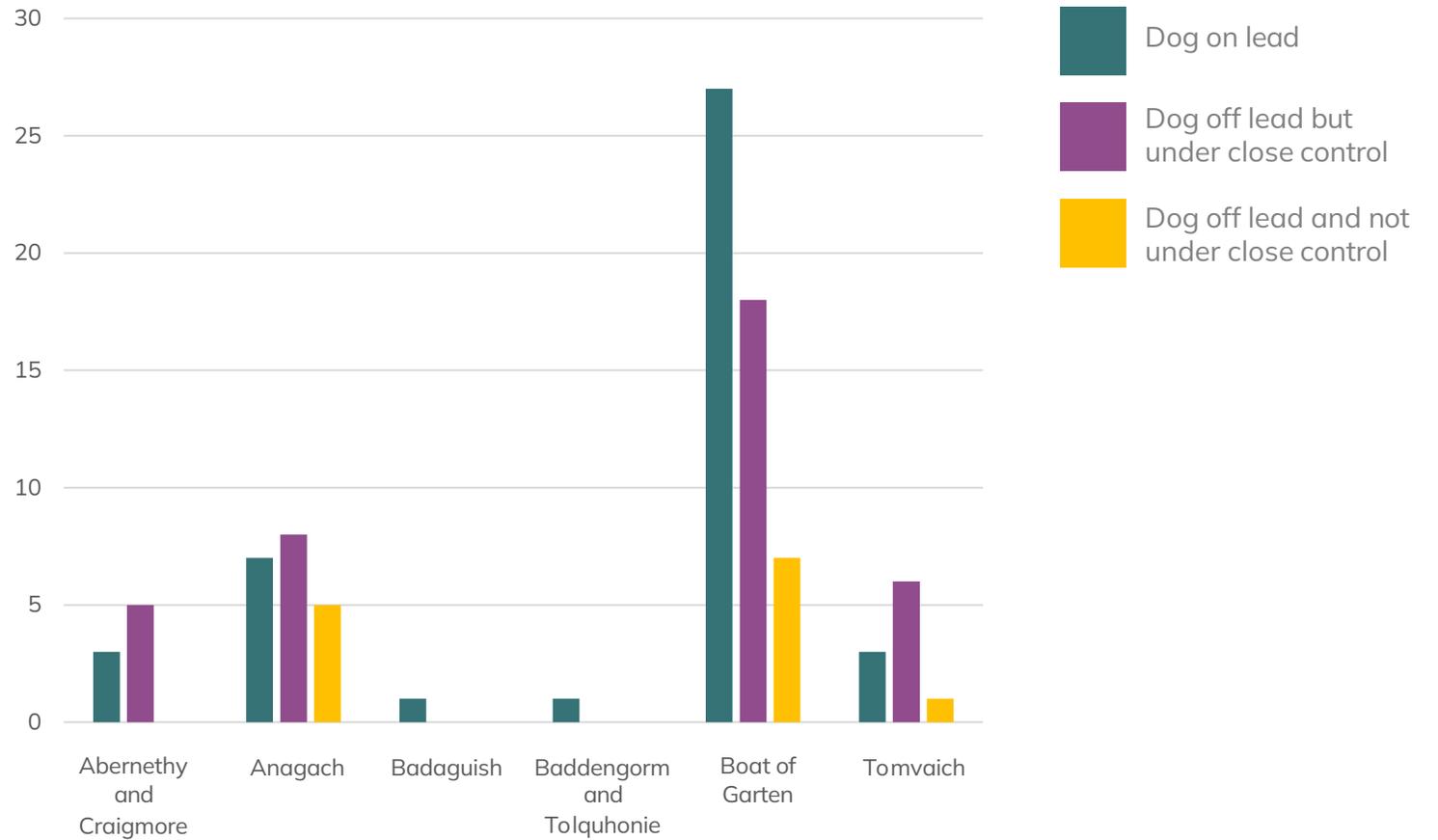
Compared to other Ranger patrolled sites, more dogs in Boat of Garten were encountered being walked on a lead regardless of whether they were in a sensitive capercaillie area or not. This graph shows behaviours within sensitive capercaillie areas.

Dog walking behaviour in capercaillie sensitive areas across five different sites in 2024



This graph shows dog walking behaviours outside of sensitive capercaillie areas.

Dog walking behaviour outside capercaillie sensitive areas across five different sites in 2024



## Online engagement was positive

Campaign posts targeted at Boat of Garten residents received over 1,000 engagements which were overwhelmingly positive.



Kirsty Taylor

We paid attention to the friendly advice on the signs last week 🥰



1 w Like Reply



Example response to the campaign on Facebook.

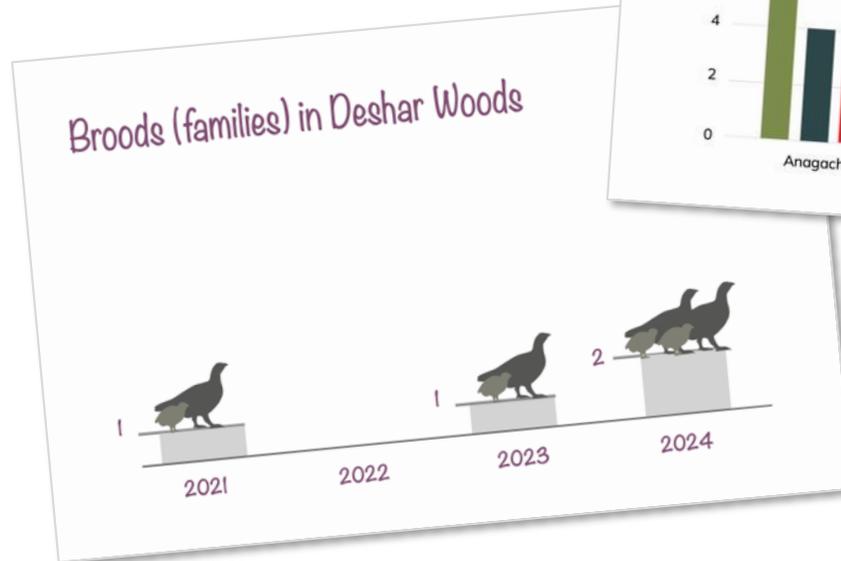
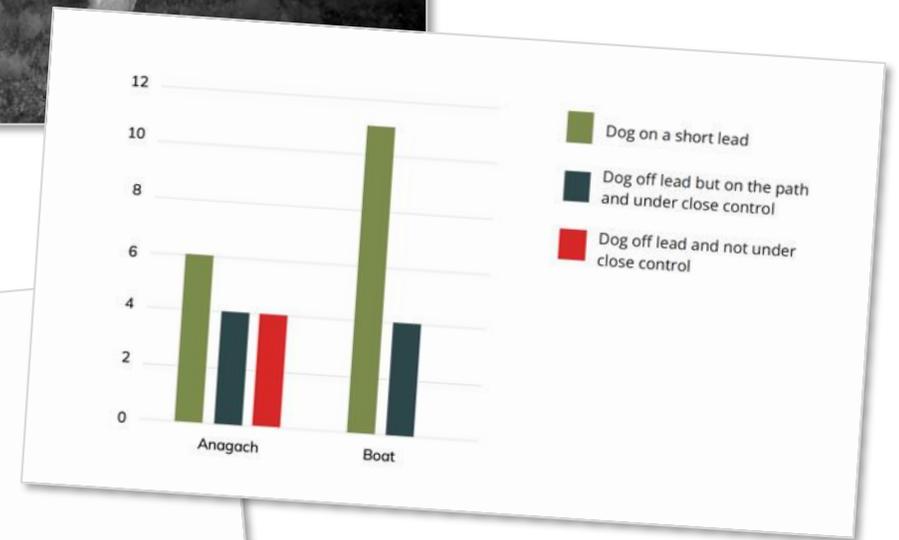
## Residents engaged with feedback opportunities

Over 100 people attended a Neighbourly Get Together event at the end of the campaign. Information was shared at the event about how capercaillie fared during the breeding season and residents were invited to share their thoughts about the campaign.



# Positive feedback was shared about the capercaillie talks at the Neighbourly Get Together

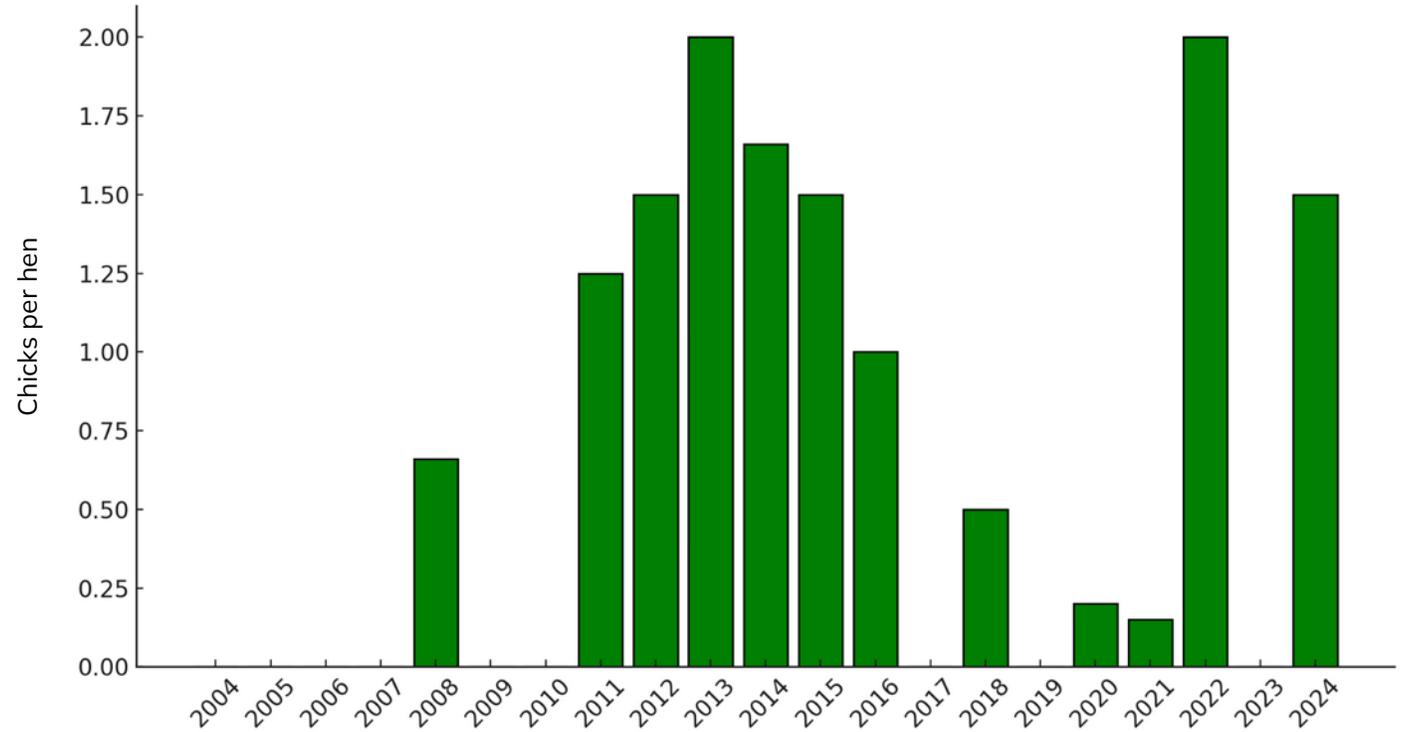
The talks delivered at the event saw capercaillie and Ranger patrol data shared with residents. The aim was to provide feedback, reinforce positive behaviours and motivate continued effort.



# Capercaillie productivity increased in the woods compared to last year

A summary of this data from the most recent years was shared with residents at the Neighbourly Get Together.

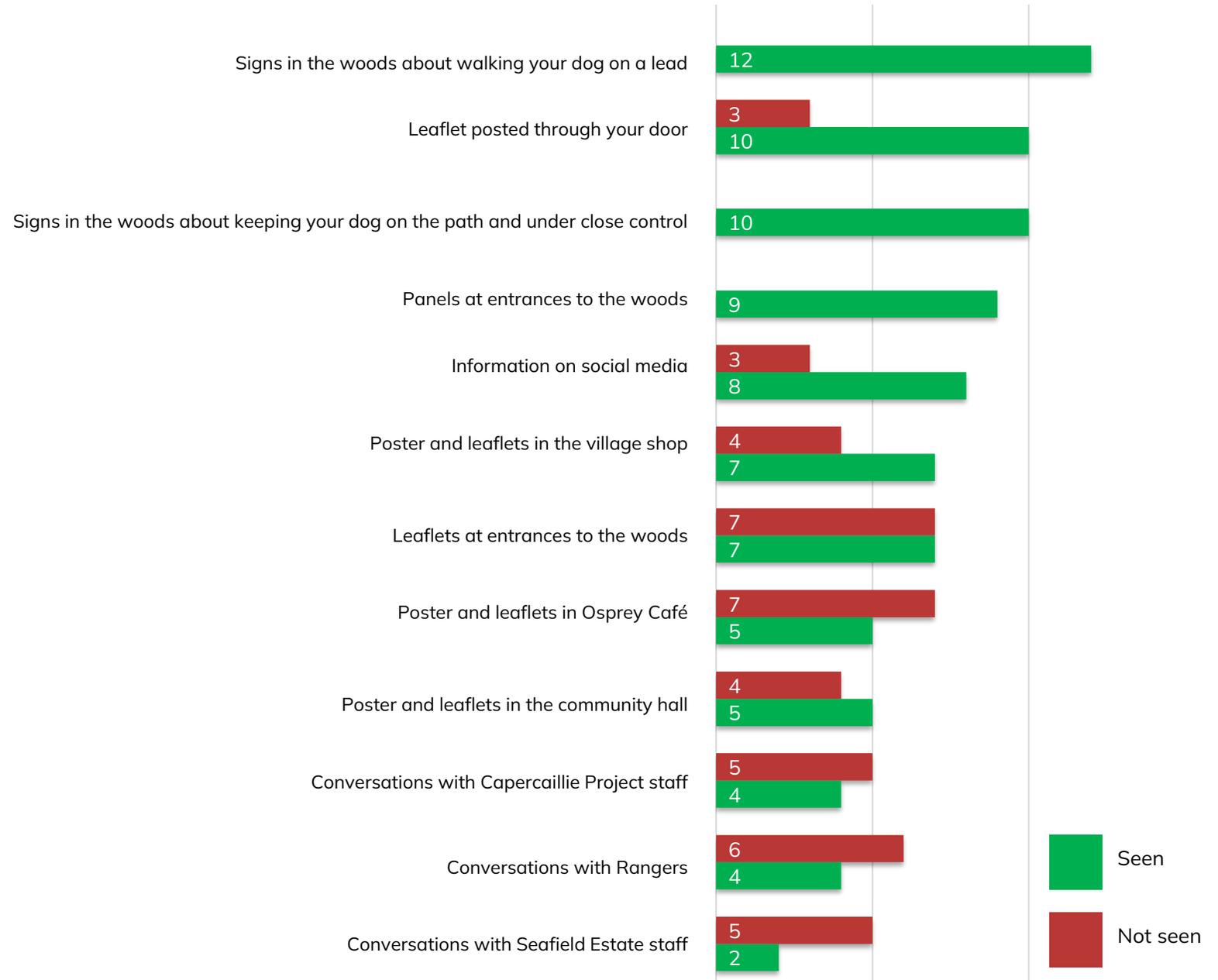
Number of chicks per hen in Boat of Garten woods



# All campaign elements were seen

Collectively, the residents that attended the Neighbourly Get Together reported seeing all the campaign elements, with the signs in the woods and the leaflets delivered to all homes being seen by the most people.

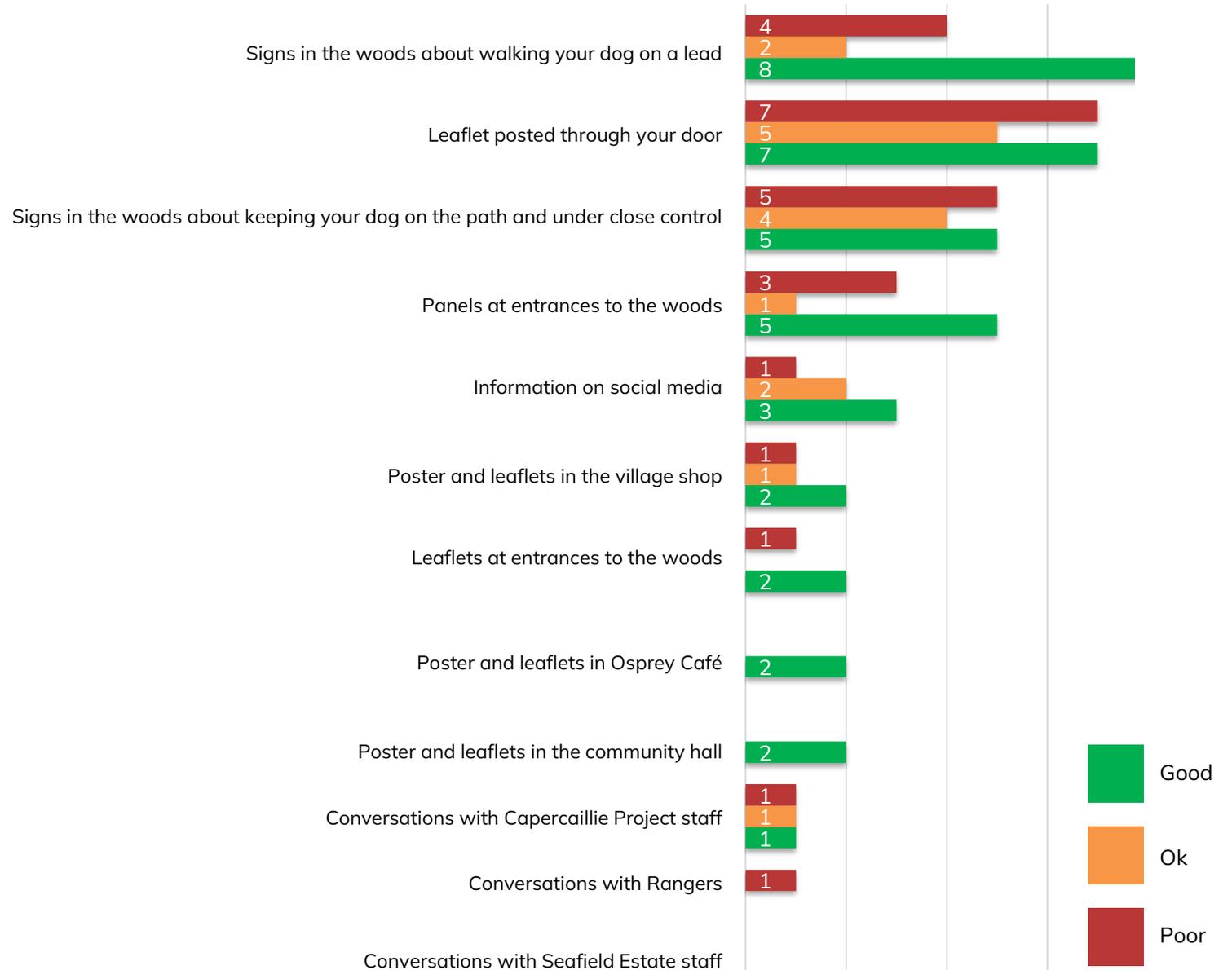
*The graph is based on number of votes by attendees at the event.*



# Perceived effectiveness of campaign elements varied

Residents at the Get Together shared mixed views about the effectiveness of the campaign elements, with the signs in the woods about walking your dog on a lead considered the most effective element.

*The graph is based on number of votes.*



Some residents  
shared positive  
comments about  
the campaign  
elements

*"New graphics and information is a lot better - it's engaging and more noticeable."*

*"I've enjoyed the new friendly public face of the information."*

*"Rangers and stuff have been kind and friendly."*

*"Dog versus capercaillie map very useful for letting my dog off."*

## Some residents raised concerns and questions

*"Huge rise in birdwatchers this summer."*

*NB: Lek It Be patrol reports this year show a 55% reduction in birdwatchers encountered compared to last year.*

*"Why advertise where you can see capercaillie?" (re map on panel)*

*"Concerned about lack of parking and it impacting where we have our village bonfire night and making an impact of wildlife."*

*This comment relates to the proposed dog exercise area on the Bonfire Field.*

## Residents shared mixed views about a proposed dog exercise area

This campaign element took time to develop so was shared with residents for the first time at the Get Together. Work is needed to gather views on the proposal from a representative sample of residents.



Recommendations ...



## Three main recommendations based on all the data and insights gathered

### **1. Don't stop**

It's essential to maintain dialogue to avoid damaging newly formed relationships and reinforcing perceptions of top-down authority by the Park Authority or land managers.

### **2. Invest the time, plan the next steps.**

Ideally, any ongoing work with the dog walking community in Boat of Garten should be led by an experienced staff member with dedicated time to build relationships and continuity. A known contact helps foster long-term knowledge and connections needed for change. Revisiting the Community Action Planning model from the Capercaillie Project and adopting a more community-led approach could now yield greater success.

**Three main  
recommendations  
based on all the  
data and insights  
gathered**

**3. Gather the data to inform the discussions.**

Any negative conversations at the Neighbourly Get Together often stemmed from differing perceptions of reality, like increased birdwatchers or issues with dogs in Deshar Woods. Some residents believe there's no issue, while others disagree. Where there are entrenched views, lengthy debates or data probably won't change minds but where there are opportunities to inform discussions, think about the data worth gathering ready for next year and the most effective ways to do that.

**Other key  
recommendations  
based on the  
project's learning  
from working  
with the dog  
walking community**

1. Allow time
2. Use behavioural change principles
3. Establish a baseline understanding
4. Ensure stakeholder involvement
5. Increase community participation in consultation phases
6. Improve feedback process
7. Equip project team and wider 'advocates'
8. Monitoring and observation

Where and what next?



Reflecting on the project's learning so far working with the dog walking community and recommendations in response, these are our thoughts about where and what we do next ...

### **Allow time**

Continue working with the dog walking community in Boat of Garten to allow more time to learn and build on the momentum and relationships developed to date.

### **Use behavioural change principles**

Continue to use the behavioural change principles in Boat of Garten employed through the Neighbourly Advice campaign, i.e., develop levels of exposure, ownership, commitment and consistency and use of feedback loops.

### **Establish a baseline understanding**

We've established a baseline understanding to a degree, but there is more to learn about the motivations, values and beliefs of resident dog owners in Boat of Garten to help inform work in the village and elsewhere.

## Continued ...

### **Establish a baseline understanding** (continued)

Establish a baseline understanding of first-time and infrequent visitors with dogs in Boat of Garten to better understand this audience. Research from the Capercaillie Project shows that first-time and infrequent visitors behave differently from long term visitors, who act more like residents.

### **Ensure stakeholder involvement**

Not all stakeholders related to visitors in Boat of Garten engaged with the campaign, e.g. accommodation providers, so there's room to ensure their involvement next year. Residents also suggested hosting a Neighbourly Get Together event at the start of the breeding season next year, to boost stakeholder engagement.

## Continued ...

### **Increase community participation in consultation phases**

There's a need to consult with more Boat of Garten residents about the proposed dog exercise area on the Bonfire Field.

### **Improve feedback process**

Only a small number of residents participated in the two online surveys conducted to assess the campaign's impact in Boat of Garten. This suggests there's room to review how residents might prefer to provide feedback and explore new ways to increase participation in feedback opportunities to gather more representative data.

### **Equip project team and wider 'advocates'**

Provide more deliberate familiarisation for rangers and land managers with the principles behind behavioural science and the use of nudge techniques.

## Continued ...

### **Monitoring and observation**

Continue monitoring dog walking behaviours in Boat of Garten over the autumn and winter using ranger patrol data.

In addition, we will increase our understanding of resident dog owners in Grantown with a view to potentially working with that audience, subject to first establishing a baseline understanding.