

Greater diversity enhances public interest in marine habitats

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Greater animal biodiversity can lead to heightened human interest in marine habitats, according to research published in *Scientific Reports*.

The study, by scientists at Swansea University and the University of Plymouth, used simulated rockpools to assess whether there were particular characteristics which enhanced public interest.

In an online test completed by more than 600 people, the results showed images in which [animals](#) were present generated more than double the interest than those without.

Researchers say the findings strengthen arguments that maintaining and protecting biodiversity may be an important element of [human wellbeing](#) and [environmental education](#).

Dr. Tom Fairchild, from Swansea's College of Science, was the study's lead author. He said:

"We expected that communities that included more, obviously different, animal species would be more interesting, as they would contain a greater

diversity of body shapes, colours or behaviours. But rather than a single animal being particularly interesting, we found that scenes with more, and increasingly different animals, were more interesting to the people that we asked. This is significant as it is a clear indication that people will engage more and gain educational value from areas that are more 'biodiverse,' further strengthening the growing calls to protect and restore our native biodiversity."

Despite the importance of interest in determining how we view and interact with the world, little is presently known about what drives humans' interest in nature.

While studies in psychology and social sciences suggest that having more complex images or objects or those that are less familiar may incite interest, how this applies to the natural world is unknown.

In order to test different potential drivers for interest, the researchers used simulated rock pools – replicating those left on rocky coastlines by the falling tide – as a model system.

Participants were then asked to rate their level of interest using a sliding scale, recording whether they found the images anything from "not at all interesting" to "extremely interesting."

Dr. Sabine Pahl, Associate Professor (Reader) in Psychology at the University of Plymouth, said:

"Bringing together natural and social sciences in a truly interdisciplinary project, this study demonstrates that experiencing nature's complexity and variety is really important for the psychological feeling of interest. Interest is linked to exploration and engagement and thus a first step towards learning more about and connecting with the [natural world](#). We don't always need to see spectacular individual animals, even seeing a

variety of animals together in a rockpool environment can enhance [interest](#)."

More information: Tom P. Fairchild et al. Multiple dimensions of biodiversity drive human interest in tide pool communities, *Scientific Reports* (2018).

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