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Can social media analytics help us to understand engagement with nature?

Valuing Nature Conference

Duncan Stewart

13-14 November 2018

NATURAL ENGLAND   defra

Background

Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment

- Visits to the outdoors and caring for the environment
- Continuous in-home survey for 10 years
- 40,000 interviews per year
- Lengthy questionnaire
- Complicated dataset
- Becoming less representative as response rates decline

The need for change…

- Changing information needs
- More accessible, deeper insight
- A broader audience
- A greater need to demonstrate value for money
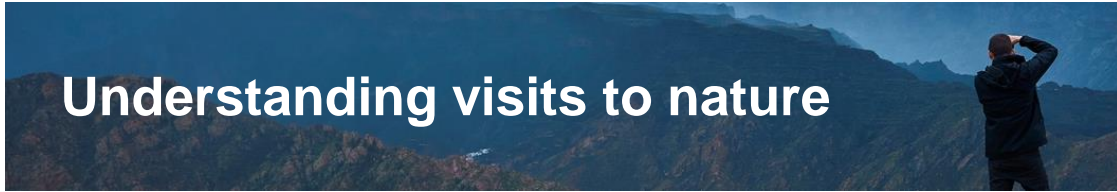
An approach for the next ten years (and beyond)…

- Short, smart phone survey?
- Passive data?
- Social media?
- Other methods?

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A social media pilot

1 **6 month's data** from multiple platforms.

2 18th September 2017 to 23rd March 2018

3 Limited to conversations taking place in England

4 **2.4 million** social media conversations analysed

Two areas of focus

Understanding visits to nature

Understanding caring for the environment

What are the motivations for the various types of outdoor visits?

What are the types of behaviour associated with these visits?

How do certain events/seasonality affect visits?

What are the most resonant topics driving interest in protecting the environment?

How is interest in these issues are triggered?

How has the landscape changed over the 6 month period of data collection?

Key metrics:

1 **Volume** of genuine conversations

2 **Engagement**: Sum of interactions on a post.

3 **Sentiment:** whether posts were positive. neutral or negative.
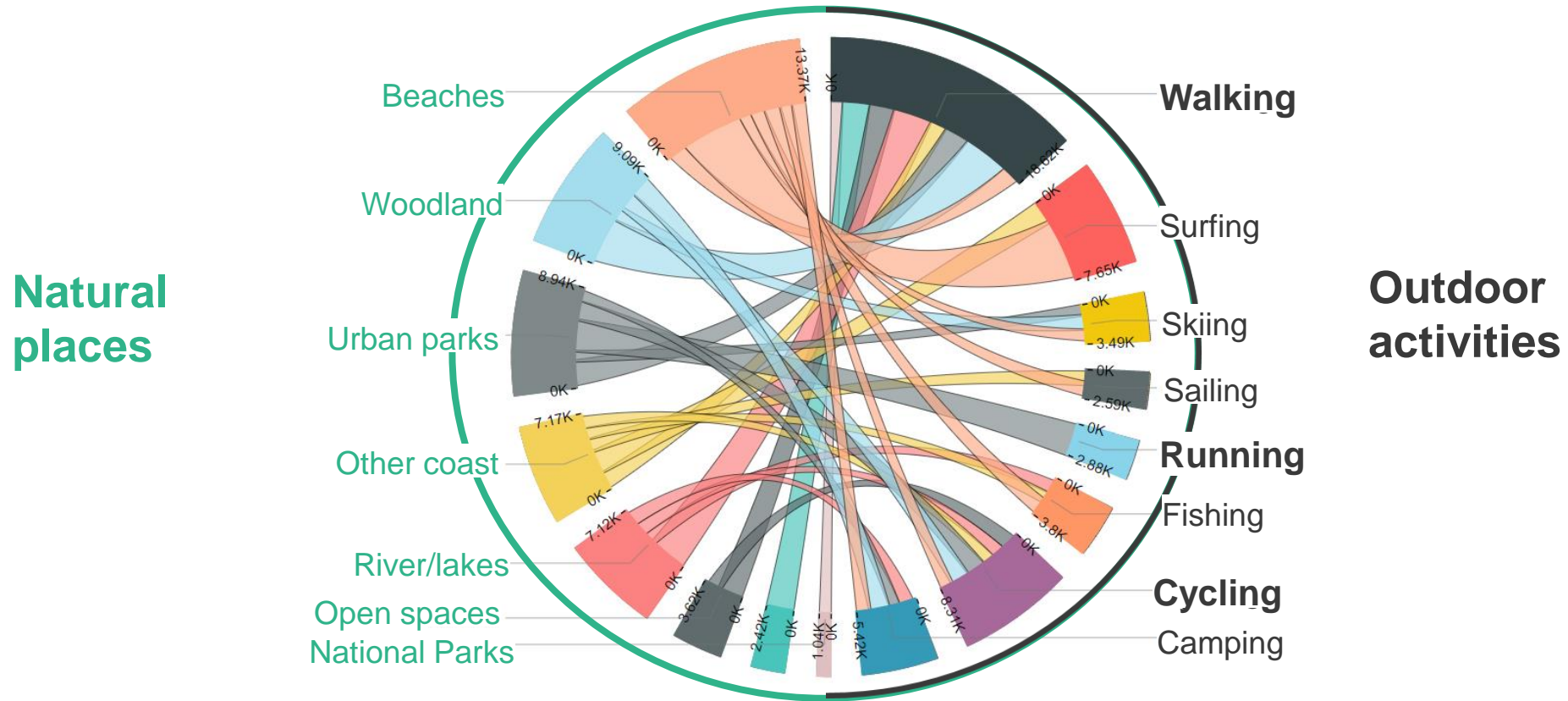
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Cycling is the most talked about outdoor activity while woodland and parks are the most talked about places

Volumes of conversations by places and activities mentioned
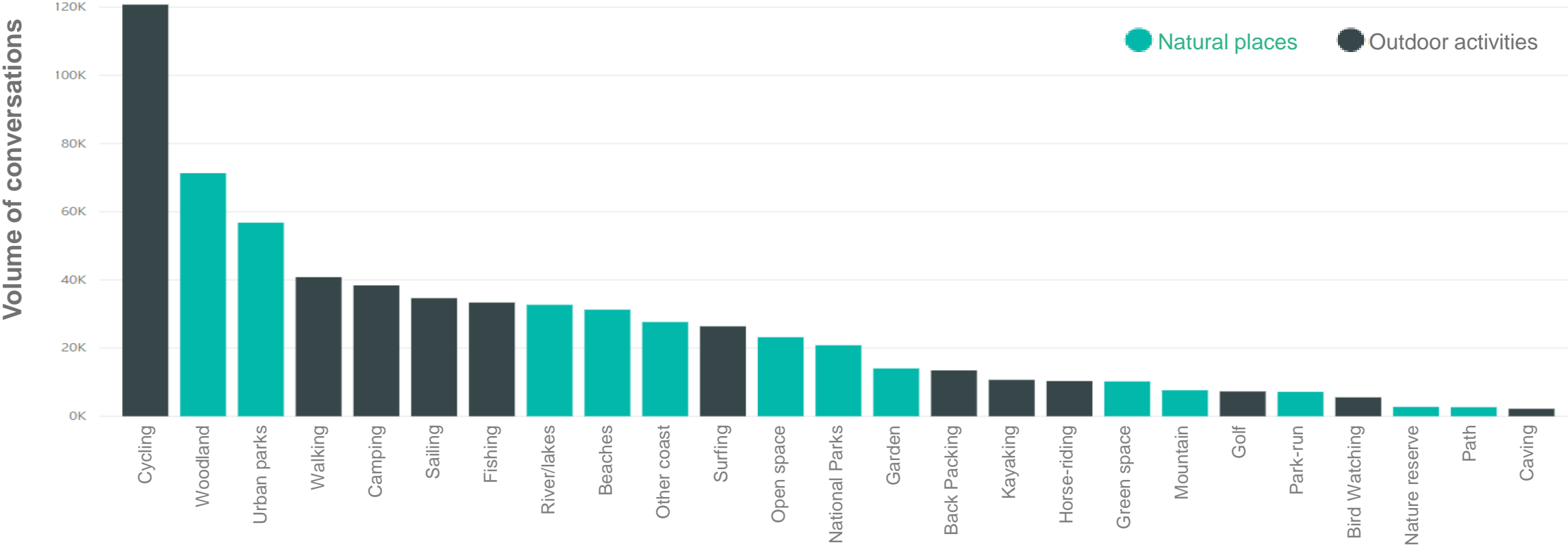
Conversations about walking include more references to natural places than conversations about running or cycling

Interactions between places and activities mentioned in conversations

Natural places

Outdoor activities

Beaches · Woodland · Urban parks · Other coast · River/lakes · Open spaces · National Parks

Walking · Surfing · Skiing · Sailing · Running · Fishing · Cycling · Camping
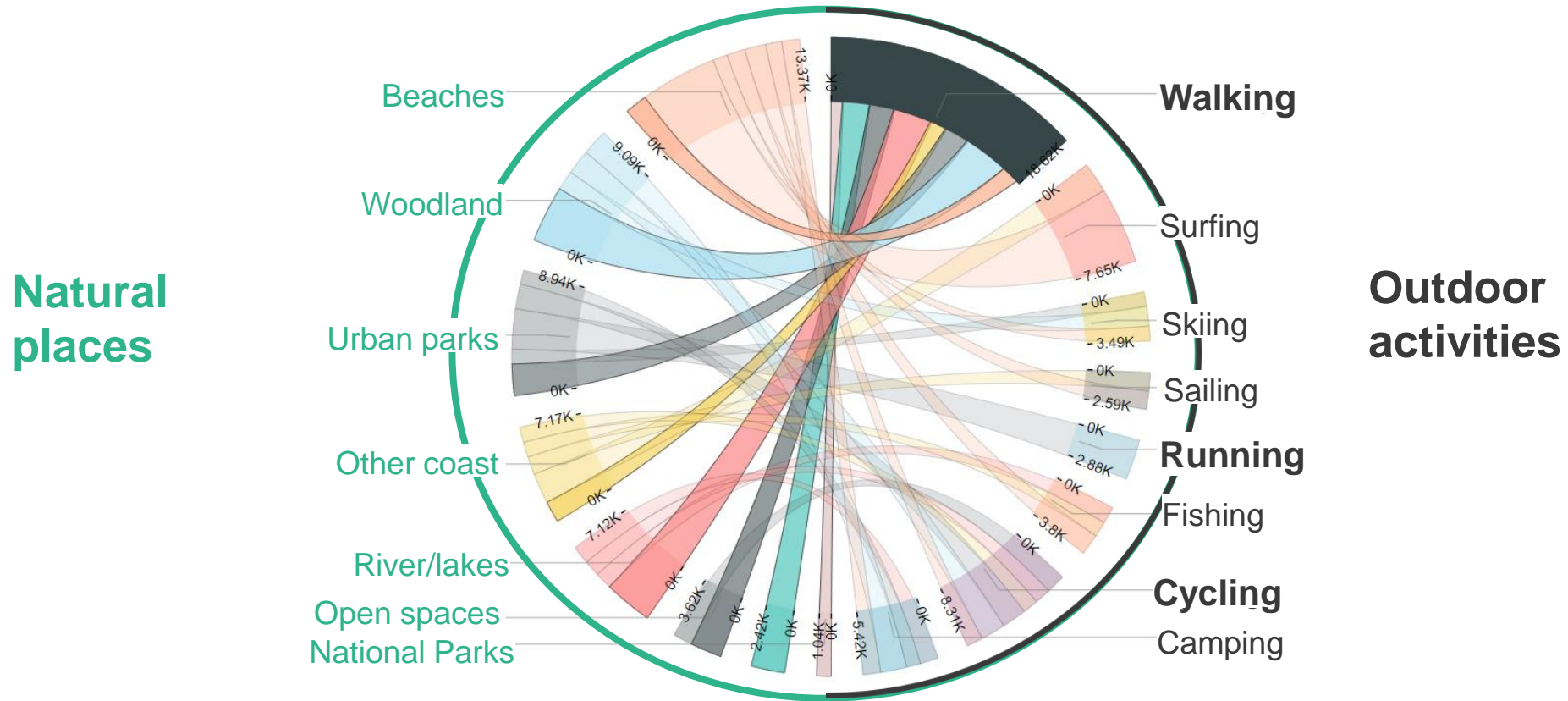
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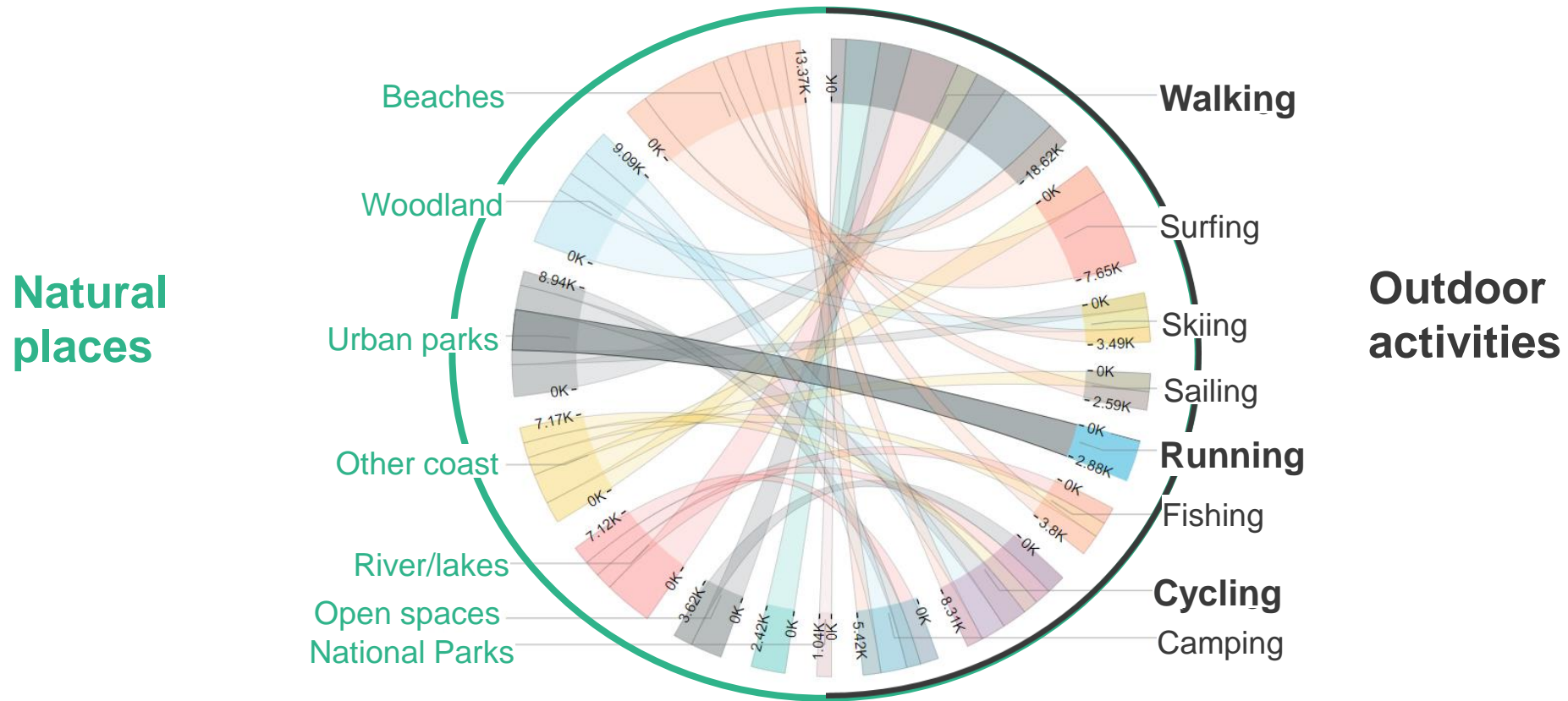
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Interactions between places and activities mentioned in conversations

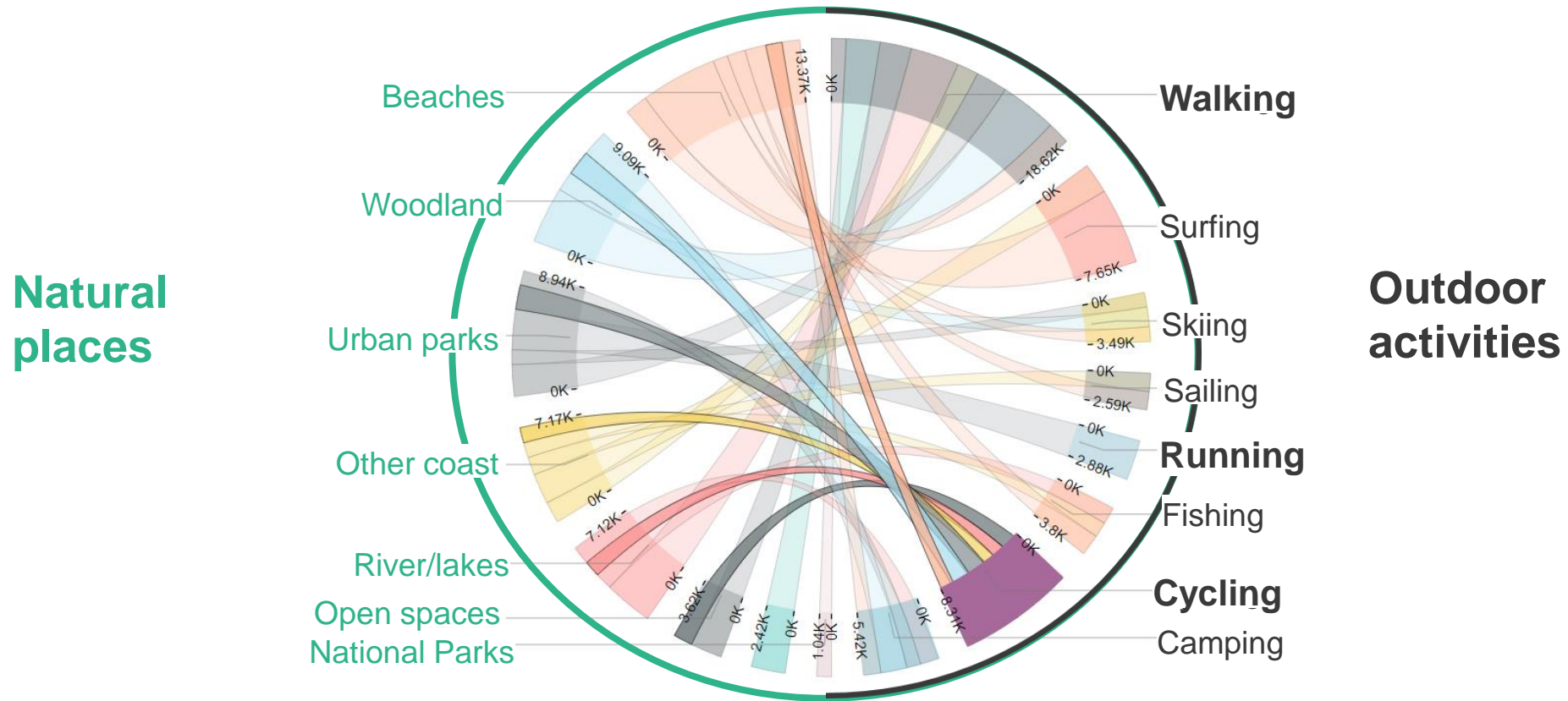**Natural places**

Outdoor activities

Conversations about walking include more references to natural places than conversations about running or cycling

Interactions between places and activities mentioned in conversations

Natural places

Outdoor activities

Beaches
Woodland
Urban parks
Other coast
River/lakes
Open spaces
National Parks

Walking
Surfing
Skiing
Sailing
Running
Fishing
Cycling
Camping

13.37K
0K
18.62K
0K
7.65K
0K
3.49K
0K
2.59K
0K
2.88K
0K
3.8K
0K
8.31K
0K
5.42K
0K
1.04K
0K
2.42K
0K
3.62K
0K
7.12K
0K
7.17K
0K
8.94K
9.09K

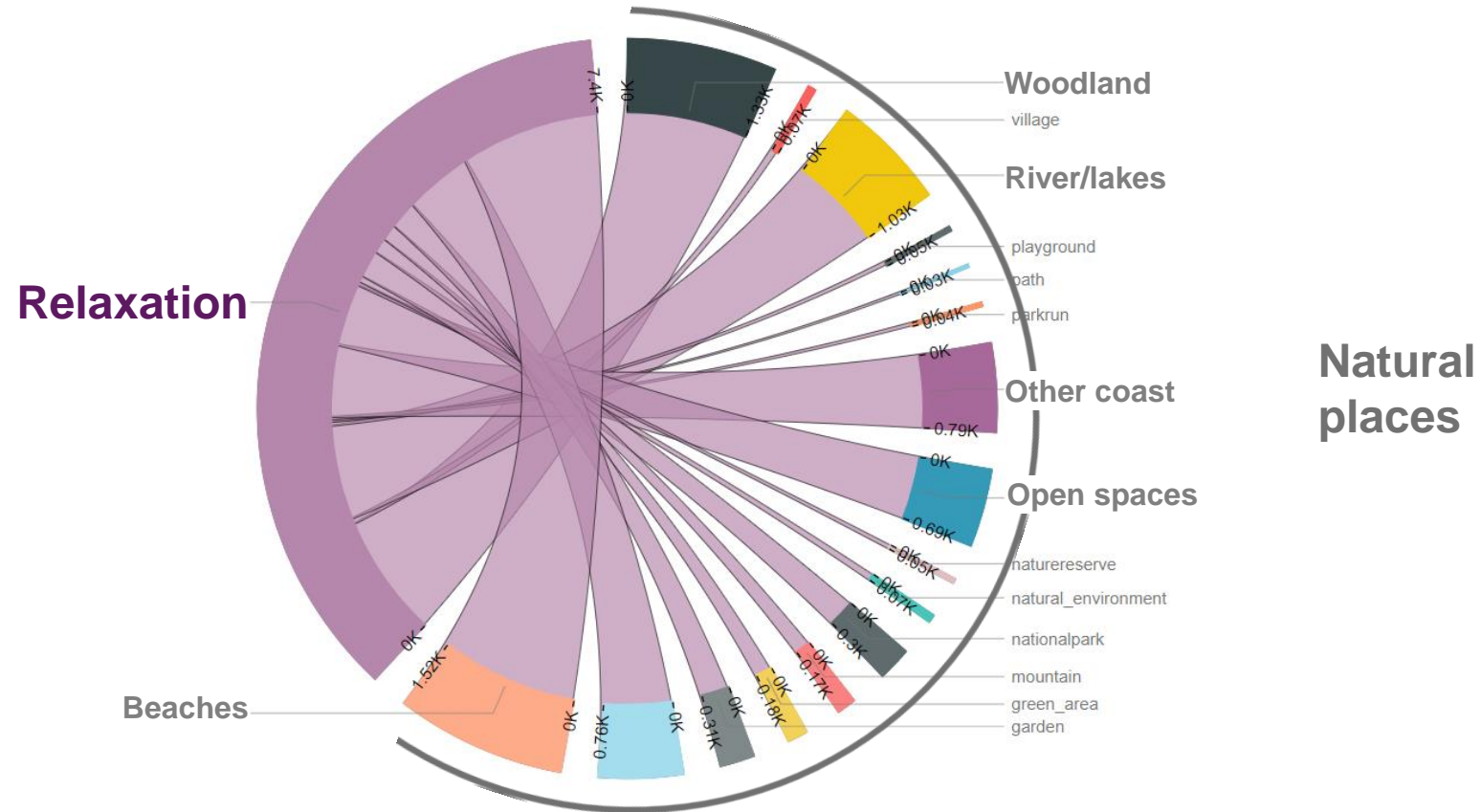# On balance, experiences in woodland and beaches and those involving walking or camping are the most positive

Volumes of positive and negative sentiment in conversations by places and activities mentioned
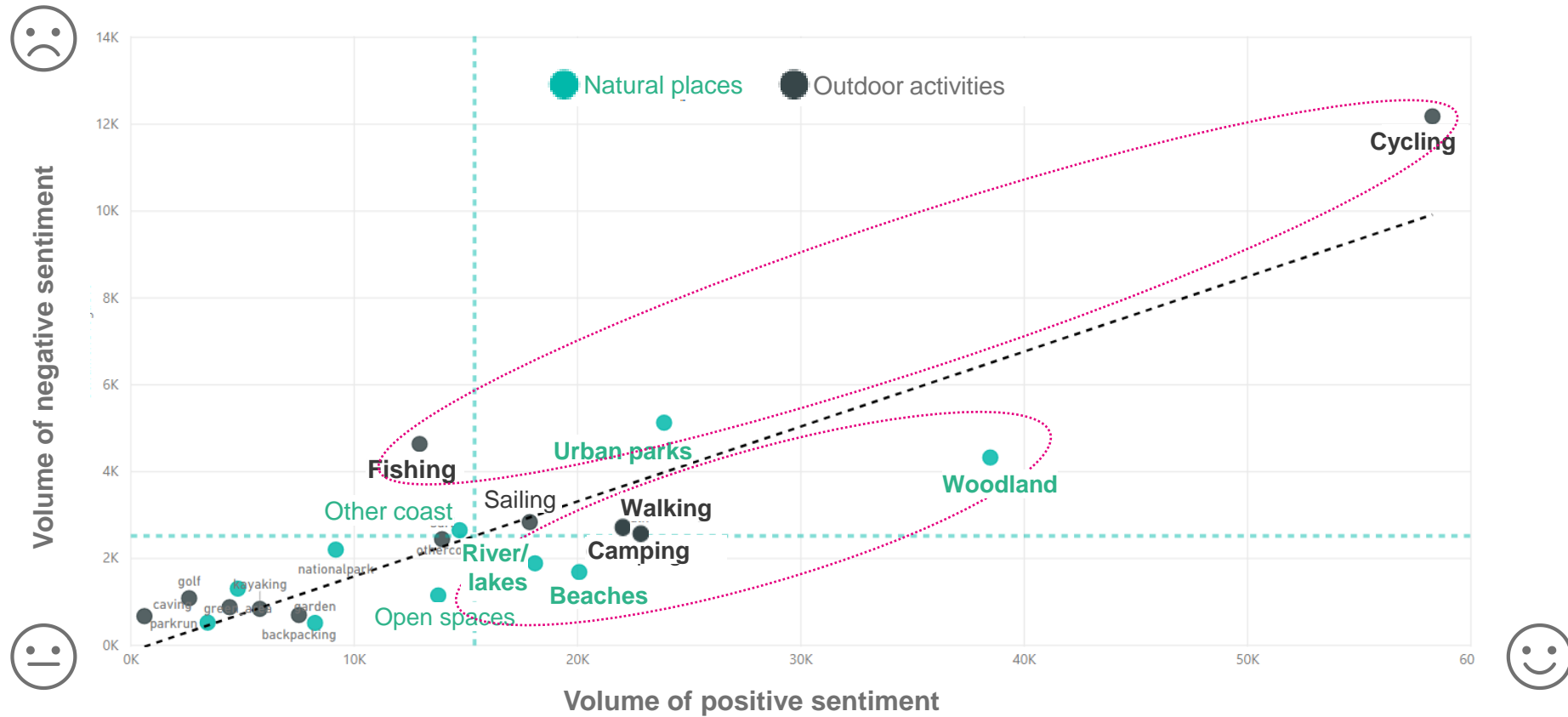
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Motivations vary by place with relaxation most strongly associated with beaches, harmony with woodland and wellbeing across all places

Interactions between places and motivations mentioned in conversations

Relaxation

Woodland

village

River/lakes

playground

path

parkrun

Other coast

Open spaces

naturereserve

natural_environment

nationalpark

mountain

green_area

garden

Beaches

Natural places

7.4K
0K
1.35K
0.07K
0K
1.03K
0.03K
0.03K
0.04K
0K
0.79K
0K
0.69K
0.05K
0.07K
0.3K
0K
0.17K
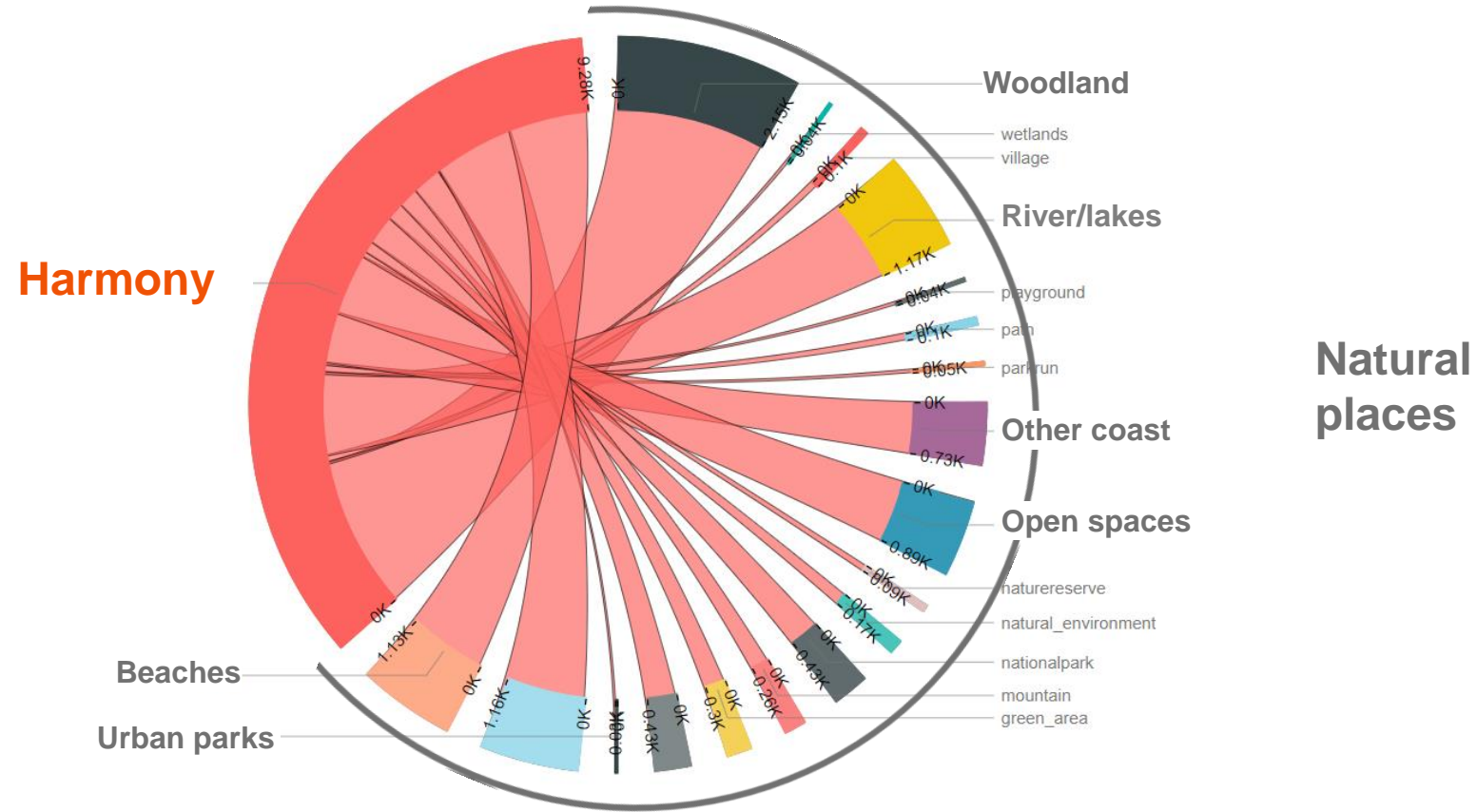0.18K
0.31K
0K
0.76K
0K
1.52K
0K
0K

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Motivations vary by place with relaxation most strongly associated with beaches, harmony with woodland and wellbeing across all places

Interactions between places and motivations mentioned in conversations
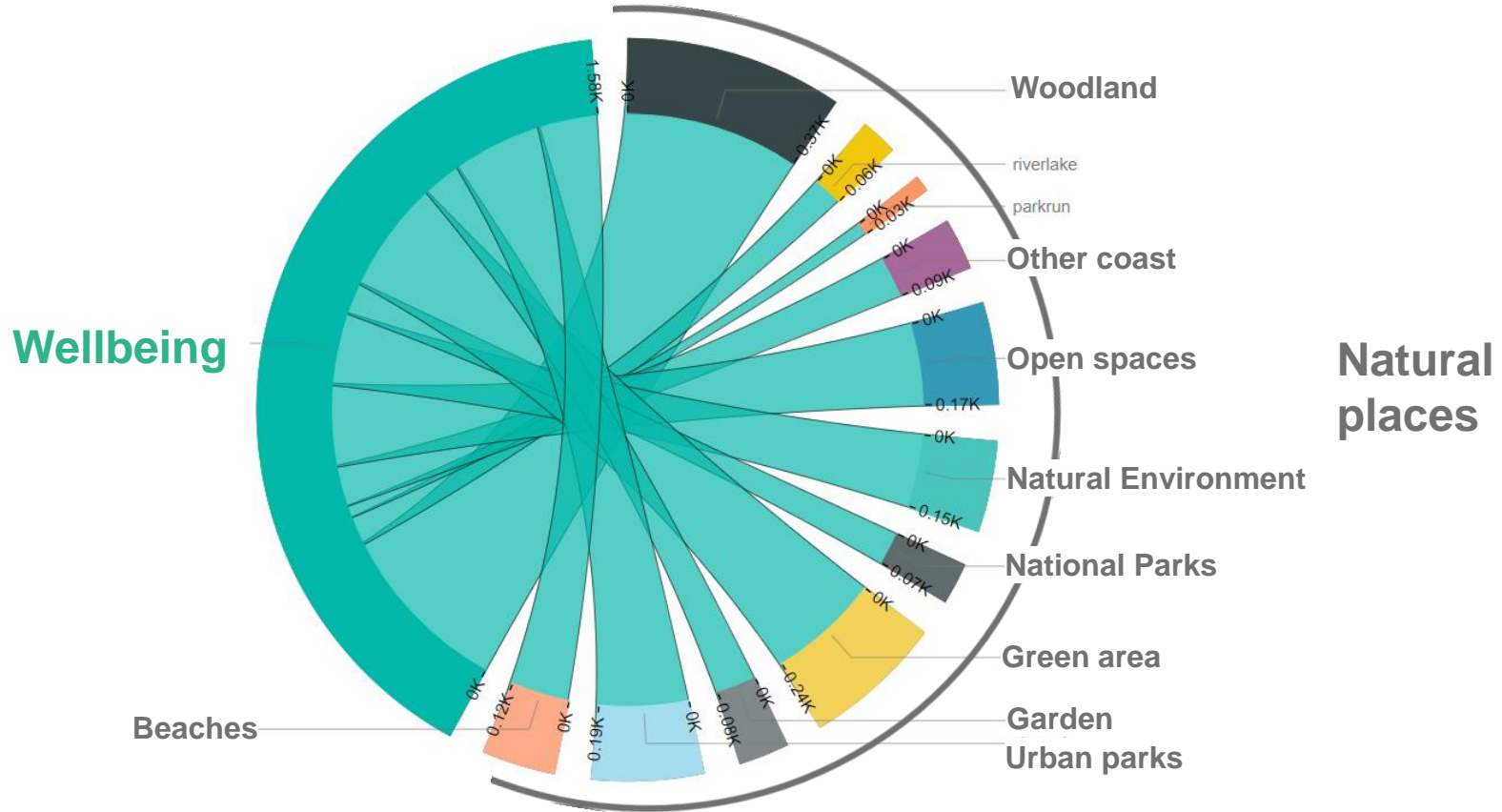

Natural places

Motivations vary by place with relaxation most strongly associated with beaches, harmony with woodland and wellbeing across all places

Interactions between places and motivations mentioned in conversations

Wellbeing

Woodland

riverlake

parkrun

Other coast

Open spaces

Natural places

Natural Environment

National Parks

Green area

Garden

Urban parks

Beaches

1.58K
0K
0.37K
0K
0.06K
0K
0.03K
0K
0.09K
0K
0.17K
0K
0.15K
0K
0.07K
0K
0.24K
0K
0.08K
0K
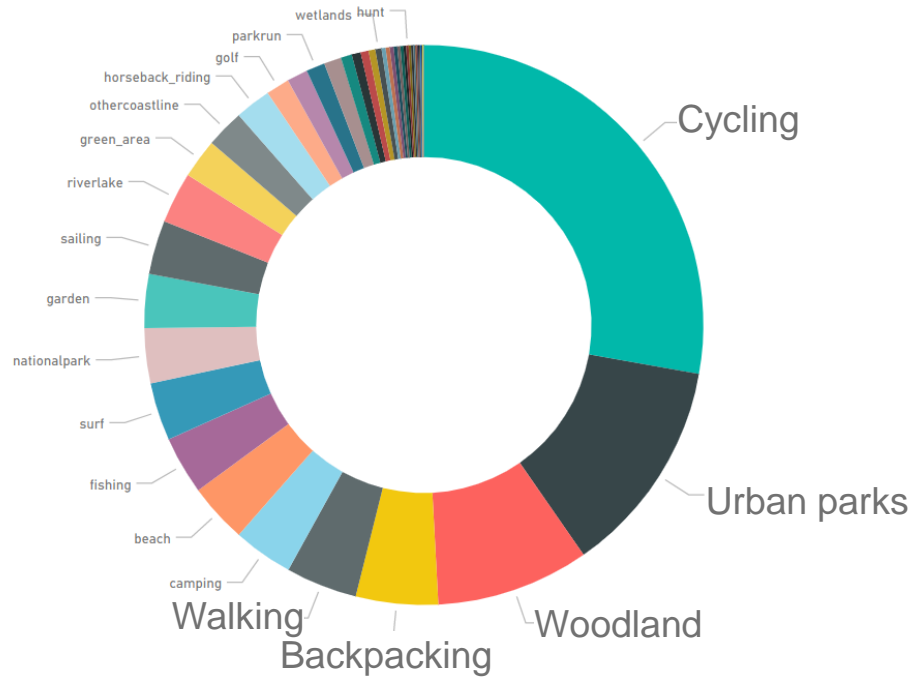0.19K
0K
0.12K
0K

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Volumes of conversations vary over time with interest in outdoor activities and natural places increasing after Christmas

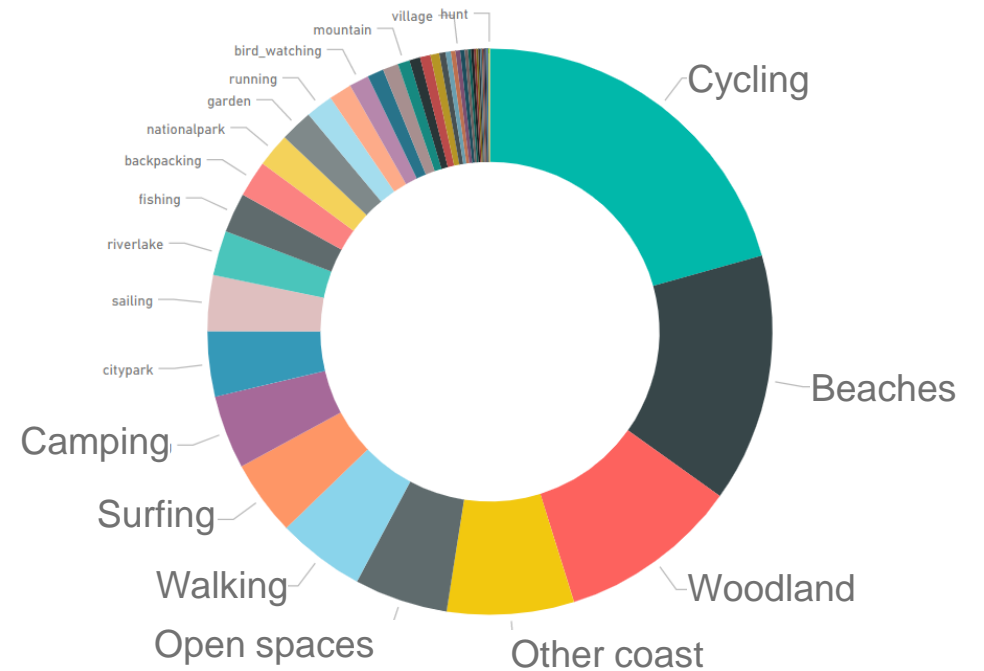Volume of conversations by topic October 2017 to March 2018
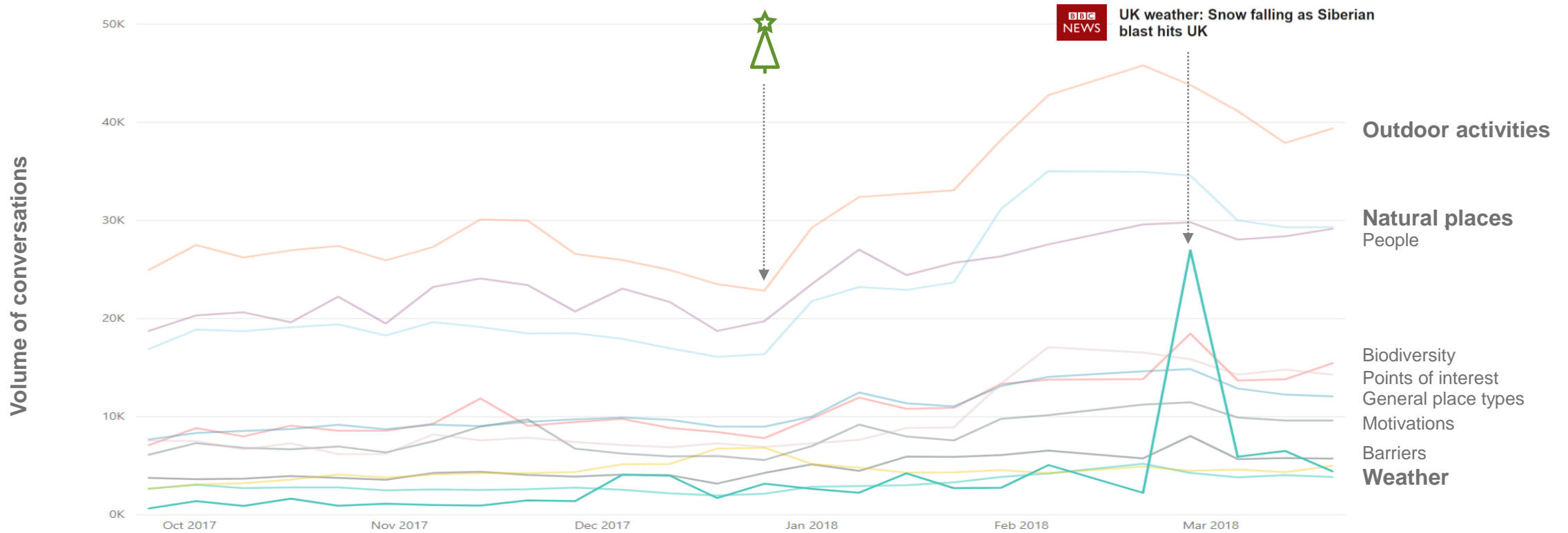
The pilot allowed us to 'deep dive' into topics of interest including specific activities, places and regional differences

Volume of interactions in London

wetlands hunt
parkrun
golf
horseback_riding
othercoastline
green_area
riverlake
sailing
garden
nationalpark
surf
fishing
beach
camping
Walking
Backpacking
Woodland
Cycling
Urban parks

Volume of interactions in the South Downs

mountain village hunt
bird_watching
running
garden
nationalpark
backpacking
fishing
riverlake
sailing
citypark
Camping
Surfing
Walking
Open spaces
Other coast
Woodland
Beaches
Cycling

Conversations about caring for the natural environment centre on biodiversity recycling, pollution and climate change

Average sentiment (y-axis, 70 to -20)

Volume of conversations (x-axis, 0K to 12)

Legend: ● Biodiversity ● Climate change ● Concern ● Recycling

Data points:
- Ecofriendly
- Reuse
- Habitat
- Biodiversity
- Container
- ecology
- Wildlife
- Conservation
- Recycling
- Extinction
- Greenhouse gases
- Fumes
- Global warming
- Climate change
- Pollution
- Fracking
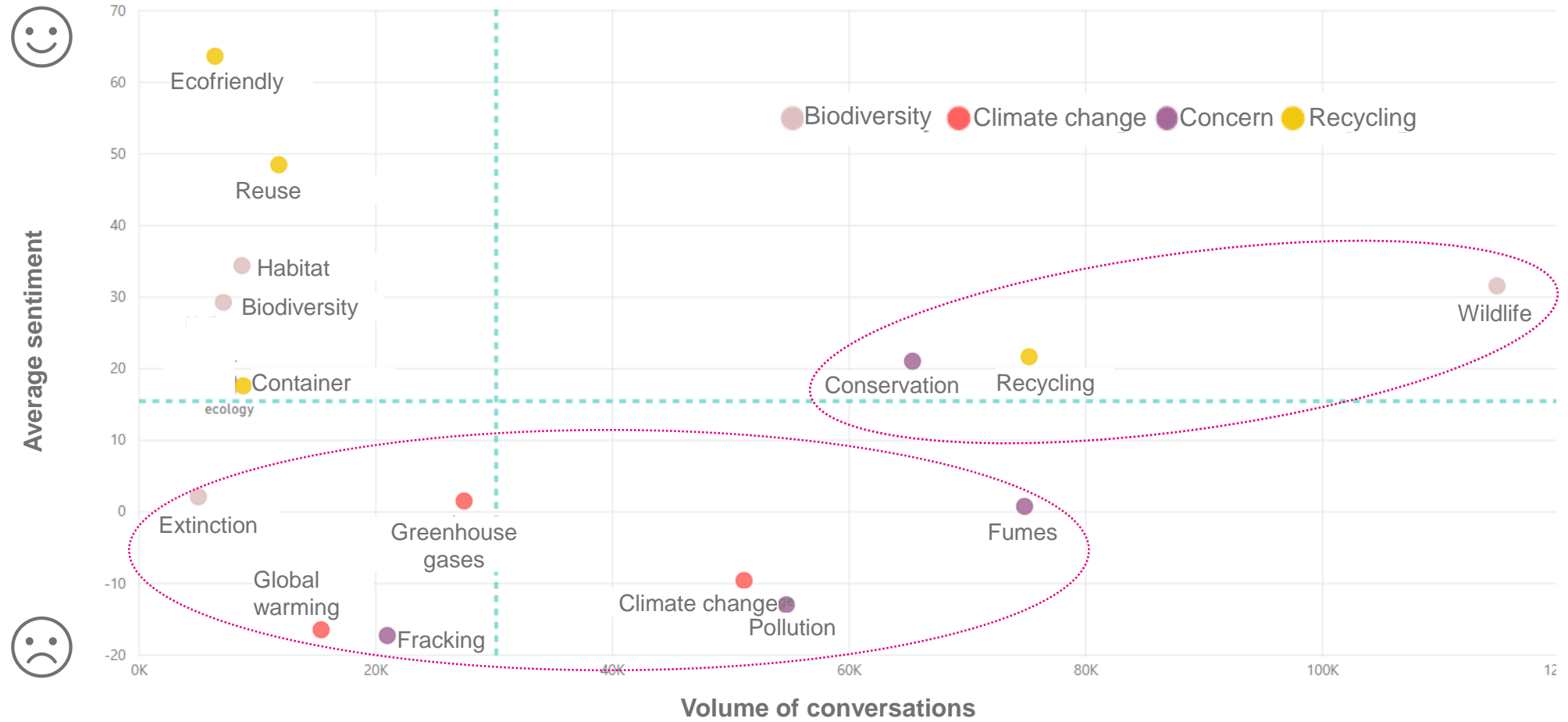
Analysing volumes of conversations by topic highlights the 'gap' between concern and taking action
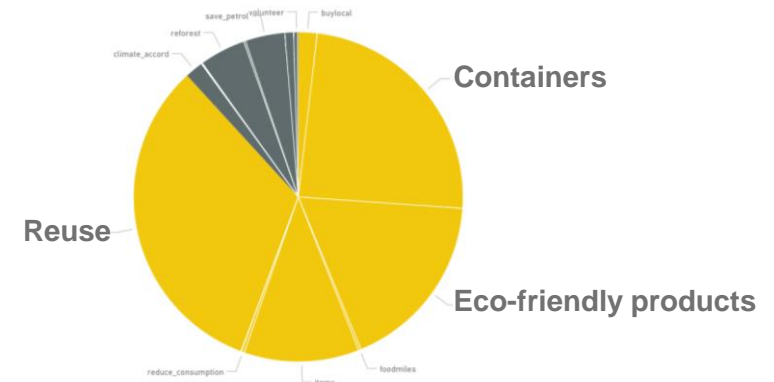
Carers: 1 million conversations
Those commenting on issues related to general concerns and issues related to protecting the environment
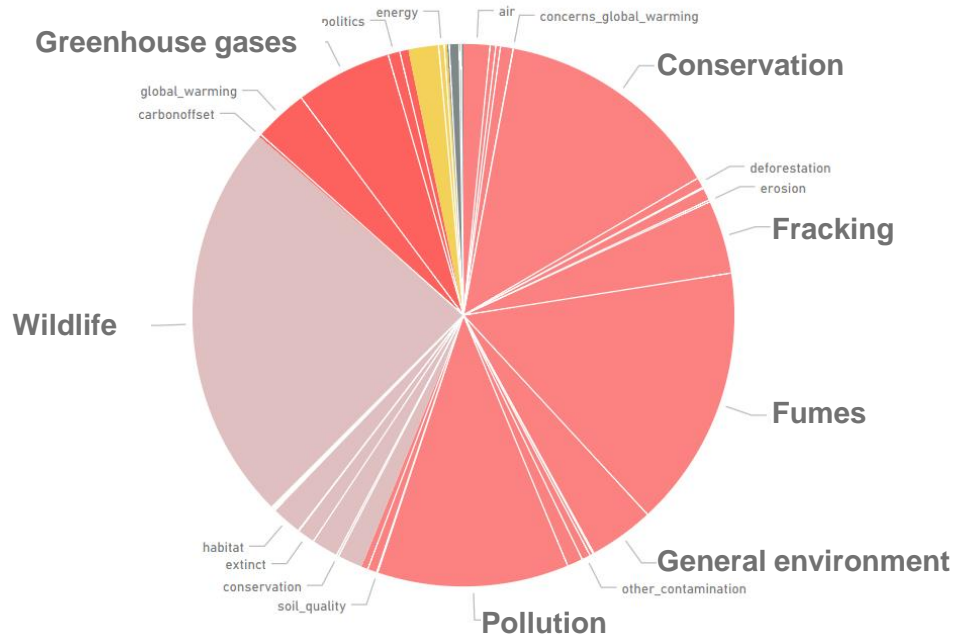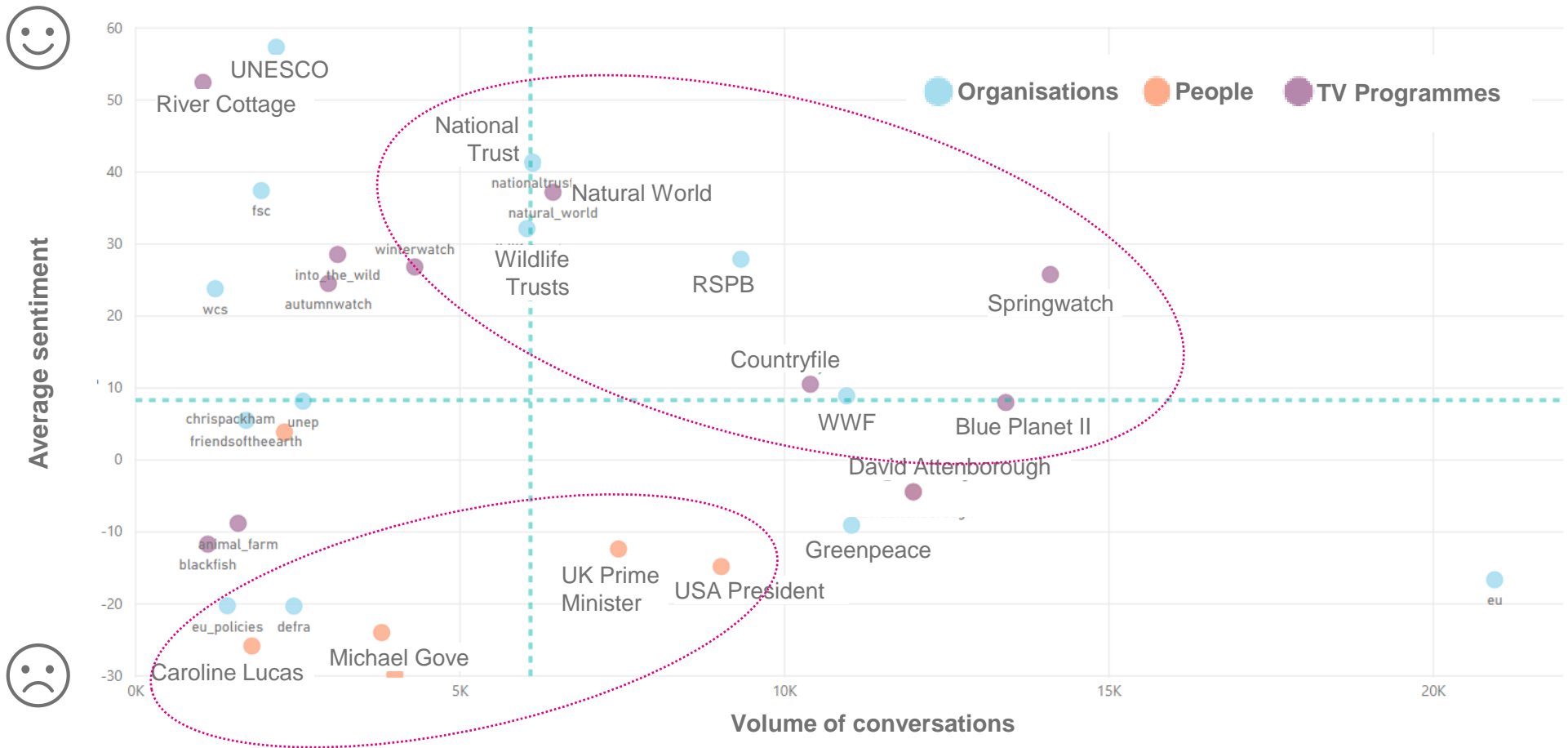
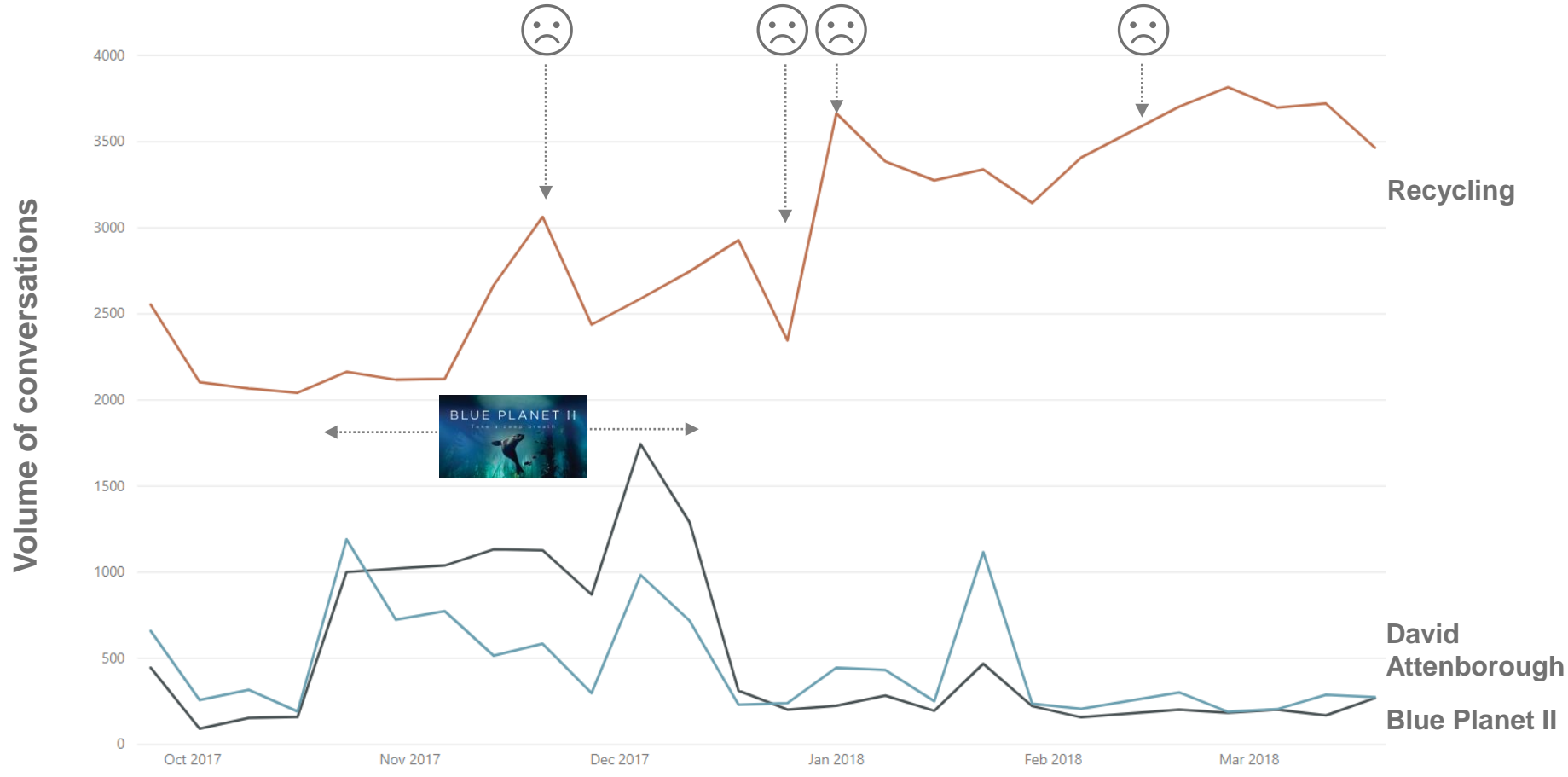**Doers: 20,000 conversations**
Defined as those mentioning specific, personal-level actions to protect/care for the environment

Conversations are driven by TV, organisations and individuals. Sentiment is most positive for organisations but most negative in relation to politicians

Average sentiment (y-axis, range -30 to 60)

Volume of conversations (x-axis, 0K to 20K)

Legend: **Organisations** · **People** · **TV Programmes**

Data point labels:
- UNESCO
- River Cottage
- fsc
- wcs
- into_the_wild
- autumnwatch
- winterwatch
- National Trust / nationaltrust
- Natural World / natural_world
- Wildlife Trusts
- RSPB
- Springwatch
- Countryfile
- WWF
- Blue Planet II
- David Attenborough
- Greenpeace
- chrispackham
- unep
- friendsoftheearth
- animal_farm
- blackfish
- eu_policies
- defra
- Caroline Lucas
- Michael Gove
- UK Prime Minister
- USA President
- eu

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Deep dive – how Blue Plant II drove the debate on plastics

We have choked this planet. And we have to stop. Now. Banning plastic straws and recycling coffee cups won't do it. We have to stop all unnecessary single-uses of plastic. Most. #plasticwaste #plasticpollution

A mother whale lost her little baby due to plastic pollution and carried her baby's dead body with her for days before giving up and we cant even carry our plastic waste to a recycle bin"

Conclusions and next steps

Social media can provide a valuable source of insight on how the population is engaging with and caring for nature.

It allows us to :

- Measure and understand the effects of policy initiatives and marketing campaigns

- Track conversations to understand on what is driving engagement and interest.

- Track influences and influencers to understand what triggers interest – deep diving on specific trigger moments.

But the approach has its limitations:

- Those contributing to conversations are not fully representative of the population.

- The conversations taking place may not fully represent the discourse across the population.

Social media analysis is recommended as part of a future **package** of methods to replace MENE helping to enrich data collected from a national survey.

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