

inpractice

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Climate Action and Green Recovery

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Part of the Action 2030 Project

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Upper Wharfdale Natural Flood Management.

Introduction

As environmentalists we constantly strive to challenge and improve upon our impact on the planet in both our personal and professional capacities. When we start to consider sustainable choices we can make when undertaking our work, it is easy to fall down a rabbit hole of overwhelming and conflicting information. Or maybe there are more sustainable options already available that you hadn't yet discovered? This article aims to highlight potential

alternative sustainable activities and materials that can be used and intends to start a wider discussion on areas for future research and improvement.

Plastics in particular tend to be relied upon for their resilience and strength, which is essential for them to withstand repeated use across a full season. As always, challenging their use is essential. Using the basic concept of Reduce, Reuse, Recycle – is that item really necessary?

Could the activity completed in a different way to avoid the use of resources? Is there a more sustainable alternative that you could purchase instead? Does it need to be completed at all?

Gloves

One simple change that environmental professionals can make is to utilise biodegradable gloves that break down in a few years rather than 100s of years.

However, one must be mindful of the issue of large-scale disposal into landfill - which can cause the build-up of natural gases. Therefore, could a longer lasting PPE alternative be used instead, such as FSC Certified natural rubber gloves which also have the benefit of being compostable? Of course, with the recent coronavirus pandemic and the necessity for strict hygiene practices in place, the risk assessment process must ensure that reuse is safe and appropriate.

Fencing

Temporary herpetofauna fencing using standard polythene is another single use item that has longer lasting and sustainable alternatives. The initial outlay for semi-permanent fencing is more expensive and uses more plastic in its production, however it can be sourced from recycled materials and can be reused multiple times. Consideration of the recycling or reusing of herpetofauna fencing within the Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMPs) is a great place to capture this requirement. Clients are more likely to be receptive to increased costs if provided with a strong environmental and sustainable case for doing so. As such, it is important to highlight the benefits clients can gain, which include the ability to reduce their carbon footprint, promote their sustainable practices and long-term cost savings through the reuse of materials for multiple seasons or sites. If we do not ask, we cannot effect real change.

Dormouse surveys

A simple alternative to utilising wire or cable ties for securing dormouse tubes is the use of Velcro straps. Velcro can be used across multiple seasons and has the added benefit of easy removal when checking tubes. Biodegradable marking tape for tagging vegetation is also available.

Great crested newt surveys

In recent years, the endorsement of eDNA survey techniques has reduced some of the requirement for plastic bottles for bottle trapping surveys. A simple (and free!) way to reduce the plastic for these surveys is to utilise previously used bottles. Advance preparation, storage and appeals for bottle donations is required, but the reduction of cost and unnecessary waste of using new bottles generally outweighs this effort.

Tree guards

The use of plastic tree guards is commonplace, and far too often they are left in place to litter the natural environment. It may be possible to consider alternatives, such as not to provide tree protection at all, and to simply replace or accept a low level of plant loss, however there will be instances where this is not feasible. There is a growing concern from the use of 'bio-plastic' guards made from polylactic acid (PLA), as these do not readily breakdown in the natural environment. More sustainable alternatives are available such as 100% recycled cardboard guards, which fully decompose, no plastic clips or ties are required to secure them and they can be left in place to completely decompose.

Badger bait marking

Perhaps one of the most problematic activities that ecologists undertake in the field is the use of badger bait marking pellets when determining territorial boundaries of different badger groups in an area. Small 2 mm food grade plastic pellets are used, which are harmlessly passed through the badger's system. This results in millions of microplastics being released into the environment each year. To date, it is unclear if there are any suitable alternatives that could be used such as biodegradable pellets. There is an overwhelming feeling amongst ecology professionals that an alternative is long overdue. Have you found an alternative solution or have an idea to share?

Get involved!

The suggestions presented within this article are in no way exhaustive and are predominantly focused on ecology; however, we must work to share ideas to cut resource use and emissions wherever we can in the profession if we are to meet net-zero targets and address the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis. CIEEM's Action 2030 Working Group would love to hear from you if you have any additional ideas for reducing waste, single use products or micro plastics that can be introduced into our working practices. Please let us know on our Linked In group here: <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/4306428/>.

Action 2030

In September 2019, CIEEM declared a climate emergency and biodiversity crisis – but a declaration means nothing without action. That is why we launched Action 2030: a project which sees us reaching net-zero carbon emissions by 2030 and leading the way for our profession in taking urgent action to address the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis.

Find out more at:
www.cieem.net/action-2030

About the Authors



Ria Monckton is a Chartered Environmentalist with a background in ecology and acoustics but is predominantly an environmental coordinator undertaking

Environmental Impact Assessments. She participates and leads sustainable improvements within her office, significantly reducing the amount of paper use, waste and electricity usage. Ria strives to challenge her working practices and continuously improve and encourage sustainability in both her personal and professional capacities. She is a member of CIEEM's Action 2030 group.

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Rachael Maddison is a consultant ecologist who has taken an interest in educating farmers on the incorporation of agroforestry management practices on

their farms. Rachael also focuses on sustainability within her organisation, sharing tips for a more sustainable Christmas and is involved in presentations on environmental issues. She is also a member of CIEEM's Action 2030 group.

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