



The **FOREST 404** Experiment

Initial data description

An overview of the data captured from the first wave of this unique collaborative project.

Compiled by Alex Smalley, University of Exeter.

Available April 2020.

This document represents early-stage data assessment which has not been peer reviewed or published. It should not be shared or cited beyond the project teams.



Introduction

Forest 404 is a sci-fi thriller podcast series created by BBC Radio 4. It stars Pearl Mackie, Tanya Moodie and Pippa Haywood, with original music by Bonobo.

The 9-part drama is set in the 24th century in a world where technology dominates life and nature has largely been erased from history.

During her job as a sound archivist, the protagonist, Pan, uncovers a set of sound recordings which she is inexplicably drawn to. Forest 404 follows her quest to understand the origin of these sounds and what they mean for the history and future of humanity.

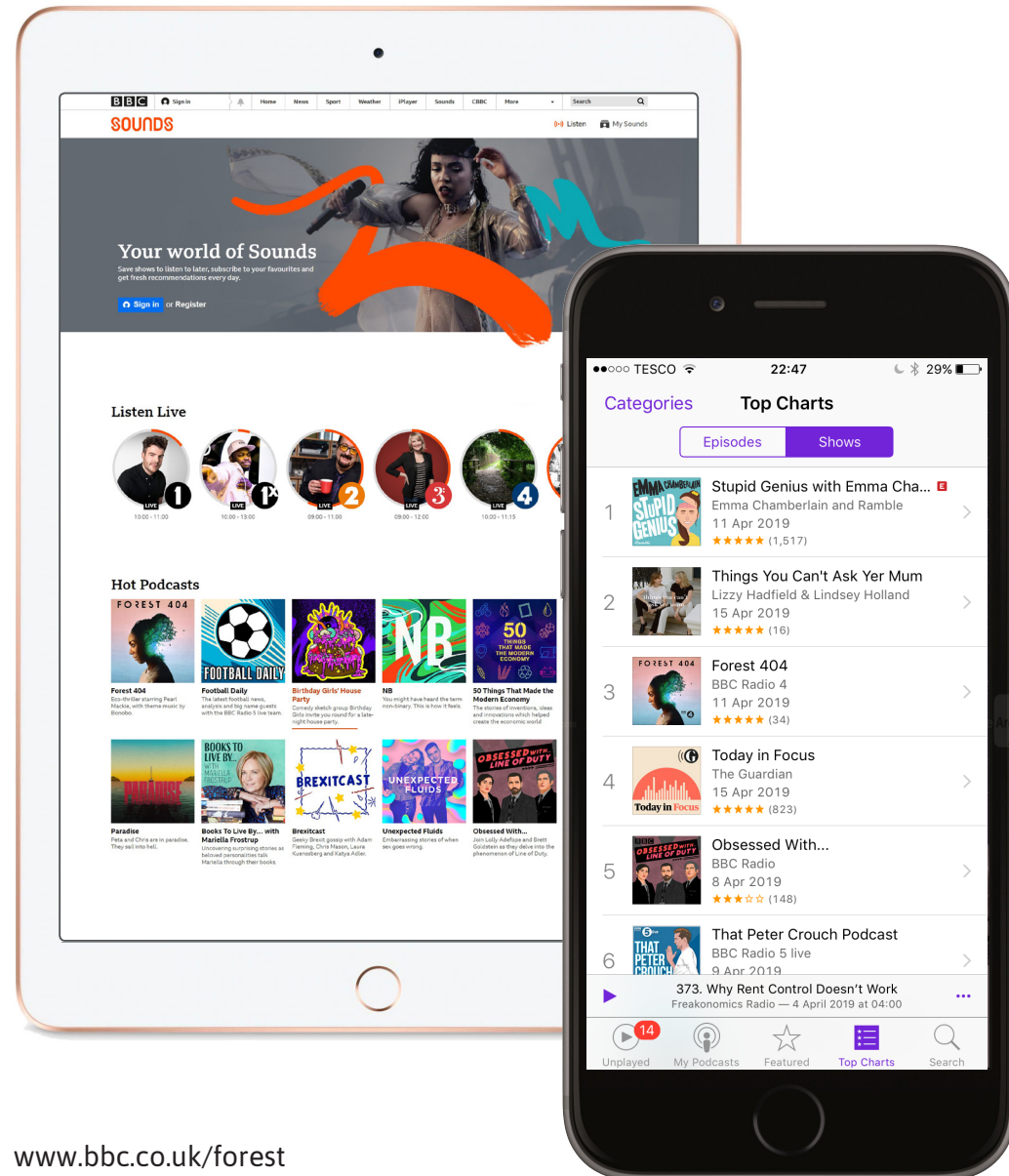
Forming a unique four-part offering, the series is accompanied by 9 science-focused podcasts, 9 immersive binaural soundscapes, and the Forest 404 Experiment.

The experiment offered listeners a way to take part in the Forest 404 experience, and was designed to improve scientific understanding of the therapeutic potential of nature.

It was a truly collaborative project between the BBC, the University of Exeter, the Open University, and the University of Bristol.

The data captured people's responses to a range of natural soundscapes and this report provides an overview of our initial data analyses.

The Forest 404 series



www.bbc.co.uk/forest

Who took part?

The first wave of the experiment launched alongside the Forest 404 series on 4th April 2019. It remained open until 30th September 2019.

7,596 people have taken part, making this one of the largest soundscape experiments ever conducted.

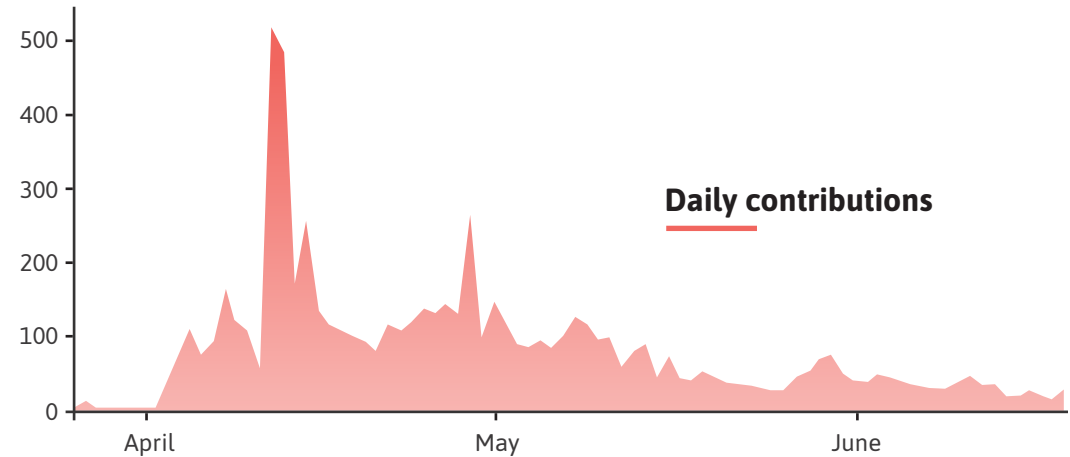
7,596

unique participants

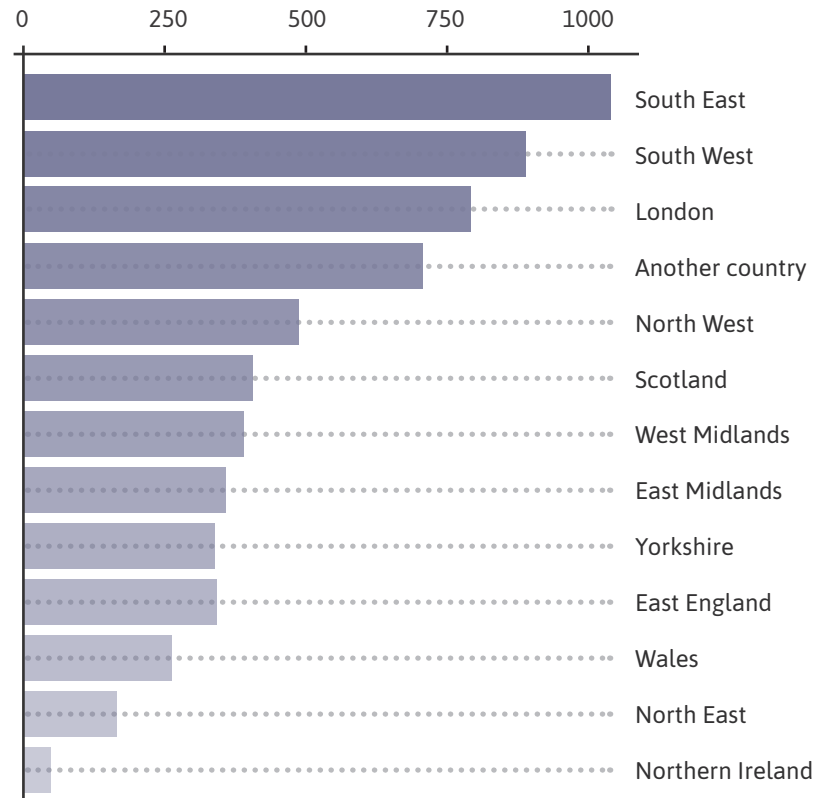
Initial participation featured several large spikes, catalysed by BBC network promotions. People from across the UK took part, with substantial contributions from other countries too.

This report is using a subset of the total data (7,005 contributions) collected up to the end of June 2019.

This sample represents 168,000 data points and is remarkably complete; only 0.8% of data are missing.



Participant Locations



Who took part?

Experimental psychologists often struggle to capture opinions from a broad mix of people, and many studies tend to use small samples from a single age group.

With a large number of participants from a wide range of ages taking part, the Forest 404 Experiment marks a large advance in this area.

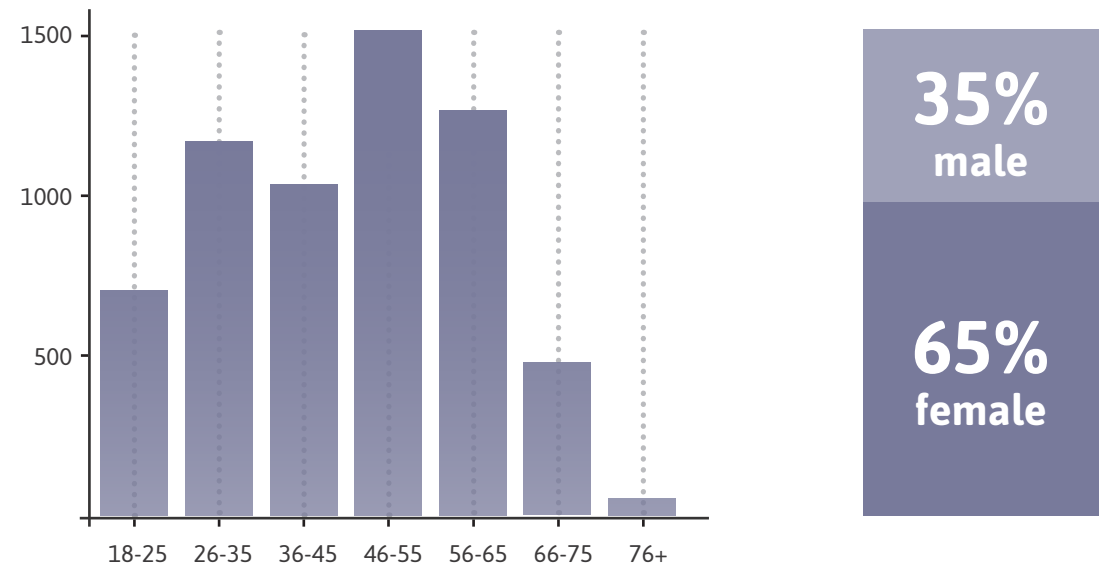
Roughly twice as many women took part compared to men, a common trend in voluntary and 'self-selecting' experiments.

People tended to consider themselves quite connected to nature and a large majority visited nature on a weekly basis. These data suggest our sample is slightly biased compared to national averages and we must bear that in mind as our analyses continue.

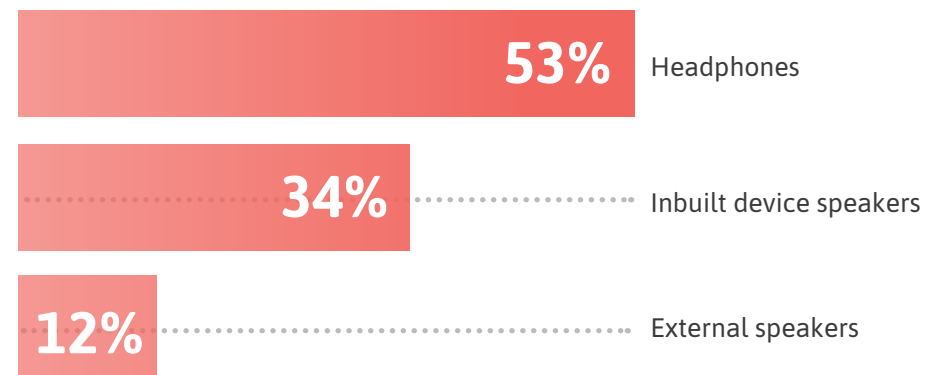
Over half of our participants listened to the experiment using headphones, whilst a third used their inbuilt device speakers. Fewer people used external speakers.

Listening mode had a very small impact on people's experience, but on the whole listening quality was very good for almost everyone who took part.

Distribution of age and gender



Listening modes



What did people say about the series and experiment?

Over a hundred people contacted us to provide feedback on the Forest 404 project.

Some people provided extra information related to their responses in the experiment, others wanted to know more about the series and plans for what might come next.

These correspondences were overwhelmingly positive, sometimes even reporting a demonstrable change in a person's behaviour because of their Forest 404 experience.

The quotes shown here provide an insight into the types of response we received.

“ This is SUCH a cool project + podcast! I have enjoyed both tremendously. Please will you share the findings with me when you publish them? ”

“ My ears seem more attuned to nature now. On my morning dog walk I could hear nothing but birdsong, I don't think this is any different than before I think I've just noticed it now. ”

“ I have just been listening to Forest 404 podcast / the experiment and was absolutely blown away by the creativity of the story, and the science / soundscape podcasts were really interesting! ”

“ I've been listening to forest 404...It's amazing and I wish that everyone would listen to this to connect with nature. This experiment and the information connected to it is so new and makes me yearn to be outside more. Thankyou for doing this :) ”

Where next?

This report provides a brief overview of our data, and marks the beginning of a deep dive into our incredible bank of information.

We are very grateful to everyone who took part, and for all those who continue to support the project and its outcomes.

There are more questions to ask, relationships to explore, and numbers to crunch. This process will unfold throughout the rest of 2020.

We are aiming to publish several scientific research papers as part of this process, and these will be publicly available as soon as they are released.

We will also open the experiment to a second wave of participants, which will allow us to explore particular themes in more detail.

Ultimately, we hope this knowledge will feed into the design of an intervention aimed at helping people recover from stressful situations.

You can follow the progress of this research on our project website, virtual-nature.com.



Find out more about the Forest 404 podcasts and experiment at bbc.co.uk/forest.

More information about the virtual nature project is available at virtual-nature.com.

All data and content © University of Exeter 2020

