



Bengt Ek: Place your research in a wider and applied context to make it more interesting for the media. Photo (portrait) Hedda Thomson Ek

## “Use me to communicate your research”

**Research results must be disseminated and used to prove their value. News & Views asked an editor of a leading forestry magazine for advice on how media can be used to reach a broader audience than the traditional research community. Make contacts with journalists and get some media training, are two of his suggestions.**

Bengt Ek is chief editor of the Swedish forest magazine Skogen (“The forest”), which, since 1914, has been on a mission to support good practice in forestry and silviculture. The monthly magazine is read by over 100 000 people, many of whom are forest officers, entrepreneurs or forest owners. Skogen is, therefore, a powerful channel for disseminating new results and important facts, which are transformed into useful advice and interesting articles.

Bengt Ek has had positive experiences in using scientists as sources for the articles; and he wants to be used by them as a channel. Over the years, he has seen a shift towards scientists being more open to approaches from the media. Swedish forest researchers are often available for interviews, and he can easily contact a person to check a fact. In the past, researchers were much more resistant to making comments about subjects outside their own specific area of expertise.

– I am very glad when researchers dare to place their research in a wider and often applied context, and to reason and argue on topics that are also beyond their narrow fields of expertise, he says.

How does a forest magazine collect its content? Bengt Ek admits that he hasn't the time to scan all websites and new research reports actively. Instead, he relies on research contacts

that the journalists themselves make when a new topic is raised, a new method is implemented etc. But he welcomes researchers who contact the magazine directly. Some institutions send all their scientific reports to Skogen on a regular basis, which means that these have a much greater chance of being featured.

Examples of this are the bachelor theses from the forest technicians' school. All of them are sent to Skogen, and since the journalists know them, they will also be heavily cited.

– Applied results are often more interesting for the media, no matter if they are produced by a student or through a rigorous peer-review process from a top research team. But even basic research can prove interesting when put in context by the scientist.

Read Bengt's practical advice →

## Bengt's practical advice for better mass-media relations

Based on his almost 25 years experience in forest communication, Bengt Ek has a number of pieces of simple advice on how scientists can become better communicators. Some have discovered them already, but many have not:

- ✓ Set aside resources for communication, both in the research programme and at a central level of the university. The researchers themselves simply do not have the time to spend on communication.
- ✓ Produce an accessible package of the information. Sending a research report in a peer-reviewed journal to a journalist in your field is far better than nothing. But even better, of course, is to add a press release or a short summary in a newsletter. Popular short reports, such as the series Fakta Skog from SLU or Results from Skogforsk, are obviously even better. If the information about the research is appealing, journalists will turn to the original source for more information.
- ✓ Make active contacts with the media – a magazine, radio or TV.
- ✓ Get to know which editor works with your subject. If you have something interesting to say, chances are that you will have your research mentioned.
- ✓ Invite a journalist to the university, for example for six interviews in 3 hours! A quick way to reach out, efficient for both the journalist and the researchers.
- ✓ Be trained in media! A 2-hour course can work miracles if it is efficiently planned. Again, learn which magazines, radio or TV contacts are most relevant. Familiarise yourself with their different ways of working (how urgent, what is interesting, when, etc.). Open your eyes to the news in your own backyard.
- ✓ Create a scoop. Offer an exclusive to one magazine. Journalists are reluctant to miss such bait.
- ✓ Use your position! A researcher usually has high credibility. If two parties in forestry are arguing, journalists turn to the scientist for the correct answer.
- ✓ Rid yourself of any phobia of journalists. Maybe you have had a bad experience, but get over it. They are not there to do you harm, and you can usually check the citations.
- ✓ Use also older knowledge, which may be “old” only to you, together with your results. Newspapers are more willing to write about a small finding if it is put into a bigger, preferably hot, context. Use climate change, hands on advice etc. to get your message across.
- ✓ Work with the available resources. Each country has its own channels, such as websites, silvicultural handbooks and magazines.. Wikipedia is another good channel.
- ✓ Do not mix forestry and agriculture in communication activities. The target groups are very different.
- ✓ Don't forget to invite media to interesting seminars and excursions.

Last but not least: Remember that good communication also opens up sources of good finance.

Use your excursions and seminars to reach media. Photo: Silvinformation

