

Volunteer bird watchers can take influence conservation efforts, study shows

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A new scientific study by the University of Queensland and BirdLife Australia has shown that volunteer bird watchers have the opportunity to affect better policy to protect threatened birds and their habitats.

The study looked to understand the motivations of [bird watchers](#), and how they could maximise their influence by capturing data that will most assist scientists to measure changes to bird use of different systems and allow decision and policy makers to design better protective measures for threatened species.

The project's lead researcher, Ms Ayesha Tulloch from the School of Biological Sciences said volunteer bird watchers' preferences for certain species or habitats meant the data they collected was not always even in space or time. To have greater impact [volunteers](#) needed to modify their collection habits of bird surveys so they could be of most use to further [conservation efforts](#).

"Aided by the internet, the popularity and scope of [citizen science](#) appears almost limitless, with more than 400 volunteer survey schemes around the world for birds alone, equating to an average of US \$8 million per scheme in volunteer time investment," Ms Tulloch said.

"For citizens the motivation is to contribute to "real" science, public information and conservation. For scientists, citizen science offers a way to collect information that would otherwise not be affordable."

Local conservation, natural resource management groups and [land managers](#) faced with limited funding for conservation can use volunteers in different ways, depending on what they want to achieve.

"Different volunteer types have different [conservation](#) objectives. 'Site-faithful' volunteers want to measure changes over time so visit the same site repeatedly, usually close to home, whereas 'roaming' volunteers want to find rare and threatened birds so travel on average more than 200km each time to find them."

"If site-faithful volunteers can be encouraged to select one or more specific habitats within their preferred range to monitor trends over consecutive seasons and years, they might be the first to detect change or serendipitous events like the onset of disease, invasive organisms, or catastrophic environmental change," Ms Tulloch said.

"Roaming volunteers, who tend to be tourists, can view maps of data gaps. They have the chance of filling gaps and finding threatened and rare species, and they can benefit by being the first person to complete a survey in one of the many areas that remain unsampled."

Provided by University of Queensland

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