

Aussie birds favour almonds for dining choices

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The survey found the yellow rosella (pictured) was present in 90 per cent of surveyed areas. Credit: Indigo Skies Photography

Almonds appear to be the fare of choice for many Australian birds with

recent research finding a variety of bird species frequent almond orchards over other agricultural crops.

An in-depth survey of bird populations by researchers from Charles Sturt University and Subiaco's Australian Wildlife Conservancy found almond orchards have greater bird species richness and diversity as compared to apple orchards, vineyards and eucalyptus woodlots.

An ornithologist's dream, this colourful procession includes the yellow rosella (*Platycercus elegans flaveolus*), red-capped robin (*Petroica goodenovii*), Rufous Whistler (*Pachycephala rufiventris*) and yellow-rumped thornbill (*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*), all of which were recorded in 90 per cent of surveyed areas.

What is more, some of the country's most vulnerable species are dining out on almonds, with the most abundant species found being the threatened eastern subspecies of the Regent Parrot (*Polytelis anthopeplus monarchoides*), one of 11 parrot and cockatoo species logged.

However, [birds](#) in WA are missing out, as large-scale producers have made no attempts to re-establish the state's industry since Select Harvests pulled the plug on their operations in Carnamah and Coorow in the Mid West in 2013, citing a need to consolidate operations in the eastern states.

While Select Harvest's move has helped the Australian almond industry become the fastest growing in the world—currently ranked second only to drought-besieged California as a producer—it has left WA on the outside looking in as Asian demand soars.

Birds step in to clean up post-harvest

Lead researcher Charles Sturt University Professor Gary Luck says the

study not only highlights the value of agricultural environments for some of our most vulnerable species, but draws attention to an often overlooked two-way relationship between crops and [bird populations](#).

"Since the early 20th century, the literature on bird occurrence in crops has focussed mostly on birds as pest species inflicting crop damage," Prof Luck says.

"However, there is increasing interest in the ecosystem services birds can provide agriculture, which can reduce costs to growers and improve crop yield."

This includes birds in almond orchards removing residual nuts on trees post-harvest that are susceptible to fungal and insect infestation.

"By cleaning up residual nuts, birds are providing a service to growers by reducing the need to remove the nuts manually," Prof Luck says.

"Because conservation-production interactions are complex, management strategies need as much information as possible to understand how supporting or discouraging particular [bird species](#) will affect the landscape."

More information: "The species and functional diversity of birds in almond orchards, apple orchards, vineyards and eucalypt woodlots" *Emu* 115(2) 99-109 [dx.doi.org/10.1071/MU14022](https://doi.org/10.1071/MU14022)

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