

Scientists exploring why so many Australians love feeding wild birds

July 28 2016

Deakin University scientists are wondering what the implications of so many people feeding birds might be and if the food being offered to them is potentially harmful to their health.

But they think those feeding [birds](#) might also hold the secret to save our feathered friend from risk, and are calling for [citizen scientists](#) to help them learn more by signing up to the Australian Bird Feeding and Watering Study.

Project leader Dr Gráinne Cleary, from Deakin's Centre for Integrative Ecology, within the School of Life and Environmental Sciences, said it was Australia's largest ever study on the impact of bird feeding and watering ever undertaken.

The study, which is a joint project between Deakin University and Griffith University and supported by Mars Birdcare, is calling on residents across the country who are already feeding and watering birds in their backyards to monitor and record what they observe.

"Australians clearly love feeding their birds and we don't want to stop this important human-wildlife interaction, but we do want to develop some sound guidelines that can help people ensure they are doing the right thing by the birds," Dr Cleary said.

"That's the plan, but we can only do this with the support of the public. We need people to get involved in the study and let us know how they

are interacting with birds in their own backyard.

"There is so much we don't know about what impact bird feeding and watering is having on native birdlife, but one thing is clear, Australians love feeding their backyard birds.

"The fact is we don't know if we are having a negative impact and potentially a very serious one at that. Through this nationwide study we want to find out what's happening – and we need the public to help us as we simply can't be inside all the backyards in Australia."

Dr Cleary said bird feeding in Europe had been common for many years, but Australians had been doing it, evolutionarily speaking, for a very short space of time.

"Are we feeding them too much? How much is enough? Are we making urban bird populations reliant on us? Is what we are feeding birds bad for them? Are we creating an environment with feeding and watering that could cause diseases to spread among birds? Importantly, are we causing an increase in certain bird species at the expense of others?" she said.

"There are so many unanswered questions and without scientifically based knowledge to guide the community in the future we are at serious risk of losing certain native birds from areas by creating an imbalance that we could rectify with some sound information.

"So we are recruiting citizen scientists across the country and asking them to record information about what they are doing and seeing when they are providing food and water for birds.

"From August 1, we are asking people to monitor the birds' behaviour for 20 minutes, three times a day for up to month. But they don't have to

complete the full task in order to contribute. We are asking people to just do what they can."

To register people can go to www.feedingbirds.org.au

Provided by Deakin University

Citation: Scientists exploring why so many Australians love feeding wild birds (2016, July 28)
retrieved 25 April 2024 from
<https://phys.org/news/2016-07-scientists-exploring-australians-wild-birds.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.