

# Internet data could boost conservation

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Businesses routinely use internet data to learn about customers and increase profits - and similar techniques could be used to boost conservation.

New research has tracked [public interest](#) in [conservation](#) over time, and found sudden spikes in interest linked to media coverage and seasonal events.

Peaks in interest in certain animals - such as when a species appears on TV programmes like the BBC's Planet Earth II - could be harnessed to aid protection efforts, the researchers say.

"Using these methods is relatively cheap and they produce huge sample sizes to tell us what people think about conservation," said lead author Andrea Soriano-Redondo, of the Centre for Ecology and Conservation on the University of Exeter's Penryn Campus in Cornwall.

"Up until now people have relied on surveys, which are extremely useful but very expensive, take a long time and usually have relatively small sample sizes."

The research, by the University of Exeter, the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, is published in the journal *Biological Conservation*.

Ms Soriano-Redondo, a PhD student, noted spikes in interest in cranes after a media release in August 2015 that detailed the first successful

breeding of Eurasian cranes in south-west England in over 400 years - but she said the level of interest went "back to the baseline" soon afterwards.

The same happened for sloths and iguanas after they appeared on Planet Earth II.

"The challenge is to make the most of these surges and keep that going after the initial peak," she said.

"At the moment the power of this public interest isn't being used to its full potential to promote conservation."

The study noted peaks in interest in bird species such as red kites and cranes when each species was nesting.

The researchers used both offsite tools (such as Google Trends) and onsite tools (such as Google Analytics) to monitor public interest in conservation.

Ms Soriano-Redondo's PhD studies are part of the Great Crane Project, which has reintroduced cranes to the South West in order to restore a healthy population of wild [cranes](#) in the UK.

Provided by University of Exeter

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