

# How silent environmentalists could help protect biodiversity

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New research has identified an important group of Australians with a surprisingly strong connection to nature. Credit: University of Queensland

New research has identified an important group of Australians with a surprisingly strong connection to nature.

A University of Queensland-led study surveyed 2,000 people across

Australia, finding that a quarter of participants had a human-centric relationship with nature, but also a strong desire to protect the [environment](#). This research is published in *People and Nature*.

Ph.D. candidate Nicola Sockhill said the results show pro-environmental behavior is not just limited to outspoken environmentalists or the strongly ecologically-minded within the community.

"We found that large groups of people from either side of the political spectrum want to protect the environment and in fact they already do so at high levels," Ms. Sockhill said.

"We all know about the stereotypical left-leaning ecologically-centric person, who protests vocally about climate change, eats a vegan diet and values nature for its intrinsic worth.

"But we also found a very different group of people, often from rural areas and typically a more right-leaning voter base.

"These people valued nature mostly for the benefits it gives to us, such as growing crops.

"The findings revealed that both groups show equally strong levels of support for pro-biodiversity policies.

"This result challenges the stereotype that right-leaning voters and those with human-centric values care less about taking steps to protect the environment and its biodiversity.

"Understanding this could mark a shift in the way conservation messaging is delivered moving forward."

Ms. Sockhill said existing conservation messaging strategies typically

target the ecocentric subgroup of the population, assuming they are more likely to respond to pro-environmental campaigns.

"Where messaging does target the human-centric group, it may be created with the assumption that they aren't connected to nature, or that they don't already perform pro-environmental behaviors.

"We have clearly shown that both of these assumptions are wrong and could lead to the disenfranchisement of an important constituency.

"The number of people who could be encouraged to increase their level of pro-environmental behavior is much bigger than previously realized."

UQ's Professor Richard Fuller said this opens the door for future conservation messaging to embrace a wider and more politically diverse audience.

"This work has profound implications for how political parties approach [environmental issues](#), and it also means conservationists need to be much more open-minded about who supports the cause," Professor Fuller said.

"Partisan battle lines are outdated, and there are committed environmentalists right across the political divide.

"Biodiversity is rapidly disappearing, so the stakes couldn't be higher."

**More information:** *People and Nature* (2022). [DOI: 10.1002/pan3.10400](#)

Provided by University of Queensland

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