

Not all wildlife recovered in lockdowns, new research finds

September 23 2022



A European robin (*Erithacus rubecula*) singing in Gennevilliers, France. Credit: [Alexis Lours](#)/Wikimedia Commons, [CC BY](#)

When the COVID pandemic started, it was a global crisis for humans—but as humans took shelter, reports of wildlife reclaiming what

were once human-dominated spaces abounded. But biologists are noticing the patterns were not repeated around the globe.

Last year, a research team led by University of Manitoba conservation biology professor Nicola Koper found that during the lockdowns most birds in Canada and the U.S. increased in human-dominated areas, such as cities or near roads. New research, however, shows a different story in other parts of the world.

Koper teamed up with first author Dr. Miya Warrington and other team members to study responses of birds to lockdowns in the United Kingdom, published today in *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*. Surprisingly, this research showed that while some British birds increased their use of spaces that they share with humans, many species did not. It seems that some of Brits' favorite [lockdown outdoor activities](#), like visiting parks and hanging out in our backyards, infringed on birds that share our spaces.

"Although I was happy to see people getting out and enjoying nature, I was also worried that some natural spaces would be flooded with people, and we may accidentally be 'smothering nature with our love.' We may have created a bit too much human pressure on the very places that bring us joy and comfort," says lead author Miya Warrington.

Even [common species](#) such as the blackbird, the blue tit and the European robin changed their behaviors when faced with the change in [human activity](#), notes Warrington. For example, blue tits, robins and blackbirds were all detected in fewer numbers when humans spent more time at home, maybe because people spent more time in their gardens, making these green spaces less welcoming to birds. However, some garden feeder species seem to have benefited from lockdown, especially "feisty" species like European goldfinches, which might not have minded sharing their backyards with humans and their pets (at least, the

friendly ones).

"These results are really different from results from our research in North America, where lockdowns had mostly positive effects on birds," says Koper. "And it's different from what most people have assumed until now—that wildlife had a chance to recover during lockdowns. That only happened in some parts of the world. Wildlife have adapted to humans differently in different parts of the world—and they might need different kinds of help in different places."

Our relationship with wildlife is complicated. Our [human presence](#) and actions influence nature, even during a lockdown. This means that we need to consider how our behaviors affect wildlife. But Warrington reminds us, "this is also a good thing. The behavior of birds changed really fast during lockdowns. This means that if humans change the way we do things, we can reverse some of the harm we have done to wildlife very quickly."

More information: Miyako H. Warrington et al, Avian behaviour changes in response to human activity during the COVID-19 lockdown in the United Kingdom, *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* (2022). [DOI: 10.1098/rspb.2021.2740](https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2021.2740)

Provided by University of Manitoba

Citation: Not all wildlife recovered in lockdowns, new research finds (2022, September 23) retrieved 27 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-09-wildlife-recovered-lockdowns.html>

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