

People's choice: Snowy owl and kingfisher triumph as Finland's most attractive birds

June 12 2023



The kingfisher is the most attractive bird on a global scale. Credit: Flavio Felici

Recent research has revealed which bird species are the most pleasant to the human eye, and which are less attractive. The most visually appealing species were often colorful birds, but also some large birds of prey are in

the top.

Does seeing a certain bird evoke a feeling of excitement and joy in you? What kind of bird is a "WOW!" and what kind is a "blaaah"? Researchers at the Finnish Museum of Natural History wondered if there are differences in how people rank the looks of different birds.

An online application, [Iratebirds](#), was used to evaluate people's preferences based on photographs of birds and the likes they received. The application was used to determine how people perceive the appearance of all the birds of the world.

The research project created a scoring of 1–10 on the aesthetic attractiveness of nearly all [species](#) of birds—over 10 000 species globally.

"Overall, if we look at the national level of Finland, many small to mid-sized and colorful birds ranked high. Half of the top 10 most attractive species in Finland are birds of prey, four of which are owl species and the remaining are eagles, hawks and falcons. The highest points for attractiveness were received by the snow-white snowy owl, which is also among the most liked birds internationally," says Ph.D. researcher Anna Haukka (her surname means in Finnish "hawk") from University of Helsinki's Finnish Museum of Natural History.

Finnish bird species are mostly brown, black, gray and white in color, but there are also several more colorful species that occur in Finland. Among all the birds of the world, colorful birds are generally more favored than birds of prey. Globally, there are, on average, more colorful bird species in [tropical regions](#) than there are at [higher latitudes](#) in the north.

"High-scoring colorful bird species out of all the species of the world

include for instance kingfisher, hummingbird and bee-eater species. Among the smaller birds also the beady eyed, but by color mainly white long-tailed tit is especially well liked," explains Anna Haukka.

Understanding the impact of aesthetic appeal on bird conservation and pet trade of birds

The aim of this project was to produce a global data set of aesthetic attraction, according to human perception, of all the birds in the world. In addition to interesting anecdotes, this data set has many potential uses for research. For instance, priorities in conservation activities might be partly determined by the degree of aesthetic appeal that birds have. Moreover, bird watching is a common hobby that is known to enhance people's well-being, however popular species are also more susceptible to disturbance from the impact of nature tourism.

"On the other hand, illegal pet trade might target some of the more esthetically attractive birds. In this case, the looks of a bird can also be a threat to them," explains Haukka.

The research project was conducted at the Finnish Museum of Natural History at the University of Helsinki, and the open access data and its description have been published in *Scientific Data*. Thousands of people participated in scoring the esthetically appeal of thousands of [bird species](#).

Here are the top 10 birds in the world with the highest score on the visual aesthetic attractiveness scale, ranging from 1 (low aesthetic appeal) to 10 (high aesthetic appeal):

- Black-backed dwarf kingfisher: 8.21
- Yellow-throated toucan: 8.17

- Lesser violetear: 8.15
- Violet-capped woodnymph: 8.11
- Rainbow bee-eater: 8.10
- Costa's hummingbird: 8.09
- Black-billed streamertail: 8.08
- Malagasy kingfisher: 8.06
- Purple-backed Fairywren: 8.04
- Snowy owl: 8.03

The paper is published in the journal *Scientific Data*.

More information: Anna Haukka et al, The iratebirds Citizen Science Project: a Dataset on Birds' Visual Aesthetic Attractiveness to Humans, *Scientific Data* (2023). [DOI: 10.1038/s41597-023-02169-0](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41597-023-02169-0)

Provided by University of Helsinki

Citation: People's choice: Snowy owl and kingfisher triumph as Finland's most attractive birds (2023, June 12) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-06-people-choice-snowy-owl-kingfisher.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.