

Peer Review

Review of: "Feathered Icons: Drivers of Global Attention on Bird Species"

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This fascinating and important MS describes an attempt to determine the characteristics of birds that prompt interest from the public. This attraction and concern for birds is identified as a vital element in gaining better traction for biodiversity conservation among the community. Even where conservation plans have been developed with adequate data and ecological inputs, without the support of the public, such plans are unlikely to go far. This situation is perhaps one of the most alarming implications of the so-called 'extinction of experience': the diminished awareness and connectedness to nature due to decreased exposure to non-human landscapes and experiences.

This study takes this challenge very seriously. As presented in this MS, the author has attempted to identify the features and attributes of birds that most influence interest in birds among people. The approach taken is innovative and powerful; data was obtained that encompasses both public interest (as demonstrated by Wikipedia searches) and scientific interest (publication rates). Thus, a truly global survey results, with outcomes that can be understood internationally.

The outcomes are both illuminating and shocking in their simplicity: people are more interested in big, colourful, and ornate species, while smaller, duller birds draw little attention. Alarming, the influence of a species' conservation status (as indicated by the IUCN rating) had little impact. Understandably, species that had a high level of trading or use were of more interest.

Although it may be possible to view these broad-brush findings as prosaic, they offer a tangible way for the promotion of bird conservation plans. Managers of biodiversity programs need to know these things, as do those engaged in designing and delivering conservation messaging. How that might be achieved is far from obvious; it will likely require specific articulation by expert public relations people.

This is a timely and important study that deserves to be widely disseminated. The paper is clearly presented in sufficient detail to allow every aspect of the work to be understood. I found no weak elements in the MS and encourage its publication.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.