

## Social Values of Australian Threatened Birds

### Research Summary

- Researcher:** Gill Ainsworth, PhD student  
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- Purpose:** This PhD research aims to examine relevant wildlife values to identify and measure the importance placed by society on native Australian birds. A major part of this process will be to highlight the social profiles of Australia's 100 or so threatened bird taxa. This is particularly important for threatened species as it appears never to have been explored in the scientific literature even though it underpins and sustains political support for threatened species investment, often in the face of economically rational arguments.  
Part of this research is connected to the ARC Linkage Project "Increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of Australian threatened bird conservation."
- Methods:** Values Dataset: creation of social profiles of Australian native birds using Kellert and Campbell & Smith's<sup>1</sup> wildlife values criteria. Identification of measures relating to birds and collection of quantitative values data via online and other searches (see Table 1 below);  
Quantitative Attitudinal Survey: self-completion survey with members of the Australian birding community and the general public to identify values and attitudes towards Australian native birds and bird conservation programs;  
Qualitative Case Studies: in depth exploration of conservation programs for six selected threatened species around Australia including interviews with conservation managers, conservation organizations, members of the media and the general public.
- Values:** We are trying to get a broad measure of the values<sup>2</sup> Australians put on birds to see if there is any correspondence between value and the success of conservation programs. Values are expressed through all sorts of measures: consumptive (e.g. hunting) or non-consumptive (watching and enjoying in the wild or through various media, recreational, intellectual and scientific - including educational, aesthetic, artistic and cultural, and religious and symbolic). These values have both a quantitative aspect that can be measured (eg. wildlife tourism) and a qualitative aspect that cannot (eg beauty) (Prescott-Allen 1986)<sup>3</sup>.  
See Table 1 for examples.

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1 Kellert SR & Clark TW 1991. The Theory and Application of a Wildlife Policy Framework. In "Public Policy Issues in Wildlife Management" (eds WR Mangun), Greenwood, New York pp17-36

Campbell L & Smith C 2006. What Makes Them Pay? Values of Volunteer Tourists Working for Sea Turtle Conservation. *Environmental Management*, 38, 84-98.

2 Value refers to the 'relative worth, merit or importance' of something. Values cannot be observed directly but only through their expression in the form of attitudes and behaviours.

3 Prescott-Allen, C. and Prescott-Allen, R. 1986. *The First Resource*. Yale University Press: Newhaven, USA.

Birds in society: Birds help mankind understand more about non-human animals and biodiversity, and have long played a vital role in the development of human culture and understanding of ourselves. Birds are important characters in myths and fables, acting as messengers and augurs or representatives of gods. Birds have featured strongly in the arts and humanities throughout the ages and most cultures across the world still represent birds in their artworks, literature, music and dance. Birds are also popular in modern culture where they appear in a multitude of forms: names are applied to places, products and people; physical attributes represent symbols of power or freedom; and certain species convey characteristics such as purity, fidelity or mischief which we apply to ourselves through metaphor.

Birds also contribute significantly to the Australian economy. As birdwatching and birds become ever more popular so their economic significance increases through membership of bird related organizations, sales of bird-related paraphernalia such as birding books, guides and equipment; sales of pet birds with their associated food and housing requirements; and bird-related art and crafts.

Research questions: Q. Who is involved in threatened bird conservation, how do they communicate their messages and what information do they rely upon?

Q. How do Australians value native birds?

Q. Do the values held for particular threatened birds affect the success of strategies to conserve them?

Benefits: Bird conservation is as much a social matter as it is ecological. This research will contribute to the preservation of native birds in Australia by deepening our understanding of the relationships between Australian attitudes, values and norms as regards birds and identifying which conservation messages are most effective in delivering successful conservation action.

In practical terms it will prove invaluable for prioritising threatened species protection and framing effective conservation plans for individual species which appeal at both a policy and public interest level.

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Further information about this research can also be found on this website:

<http://www.cdu.edu.au/ser/profiles/GillAinsworthProfile.htm>

**Table 1: Australian Bird Values Dataset**

<b>Wildlife Value</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Quantitative Measure</b>
Aesthetic: physical, cultural / historic / symbolic and spiritual	a primary interest in the physical attractiveness and symbolic characteristic of animals.	representations on stamps, coins and artworks
Conservation	increases / decreases in bird populations, birds as endangered species, threat of extinction, loss of habitat / nesting ground, contributing to conservation.	membership of conservation organisations devoted to birds
Dominionistic	primary interest in the mastery and control of birds, typically in sporting situations but may also refer to a sense of getting to know birds well or better, being able to identify components of nature such as birds, being a good naturalist, enhancing problem solving and coping abilities in the outdoors, hunting, harvesting, etc.	participation in bird hunting and shooting
Ecological	primary concern for the environment as a system, for interrelationships between bird species and natural habitats. A particular species and associated habitats are important to the well-being and continuity of interrelated flora and fauna, as well as to the maintenance of basic hydrological, soil and other biochemical processes.	participation in bird conservation and scientific study
Humanistic	strong affection for individual animals; primary interest and strong affection for individual animals such as pets or large wild or rare animals with strong anthropomorphic and historic elements that may have been the recipients of strong personal and symbolic meanings.	participation in caretaking organizations
Moralistic / existence / intrinsic	it is possible to believe that all species have inherent rights and spiritual importance; right to survival; human duty to protect and preserve species; value of knowing a species exists without seeing it; primary concern for the right and wrong treatment of animals, with strong ethical opposition to presumed overexploitation or cruelty toward animals.	membership of animal rights organizations

Sacred Kingfisher

Naturalistic / experiential	there is enjoyment to be gained from direct contact with wildlife while taking part in some outdoor activity such as camping etc.; specific exciting or moving experiences with birds in their natural habitat, detailed description of interactions with birds.	Availability of birdwatching tours
Negativistic	primary orientation an active avoidance of animals due to dislike or fear; conflict between birds and humans possibly through competition for resources.	conflicts and court cases involving birds
Scientific	all species have actual or potential value for enhancing human knowledge and understanding of the natural world; primary interest in the physical attributes and biological functioning of animals; reference to: bird migrations, reproductive habits, nesting habits, use of habitat, life history, ecological roles, doing science (collecting data, tagging).	taxonomic distinctiveness
Theistic	primary orientation a fatalistic belief in wildlife as controlled by external deities or natural forces; links to creation stories and animism.	religious symbolism and totemism
Utilitarian-consumption and utilitarian-habitat	natural populations of organisms are potential sources of material benefit to human society, especially in the realms of medicine, agriculture and industry.	consumptive uses of birds

