

THE YOUR SOURCE FOR UNDERSTANDING TRENDS IN ECOSYSTEMS AND SOCIETY CONSERVATION CURRENT



PennStateExtension

ISSUE NO 1 | SPRING 2019



Survey Says... "Welcome to PA!"

Assistant Professor Melissa M. Kreye, at Penn State University Extension, is launching a new program called *Forest Benefits and Values*, to help advocates of conservation connect with the latest research about the value of conserved lands. To inform program development, Dr. Kreye distributed a needs assessment survey to 360 non-governmental conservation organizations located around the Mid-Atlantic region. Over 100 organizations responded from Pennsylvania, Ohio, Maryland, New York, and Virginia. Most respondents represented private land trusts, but others included landowner associations and public-private initiatives.

Most respondents (70%+) agreed that access to forest benefits and values information would improve their management decisions, and make them better advocates for stakeholders. Important topics included the economic and social value of managing for clean water and air, biodiversity, and habitats. Wildlife topics included insects, fish, and reptiles, song bird species, and endangered wildlife. Human health and culture topics focused on the relationship between natural areas and human health, enhanced recreational opportunities, and educational and aesthetic benefits. In addition to this newsletter and other suggested extension articles/workshops, many supported the development of valuation calculators and research databases to help practitioners transfer economic values to their own conservation projects. Dr. Kreye is excited to address these needs and will be revealing new products to audiences over the next year.

RESEARCH SNAPSHOTS

Learn about the value of song birds and interacting with everyday wildlife on page 2.

NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

Learn more about the new **Forest Benefits and Values** program and what topics will be discussed in upcoming newsletters on page 2.

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RESEARCH SNAPSHOTS



House finch by Matthew Field

How Much is that Birdie in My Backyard?

The success or decline of bird species often depends on the quality of the environment (i.e., land cover, vegetation and habitat quality) and human actions (e.g., bird feeders, nest boxes). Private citizens, and organizations such as non-profit groups and government agencies, will often work together to encourage the management of desirable song birds. Economic value estimates associated with bird abundance can help inform decision-making for these groups by setting priorities and justifying management costs.

Researchers in a 2015 study investigated the economic value of native urban songbirds by measuring public willingness to pay for the enjoyment they receive from birds and bird songs. They found households in Seattle, WA were willing to pay on average \$19.96 annually for finches and \$8.43 for Corvid species of birds. The total value of common urban song birds in the Seattle area was found to be approximately \$199 million per year. Demand for song bird benefits was greater for people who expressed a positive attitude toward conservation, or supported a conservation organization. Data for the study were collected using a combination of stratified survey methods and market reports about public expenditures on bird food, and analyzed using Tobit regression analysis procedures.

Source: Barbara Clucas, Sergey Rabotyagov and John M. Marzluff, *Urban Ecosystems* (2015) 18:251–266.

The Value of Interacting with Everyday Wildlife

A recent study investigated how engaging with everyday wildlife, by feeding garden birds, helped increase people's personal wellbeing and the value of common birds. Findings suggest that programs aimed at enhancing people's desire for nature-connectivity may be valued differently from programs aimed at conserving endangered species or wild landscapes.

Researchers found bird species that frequented gardens the most were often valued the most. They propose that the frequent occurrence of certain bird species provided people the opportunity to exhibit emotions of connectedness and responsibility (i.e., warden attitude) which enhanced their sense of personal wellbeing. Bird enthusiasts were willing to pay on average \$0.21 and \$0.38 for each additional robin and tit at feeding time. However, the benefits of being a "bird warden" were greater when people observed a limited number of birds at feeding times (e.g., less than five birds), suggesting that people's concern for birds may be related to a perceived need for care. People who left food out for birds, but did not see the food be consumed by birds, and those who purchased more nutritious food also reported that they benefited from having the attitude of a bird warden.

There was no evidence that feeding birds was associated with a willingness to contribute to the protection of an endangered species. Researchers suggest that the difference might reflect the nature-connectivity associated with bird feeding. People are often discouraged from engaging with endangered bird species out concern that they might disturb them. Data for this study were collected in Eastern England using mail surveys and choice experiment questions.

Source: Michael Brock, Grischa Perino, and Robert Sugden, *Environmental and Resource Economics* 67.1 (2017): 127-155.

NOTES FROM THE EDITORS

This first edition of *The Conservation Current* is an exciting one for us. We have been soliciting information and preparing articles for over six months!

Every edition will review research articles addressing a wide range of topics including markets and conservation, government and policy, public demand, and social values.

Most editions will interview **one of you**, our audience. We want to create space for conservation advocates to talk about new ideas... maybe a few challenges... and learn about ongoing efforts in the conservation community.

Our goal is to be ~your source for understanding trends in conserved ecosystems and society.