

Hunting, birdwatching boosts conservation action, study finds

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What inspires people to support conservation? As concerns grow about the sustainability of our modern society, this question becomes more important. A new study by researchers at Cornell University provides one simple answer: bird watching and hunting.

This survey of conservation activity among rural landowners in Upstate New York considered a range of possible predictors such as gender, age, education, political ideology, and beliefs about the environment. All other factors being equal, bird watchers are about five times as likely, and hunters about four times as likely, as non-recreationists to engage in wildlife and habitat conservation. Both bird watchers and hunters were more likely than non-recreationists to enhance land for wildlife, donate to conservation organizations, and advocate for wildlife-all actions that significantly impact conservation success.

The contributions of individuals who identified as both bird watchers and hunters were even more pronounced. On average, this group was about eight times more likely than non-recreationists to engage in conservation.

"We set out to study two groups--bird watchers and hunters--and didn't anticipate the importance of those who do both, and wildlife managers probably didn't either," said Dr. Caren Cooper, the study's lead author, now at North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences. "We don't even have a proper name for these conservation superstars, other than hunter/bird watchers."

"Managers often discuss direct and indirect links between wildlife recreation and conservation," said study co-author Dr. Lincoln Larson, now at Clemson University. "Our findings not only validate this connection, but reveal the unexpected strength of the conservation-recreation relationship."

The study, published in the *Journal of Wildlife Management*, speaks to wildlife agency managers. Findings could assuage concerns about diminishing support for conservation in the United States and its historic ties (both socially and economically) to hunting, an activity that has been declining for decades.

"Our results provide hope for wildlife agencies, organizations, and citizens concerned about conservation," offers study co-author Dr. Ashley Dayer of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. "Bird watchers, a group not traditionally thought of as a constituency by many wildlife management agencies, have real potential to be conservation supporters, if appropriate mechanisms for them to contribute are available."

As agencies and conservation organizations ponder how to better work with bird watchers, hunters, and hunter/bird watchers on conservation, one take-home message is clear: The more time we spend in nature, the more likely we are to protect it.

Story Source:

The above story is based on [materials](#) provided by [Cornell University](#). *Note: Materials may be edited for content and length.*

Journal Reference:

1. Caren Cooper, Lincoln Larson, Ashley Dayer, Richard Stedman, Daniel Decker. **Are wildlife recreationists conservationists? Linking hunting, birdwatching, and pro-environmental behavior.** *The Journal of Wildlife Management*, 2015; DOI: [10.1002/jwmg.855](https://doi.org/10.1002/jwmg.855)

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