

*This paper forms part of the proceedings from the BOU conference **Ecosystem services: do we need birds?**  
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## **Closing the circle – birds, cultural services and human well-being**

**KEN NORRIS\* & NATALIE CLARK**

Centre for Agri-Environmental Research, University of Reading, Earley Gate, PO Box 237, Reading RG6 6AR, UK

\*Email: [k.norris@reading.ac.uk](mailto:k.norris@reading.ac.uk)

We all recognize that birds are culturally important, or in the language of ecosystem services provide people with cultural services. For many of us the enjoyment we experience is why we watch and study wild birds, and why we think conserving wild birds is important. Yet we rarely explicitly define these cultural values, consider how these values vary across society, explore the consequences of these values for our health and well-being, or consider how these values might fit into a wider ecosystem services framework. The aim of our paper is to explore these issues.

We first outline the types of cultural values that have been recognized in the literature in the context of nature conservation. Next, we consider the extent to which these values have shaped bird conservation, using farmland bird populations as an example. We argue that their conservation largely reflects the desire to protect cultural values because priority species play a rather limited functional role in agro-ecosystems. We then contrast the priorities established by conservationists for farmland birds with those recognized by the farming community, and show that the limited evidence available suggests very different priorities. By explicitly considering cultural values, therefore, we can better understand people's motivation to engage with conservation interventions, and this may help explain why some fail to work.

Evidence suggests that there are significant links between psychological factors and human health, including examples relating to the environment. This implies that changes in wild bird populations and associated changes in their cultural values could have quite profound impacts on people, but we know virtually nothing about these interactions. We outline a framework for improving our understanding of these interactions, and argue that doing so could provide important additional arguments for conservation that go beyond those on which the conservation community has traditionally relied.

Finally, much of traditional (culturally based) conservation is cast as a cost to economic development. This view means that it is often difficult to justify conservation on the grounds of values that are difficult to express in monetary terms when this appears to reduce the economic value of development. While a better understanding of the links between cultural values, well-being and health will help, it is also possibly time to re-examine the assumption that conservation and economic values necessarily trade-off negatively. Scenario analyses conducted in the recent UK National Ecosystem Assessment clearly show that there can be positive rather than negative associations between the economic value of a range of ecosystem services and bird biodiversity. We need to explore these relationships in much greater detail.

We need to recognize that bird conservation is not simply a problem in natural science. By better understanding the cultural values of birds, how these values relate to human health and well-being as well as the values of other ecosystem services, we have the potential opportunity to develop new and more powerful arguments for bird conservation.