

Caring for and about birds

Relational values in birders' stories about their passion

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Centre Connecting
HN
Humans and Nature

Goals in brief – EnviroCitizen



More focus on the 'citizen' in 'citizen science'

Evaluate the tools, techniques, and practices deployed in contemporary citizen science ornithology efforts in six European countries: Spain, Romania, Estonia, Norway, Sweden, The Netherlands

Objective: To evaluate how citizen scientists learn about and enact environmental citizenship through their citizen science birding activities



Environmental citizenship

- ❖ Environmental citizenship operationalised as 'care'
 - ❖ Caring about birds: cognition and affection
 - ❖ Caring for birds: ways of acting
- ❖ Care as relational

Fieldwork

	Estonia	Netherlands	Norway	Romania	Spain	Sweden	Total
Interviews	15	16	15	17	17	11	91
Fieldwork event	16	12	16	25	15	13	97



Beginning of birding

- ❖ Nature & birds often present in youth
- ❖ Three routes:
 - ❖ Nature present in family
 - ❖ Innate connection
 - ❖ Nature at a later stage



Charisma

Ecological charisma: people like birds because they are easy to observe

“It's very easy to observe birds, yes, birds fly, birds can appear everywhere. They're very mobile, there's a lot of species. You practically can't leave the house without seeing a bird. Birds are accessible to everyone in the city, in the town or in the countryside, you can always see them.” (RO6)



Charisma

Aesthetic charisma

“birds are strikingly beautiful, disappear quickly from view and therefore generate interest in learning more about them.” (E7)

Charisma

Corporeal charisma: experiencing a bond through interaction

“They watched us, we watched them”. They became like family members, they said, and “when we put the feeders away, the doves kept coming back, looked inwards from time to time, checking upon us, or I don’t know what” (RO1)

“Seeing the life of these birds up close in a way that other people don’t normally see [...] it created a kind of emotional connection with the subject and with birds in general.” (E8)



Noticing nature

❖ Growing attentiveness & World opening up

“The more you learn, you see nature in a different way when you can identify all the sounds and stuff. Then it becomes.... You get a bit of a bigger world in a way.” (SW9)

“Hence, I remember, after getting the scopes, the world of birdwatching really opened up for us” (E2).

“and suddenly, I had such an epiphany that, wait a minute, it's not all sparrows and crows around us. And that's when it all started. In the sense that I began to notice them [...] a whole universe opened up to me” (RO5)

“I was fascinated by every bird I saw, I just wanted to see it, what does this creature look like, then the link with the name. Well, if you know the name, then a whole new world opens up for you” (NL8)

Human-nature relationship

❖ Ecocentric view

- ❖ Human actions framed as disturbing the balance of nature and threatening nature's resilience

“Yes, that deer is crossing the road' and I think, no, we have laid that road through that forest. 'Yes, that stupid bird flies into the building', no, it has been flying from A to B in its migration for 100 years, and then we put a building there or a windmill, and the animal flies into it” (NL8).

- *“By this I mean that it is almost inseparable, [...] in reality, my whole life has been about nature.” (SP15)*
- ▶ *“Because what really matters to me is the, yes, the natural aspect, I really enjoy seeing special birds and identifying birds, but **what really matters to me is simply seeing the beauty of nature and feeling connected with nature.**” (NL7)*



Human-nature relationship

- ❖ Birding deepens the relationship with nature

- ❖ Via connectedness with birds and nature

- ❖ Birding and care for birds can fulfill the need for a meaningful life (van den Born et al., 2018)

- ▶ *“... is half of my life. Literally, if you take the hours of my day. It is more and more important. Or rather, no longer just birdwatching. I've formulated it for myself once. **I'd like to give back to the nature what it gives to me.**” (E1)*
- ▶ *“I hope that I would be able to produce data which could be useful. I hope to feel joy and belonging to nature and to feel meaning, that it should be meaningful. **I feel that birds are a good source of meaning in my life**” (NO15)*



Learning

*“But we are not so conscious of that sense. As humans we are very visually oriented. **And if you just polish that sense, as it were, that it comes on, that you start to listen very consciously, then a whole new world really opens up for you, I think that is very special. And that is exactly the nice thing that birding can offer you, that you just become more aware of your surroundings by just using your ears. Because it is already there, we already do it, but to do it in an even more focused way is really very cool.”** (NL5)*





Care about

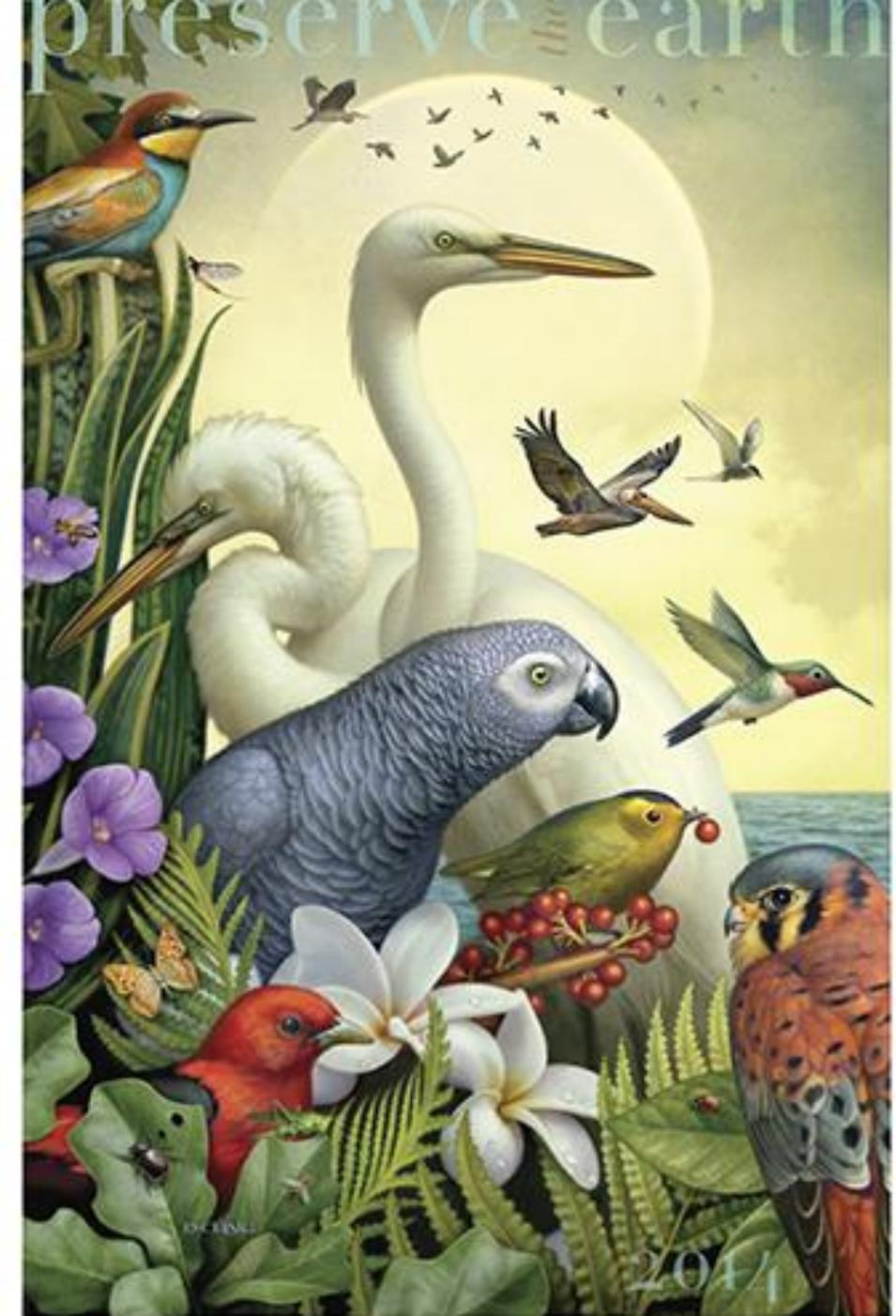
- ❖ Aware of decreasing trends, but don't always witness them themselves
 - ❖ Not a huge concern over trends
 - ❖ 'birds come and go'
 - ❖ Yet, concerns under the surface
- ❖ Some birders experience significant eco-grief



Care about

- ▶ *“it is quite difficult to convey actually, that, well, your feelings about it, about what that means to me or what that feeling is that you have seen it change so much, and that you don't see so many things anymore that you used to see very often.” (NL6)*
- ▶ *“when you know about nature, you see the loss of biodiversity in the countryside at a fairly accelerated rate and the truth is that it is not very encouraging. **Many times, when I go to the field, I come back depressed and angry, rather than renewed...**” (SP4)*





Care for

- ❖ Key types:

- ❖ Education

- ❖ Environmental behaviour

- ❖ Bird protection & activism

- ❖ Growing over the life course

*“When I first started, I didn’t think further than this being a hobby and an interest. **But as the years passed, I started thinking about the environment more and more, which became an ever increasingly important topic to me [...]** it has become increasingly apparent for me, through my studies, that the protection part is perhaps what’s most important.” (E2)*



Conclusions I

- ❖ Importance of relational values
- ❖ Learning has a reinforcing effect, positive feedback loop
 - 'World opening up'
- ❖ Strong interrelation between love for birds and love for nature
 - Often a love for nature early in life



Conclusions II

- ❖ Citizen science as a pathway to environmental citizenship?
 - Gradual broadening of environmental citizenship
- ❖ Different routes :
 - via concerns and eco-grief
 - via love and connectedness



Thanks for
caring!

