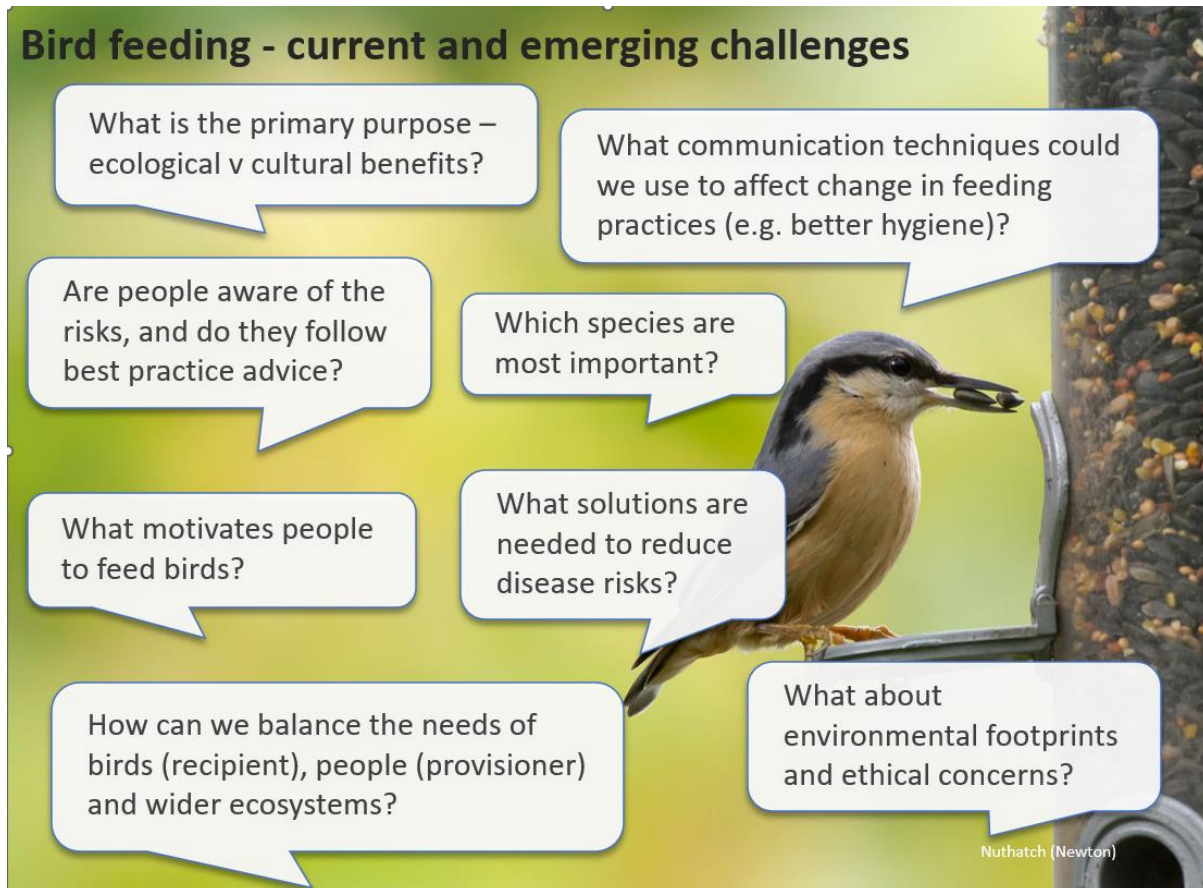


Bird Feeding in Britain: Past, Present and Future

Our second work in progress workshop was held in November 2022, hosted by the University of Reading in collaboration with our research partner the [British Trust for Ornithology](#). The theme was the past, present and future of bird feeding in Britain and was introduced with a presentation by Kate Plummer from the BTO on the Trust's work and current focus. She presented a number of questions which acted as a prompt for discussion throughout the workshop.



Current and emerging challenges relating to bird feeding (credit: Kate Plummer BTO)

Talks from the research team then followed, attempting to address some of the challenges identified by the BTO and moving from a discussion of bird feeding in the deep past to the present day with an eye to the future of Britain's birds and our relationship with them.

Sean Dohery and Riley Smallman began the discussion with an overview of their work on birds and bird feeding in the past. Riley Smallman's work 'CROW - CultuRal co-evOlution of corvids: Winged omens of the times' explores how, when and why human-corvid relationships have changed over time and interrogates value judgements we make about birds.

This theme of value judgements was continued through the other discussions with Herre de Bondt discussing his work on pigeons and pigeon feeding and how this divides opinion between those who view pigeons as pests and those who enjoy feeding them and value this interaction with them. The work on corvids and pigeons illustrates clearly how our value judgements about birds change over time and from place to place. For example, pigeon feeding used to be a popular pastime in London's Trafalgar Square but is now banned.



School boys feeding pigeons in Trafalgar Square circa 1950 (credit Virginia Thomas)

Presentations by Juliette Waterman and Virginia Thomas on the place and fate of red kites in Britain continued this theme. Kites were once widespread but were almost eradicated by persecution before concerted efforts to reinforce the remnant population saw their numbers restored. The re-establishment of red kites has seen their numbers rise to such an extent that they are now viewed as a pest in some places, leading to questions over human-kite coexistence centring perhaps on what people consider the 'right' number of kites to be and raising questions over why we continue to feed them when they are now flourishing. Kites are certainly plentiful in the Reading area where the workshop was held and we saw several on a walk along the Thames. Raptors such as red kites share a special relationship with humans and this was emphasised by Hannah Britton's presentation on the history of raptors and falconry in Britain which still influences modern language (see for example this [list](#) from the Wingspan Trust NZ).



Red kite spotting walk during the workshop

The workshop closed with a group discussion on communication and engagement around bird feeding, exploring the best ways to communicate issues around bird feeding more widely and what the best format for this might be.

Thank you so much to everyone who contributed to this workshop's success.



Figure 1: Public information sign in Minehead, Dorset raising awareness about feeding gulls.