THE HUMBLE sparrow was the focus of academics’ attention when they visited Armidale on the weekend.

Researchers from Macquarie University are interested in how the bird has adapted and survived since arriving on our shores from England in the 1860s.

“We hope to learn the secrets of adaptation from one of our most versatile introduced bird species,” researcher Monica Awasthy said.

“We want to know how the house sparrow has survived in the harsh environment of Australia,” Dr Awasthy said.

In each location, the team will frequent local stock feed stores, stables, racetracks and residents’ backyards, on the hunt for the little birds.

Once caught, researchers will record population and genetics data on each of the birds before releasing them back into the wild.

“So far they have not been too difficult to find, and we catch on average 50 birds in each town we visit,” Dr Awasthy said.

Fortunately for us the house sparrow, or *Passer domesticus*, prefer to settle around people; they love our food, and our animals’ food.”

CATTLE producers are being urged to ensure cows in calf have sufficient feed in paddocks as winter bites.

Northern Tablelands Local Land Services District veterinarian Andrew Biddle says a calved and feeding cow needs 50 per cent more energy than a dry cow.

During the last third of pregnancy a cow’s requirement for energy increases substantially.

“In winter, most natural or improved pasture is declining in quality, just at the time when the cow’s needs are increasing,” Dr Biddle said.

Producers should increase quantity and quality of feed available to cattle in the next six weeks to avoid diseases such as pregnancy toxaemia.

“Clinical signs can range from downer cows to staggering or aggression. Cows lie down and may not be able to get back up.”

REGIONAL development, the condition of country roads and tourism opportunities were just some of the topics discussed when senior leaders of the NSW Christian Democrats held talks with Armidale Dumaresq councillors.

Paul Glenn and Ross Clifford wanted to introduce themselves to key dignitaries in the city and flew up from Sydney last Friday.

They met with deputy mayor Jenny Bailey and fellow councillor Margaret O’Connor.

“We talked about the need for the NSW government to back the building of infrastructure such as pools, libraries, theatres and sports facilities that will support vibrant family life in regional NSW,” Cr O’Connor said after the meeting.

In March next year, long-serving Christian Democrat boss Rev Fred Nile will step down from his leadership of the Christian Democrats and his position as member of the NSW Legislative Chamber.

Standing for election in his place will be Dr Clifford, current principal of Morling College and Mt Glenn MLC, who presently sits with Rev Nile in the Upper House as the second Christian Democrat MLC and is a member of the standing Committee on Regional Aviation.

CARE for pregnant cows

MEET AND GREET: From left, Jenny Bailey, Margaret O’Connor, Paul Glenn and Ross Clifford at Armidale Dumaresq Council chambers.

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Christian Democrats on city tour

Small friend: The sparrow arrived in Australia in the 1860s.

“This will have important implications for our understanding of how our native birds will cope with climate change.”

Dr Awasthy and her team from Macquarie University’s Department of Biological Studies are touring regional NSW and Queensland.

First stop was Armidale, with other research stops planned at Toowoomba, Roma, Charleville, Longreach, Mount Isa and Tennant Creek.

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