Trends and Diversity among American Birdwatchers

David Scott, Ph.D.
Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences
Texas A&M University
Birdwatching has become a big business!

- High Island, TX: $2.5 million spent to see songbirds.
- Rockport, TX: $1.2 million spent on Whooping Crane tours.
- Rockport, TX: Non-residents spent approximately $1.2 million at the Hummer/Bird Celebration.
- Members of the American Birding Association spent $63 million on birdwatching.
Why should rural communities be interested in nature-based tourism?

- Dollars spent by birders and wildlife watchers can help diversify local economies.
- Rural communities have natural resources that are attractive to birders and wildlife watchers.
- Nature-based tourism is “clean and green”—birding is non-polluting and provides a mechanism for protecting ecosystems.
To maximize the potential economic benefits of birding, communities need to develop marketing strategies that are based on knowledge of different styles of birdwatching.
Purpose of presentation

● Describe the birding market
● Explore diversity among birdwatchers
How many birdwatchers are there in the United States?
According to the 2000 *National Survey on Recreation and the Environment*, 33% of Americans 16 years of age or older said they “viewed, identified, or photographed birds” at least once during the last 12 months. That is equivalent to approximately **67.4 million** Americans.
Percent change in participation rates (USA): 1983-2000

Source: National Survey of Recreation and the Environment
Changes in number of people who watch birds: 1996-2006

Only 5% of all people who say they watch birds keep lists of the birds they identify.
In a nation-wide study, Stephen Kellert (1985) reported that only **30%** of American birdwatchers (18 years of age or older) used binoculars and only **4%** said they used a field guide.
A small fraction of “birdwatchers” use specialized equipment and are skilled at identifying birds.
What experiences and amenities are attractive to birdwatchers?
Diversity among birdwatchers
Characteristic types (segments) of birdwatchers

- Casual birders (35%)
- Interested birders (41%)
- Active birders (14%)
- Skilled birders (10%)

Source: Scott & Thigpen, 2003
## Behavior, skill, and commitment among birdwatchers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Casual birders</th>
<th>Interested birders</th>
<th>Active birders</th>
<th>Skilled birders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Days spent birding last year</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Birding trips taken last year</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Birds identified by sight</strong></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Birds identified by sound</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of importance/involvement</strong></td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Centrality to lifestyle</strong></td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Scott & Thigpen, 2003*
Diversity among birders (cont.)

- **Casual birders (35%)**
  - Not highly committed to birding
  - Relatively unskilled at identifying birds
  - Lacks basic birding equipment
  - Enthusiastic about a variety of destination attributes: *Combine* birding with other outdoor recreation activities, shopping, visiting small towns, and visiting historic sites

*Source: Scott & Thigpen, 2003*
Golfing For The Fun Of It--Grab Your Clubs, And Swing With The Pros!
With PGA professionals, learn techniques to improve your swing, drive, pitching, chipping, putting, and short and long game. Be a part of small group lessons, learn about different styles of courses, different styles of playing from Palmer to Woods, great players in Central Florida and area tournaments…. Then try out your improvements on the golf course. Play at least 27 holes of golf. *In addition, learn about Florida birds, plants and small animals you may see on the grounds.*
Diversity among birders (cont.)

- Interested birders (41%)
  - Enjoy and interested in birdwatching
  - Relatively unskilled at identifying birds—will probably require guides or leaders to help identify birds
  - Also combine birdwatching with other activities

Source: Scott & Thigpen, 2003
MARCHING THROUGH VIRGINIA

Living Bird, Summer 1997

Exploring battlefields and birding opportunities along Robert E. Lee’s final route of retreat

by Jerry Hillman

Birders who are also Civil War enthusiasts will now have ample opportunities to enjoy both pastimes along the highways and byways of central Virginia. A newly designated automobile trail called the Virginia Civil War Trail closely follows Confederate General Robert E. Lee’s route of retreat in the final months of the Civil War. And, fortunately for birders, this 180-mile self-guided trail system threads its way through a wide variety of excellent bird habitats, crisscrossing through forests, farmland, and river systems from the foothills of the Shenandoah Mountains in the north to the Piedmont of central and southern Virginia. Shaped like a huge backward L, the trail is divided into two distinct sections: “Lee versus Grant: The 1864 Campaign,” which starts in northern Virginia at Germanna Ford and runs southward, ending at the Petersburg National Battlefield, and “Lee’s Retreat,” which extends from Petersburg to Appomattox.

Lee versus Grant: The 1864 Campaign

In March of 1864, Ulysses S. Grant takes charge as general-in-chief of the Army of the Potomac. He decides that instead of focusing all of his energies on capturing the rebel capital at Richmond, his major aim will be to defeat Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia, the pride of the South. His army outnumbers Lee’s by two to one, but the Southerners have proven repeatedly to be fierce, resourceful fighters. Victory will not come easily. Grant has his first major confrontation with Lee during the Battle of the Wilderness, a fierce clash lasting from May 5-6. Only resting his men for one day, Grant marches his army to Spotsylvania, where they meet Lee’s troops in another horrendous battle, lasting from May 8-20.

The casualties are staggering: some 18,000 Union troops and perhaps 10,000 Confederates fall there. But the Confederates can ill afford to lose any men. General Grant’s troops push the Confederates all the way to Petersburg, south of Richmond, fighting constant gory skirmishes and battles the entire way. All told, these warring armies suffer a combined total of some 70,000 casualties in Lee’s crushing 42-day retreat from Germanna Ford to Petersburg. There, Lee’s army digs in, fighting off every Union attack. Hope-
Diversity among birders (cont.)

- **Active birders (14%)**
  - Regard themselves as committed birders
  - Are relatively skilled and participate far more than other birder groups
  - These birders are *not* particularly interested in shopping, visiting small towns, and comfort amenities

*Source: Scott & Thigpen, 2002*
Annual Hummer/Bird Celebration
Rockport, Texas

- Oldest festival of its kind in the US
- 5000 annual attendees
- Non-residents spend $1.2 million at the festival
● Skilled birders (10%)
  – More narrowly focused than the other birders: highly selective and specialized in terms of their interests
  – Interested in observing target birds
  – Will probably not need help identifying birds
  – Are not overly concerned about opportunities for shopping, comfort amenities, and other outdoor recreation opportunities

Source: Scott & Thigpen, 2003
Wildlife Half-Day Tour (3 1/2 hours)
Enjoy a tour through some of the premier wildlife habitat in the country. Besides being famous for the quality of antlered white-tailed deer in its pastures, King Ranch is home to a diverse range of native species including javelina, bobcat, wild turkey, and a host of other birds, mammals, and reptiles.
Winter Birding Half-day (4 hours)
King Ranch is a showcase for the incredible diversity of wintering birds in South Texas. We'll visit habitats from wetland to grassland looking for birds such as least grebe, white-tailed hawk, crested caracara, vermillion flycatcher, great kiskadee, green jay, olive sparrow, and more. Expect 60 or more species on this half-day tour!
Nature Tours

Winter Birding Full-day (8 hours)
Come spend the day birding the northernmost part of King Ranch. In addition to the South Texas specialties listed for the Winter Birding Half-day tour, we'll also look for birds such as Sprague's pipit, burrowing owl, and reddish egret. Lunch, transportation, and professional guide provided.
Spring Birding Full-day (9 hours)
This tour to the southernmost part of King Ranch can be an unmatched birding experience. With some of the rarest breeding birds in the U.S. like the ferruginous pygmy-owl and tropical parula, AND habitat for migrating passerines, the ranch is a wonderful place to bird in spring. Other species we'll look for include northern-beardless tyrannulet, Audubon's oriole, Botteri's sparrow, and white-tailed hawk. Lunch, transportation, and professional guide provided.
Conclusions

• Birdwatching away from home has increased in popularity
• There is a diversity of interests and skills among birders
• Serious birders constitute a small, albeit, visible segment of the wildlife watching market
• Important to develop products and promotional materials that are attractive to different segments of the birding market
Contact information

David Scott
Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX  77843-2261
Phone: 979-845-5334
Email: dscott@tamu.edu