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Texas Agricultural Extension Service
THE TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

Establishing a Birding-Related Business

A Resource Guide





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Many of the photos in this publication were taken by Bert Frenz. The authors are grateful for his permission to use them.

Birdwatching is the fastest growing outdoor recreation activity in the United States (Outdoor Recreation Coalition of America, 1996). Many communities are enjoying substantial economic benefits from visiting birders. This has led many landowners and communities to consider establishing birding and wildlife watching enterprises and events as a means of generating income. Attracting birders and nature tourists is one way to diversify a landowner's income and a community's economic base.

Birding and nature tourism are also compatible with environmental preservation. They take advantage of natural scenic areas and habitats that attract specific bird species.

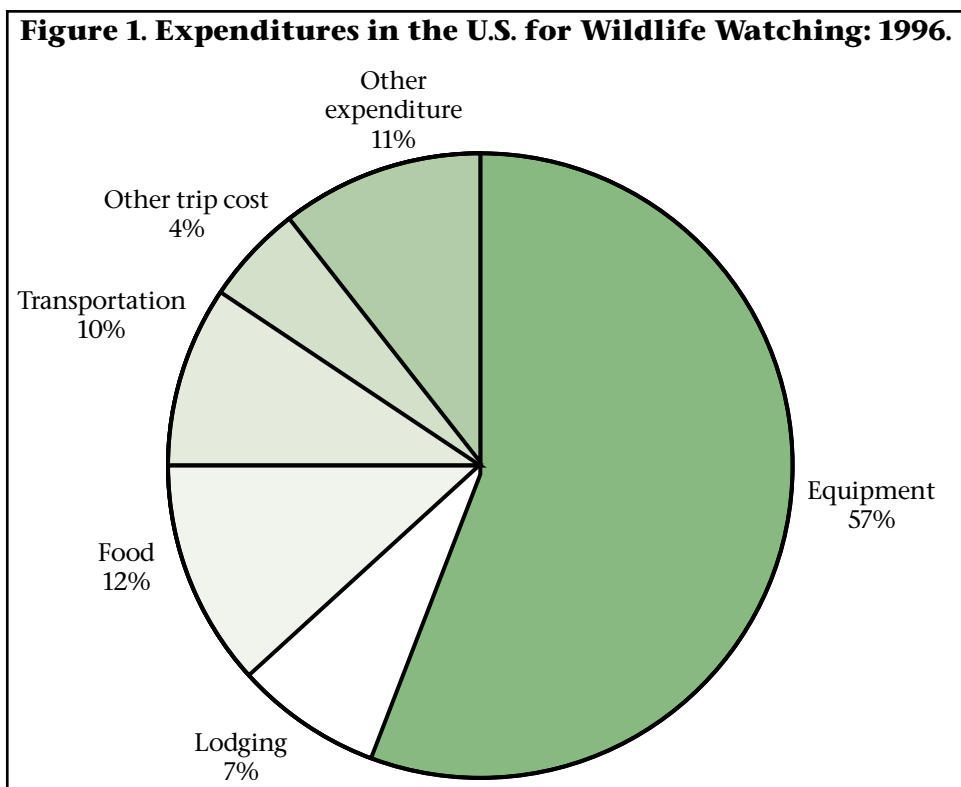
As with any business, success depends on understanding the industry and the customers one is trying to reach. The purpose of this guide is to present current information about the birding industry and birders themselves, and to help those who may want to establish birding-related enterprises.

Information in this publication came from several studies, including the *1996 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation* (referred to as the National Survey), and the *1993-1994 National Survey of Recreation and the Environment* (referred to as NSRE).

Understanding the Birding Market

Economics

The *National Survey* reported that, in 1996, Americans spent approximately \$29 billion on observing, feeding and photographing wildlife. Trip-related expenditures accounted for more than \$9 billion (32 percent) of that total. Figure 1 shows a detailed breakdown of how wildlife watchers spent their money. "Other trip costs" includes such things as guide fees and public land use fees. "Other expenditures" includes magazines and books, membership dues, contributions, land leasing and ownership, and plantings.



Source: 1996 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation





Wildlife watchers spent an average of \$554 per person for these activities in 1996, far less than the average amounts spent by hunters (\$1,497) or anglers (\$1,112). Still, wildlife watchers, particularly birders, generate substantial income for some communities and landowners.

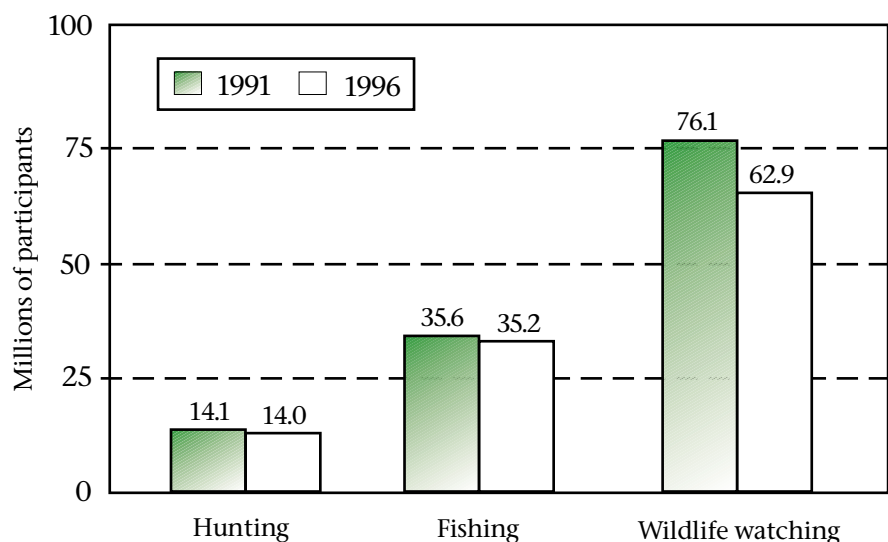
For example:

- The annual Hummer/Bird Celebration in Rockport/Fulton, Texas, attracted 4,500 visitors in 1995. They spent more than \$1.1 million during the 4-day event (an average of \$345 each). Of this amount, \$316,000 was spent on lodging, \$237,000 on meals in restaurants, and \$278,000 on shopping.
- An estimated 20,000 birders spent \$3.8 million at Point Pelee National Park in Ontario during May 1987.
- Approximately 38,000 people visited two birding “hot spots” in southeast Arizona (Ramsey Canyon and San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area) from July 1991 to June 1992 and spent about \$1.6 million.
- Roughly 100,000 birders visited Cape May, New Jersey in 1993 and spent \$10 million.
- About 6,000 birders traveled to the High Island area of Texas during April and May of 1992 and spent more than \$2.5 million for lodging and other activities.
- The Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge near McAllen, Texas attracted some 100,000 birders from November 1993 to October 1994. These visitors spent \$14 million in the area.
- About \$5.6 million was spent by the 48,000 people who visited Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge in south Texas from November 1993 to October 1994.

Participation Trends

The National Survey reported that 63 million Americans over the age of 16 participated in wildlife watching in 1996. Although this is 17 percent fewer people than was reported in 1991, the number of Americans who said they watched wildlife far outnumbered those who said they hunted or fished (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Changes in Outdoor Recreation Participation: 1991-1996.

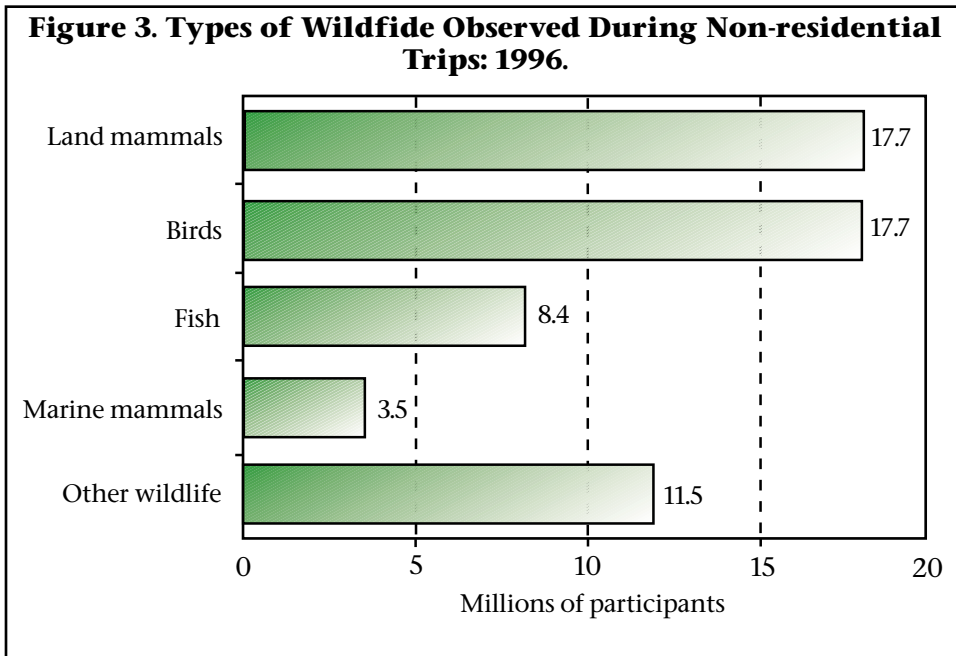


Source: 1996 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation

Of these 63 million Americans, 23.7 million said they traveled more than 1 mile from home to observe, photograph or feed wildlife. These are considered non-residential wildlife watchers. Residential wildlife watchers (some 61 million) are those who enjoyed wildlife watching within a mile of their homes.

The residential wildlife watchers said they fed birds or other wildlife (54 million), observed wildlife (44 million), photographed wildlife (16 million), maintained special plantings or natural areas for wildlife (13 million), and visited public parks (11 million). Almost all the residential wildlife watchers (96 percent) said they observed birds; many (87 percent) also like to observe mammals.

The non-residential wildlife watchers reported feeding birds (10 million), observing birds (18 million), and photographing wildlife (12 million). During their trips to observe wildlife, an equal number were interested in birds and land mammals (Fig. 3).



Source: 1996 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation

Only 25 percent of Texans said they engaged in wildlife watching in 1996, and the number of Texans who were non-residential wildlife watchers had decreased from 1.5 million to 1.3 million since 1991. However, Texas is a prime **destination** for wildlife watchers from across the country and around the world. About 1.4 million Americans said they traveled to Texas to observe wildlife (primarily birds). Only California, Pennsylvania and Florida attract more wildlife watchers. These visitors spent about \$1.2 billion on wildlife watching in Texas.

Table 1 shows the rates of participation in wildlife watching among the U.S. population in 1996 (National Survey).

Birdwatching Trends

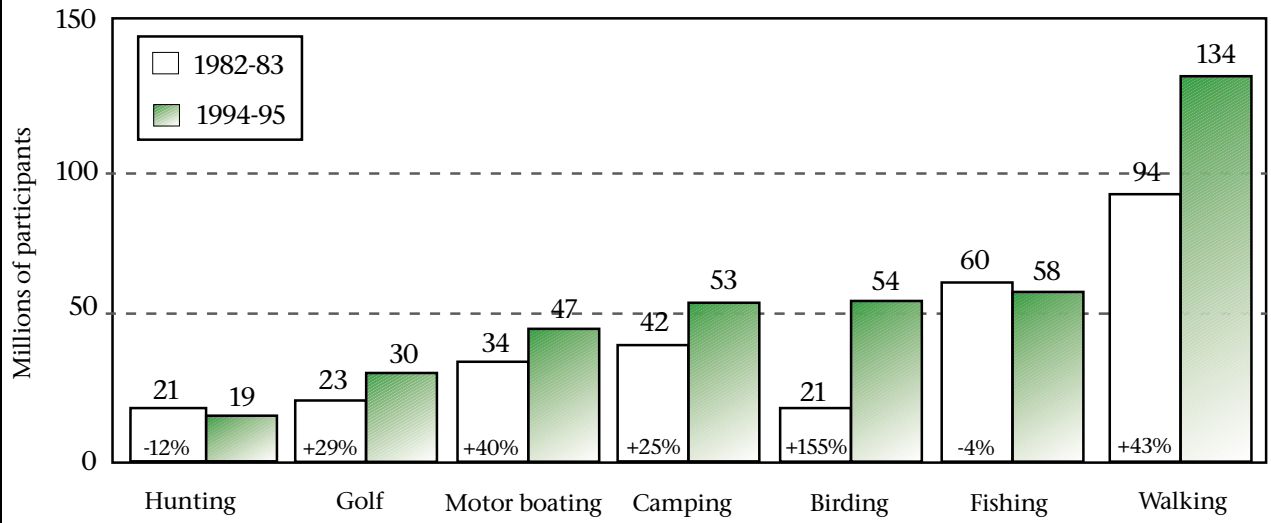
The number of Americans 16 years of age and older who watch birds grew from 21 million in 1982 to more than 54 million in 1994—a 155 percent increase (Fig. 4). However, it is important to keep these figures in perspective.



Table 1. Rates of Participation in Wildlife Watching.

Characteristics	% Engaging in residential wildlife watching	% Engaging in non-residential wildlife watching
Total U.S. population	30.1	11.7
Gender		
Male	29.0	12.1
Female	31.2	11.4
Race/Ethnicity		
Anglo-American	33.8	13.2
African-American	10.3	2.5
All others	14.7	7.3
Age		
16 to 17 years	17.6	8.6
18 to 24 years	14.6	8.5
25 to 34 years	26.4	13.0
35 to 44 years	34.4	15.5
45 to 54 years	34.4	14.8
55 to 64 years	35.5	10.6
65 years and older	32.2	6.0
Level of education		
11 years or less	20.6	5.4
12 years	27.2	8.9
1 to 3 years college	32.3	13.2
4 years college	35.1	15.6
5 years or more college	43.2	22.0
Annual household income		
Less than \$10,000	22.1	5.8
\$10,000 to \$19,000	25.7	9.7
\$20,000 to \$29,999	29.6	11.7
\$30,000 to \$39,999	32.3	13.1
\$40,000 to 49,999	36.1	14.4
\$50,000 to \$99,999	36.0	16.2
\$100,000 or more	37.4	17.0

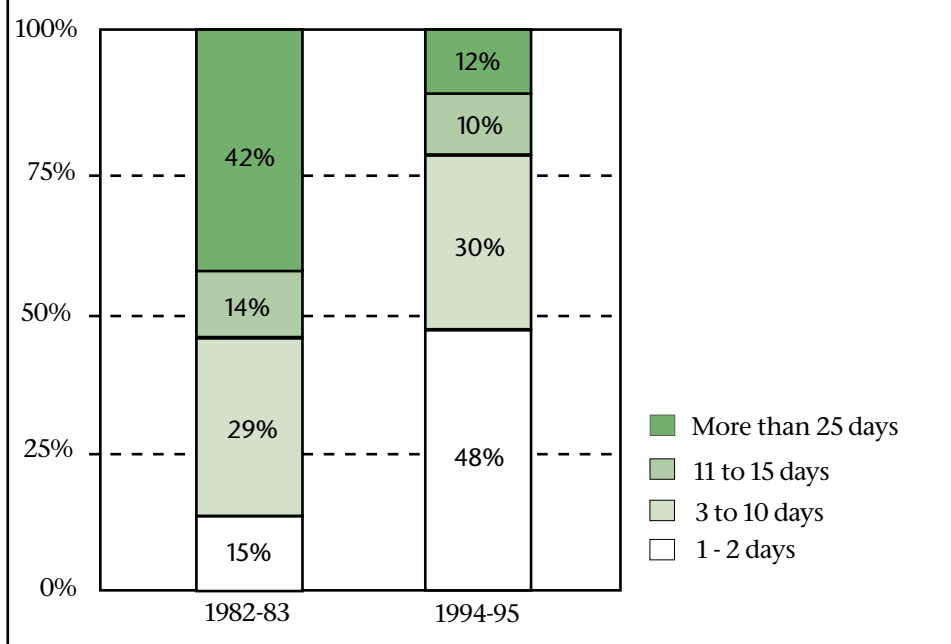
Figure 4. Changes in Participation in Selected Outdoor Recreation Activities: 1982-1994.



Source: 1994-95 National Survey of Recreation and the Environment

While the overall number of birders has increased, the average number of days per year they spend birdwatching may have decreased (Fig. 5). According to the *NSRE*, 42 percent of those who said they birdwatched in 1982 reported doing so on 25 or more days that year. Only 15 percent said they observed birds on just one or two occasions. In 1993 the percentages were very different—only 12 percent of birders reported spending 25 or more days on the activity and nearly 50 percent said they went bird watching on only one or two days.

Figure 5. Comparison of Days Spent Birdwatching: 1982-94.



Also, these data from the *NSRE* don't reveal whether people were residential or non-residential bird watchers. There are far more bird watchers who do so close to home than who travel to watch birds (*NSRE*).

Finally, there is wide variation in the skills and commitments of birders. A national study of birders reported that 60 percent of those who had gone birding in the last 2 years said they could identify ten or fewer species of birds (Fig. 6). Only 3.2 percent could identify more than 40 birds; only 30 percent said they used binoculars; and only 4 percent said they used a field guide.

So it is important for landowners and communities to be realistic about the birdwatching market. Despite the fact that a large number of Americans say they birdwatch, only a small percentage of them is committed to the activity in a serious way.

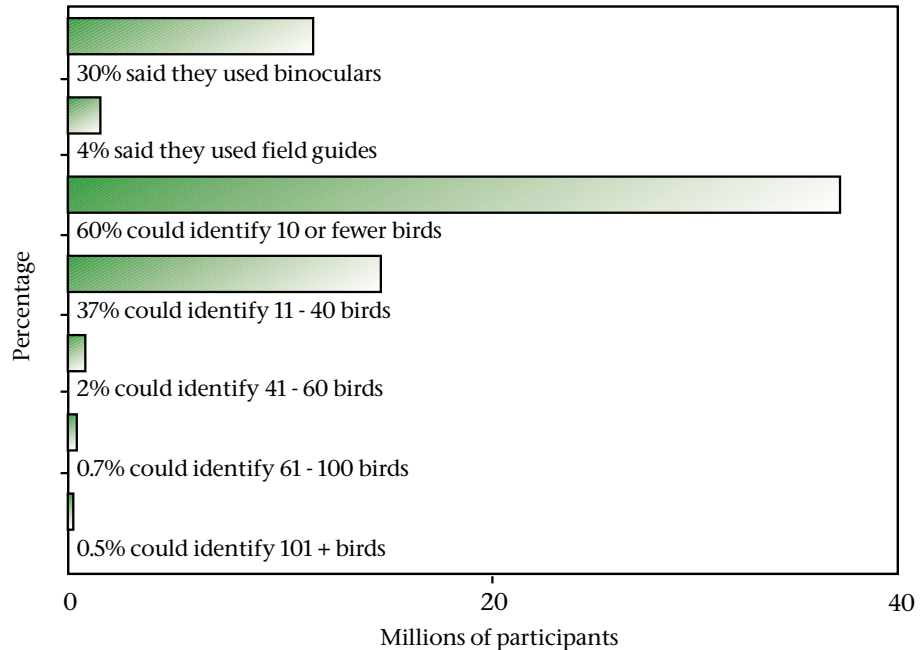
Characteristics of Wildlife Watchers and Birders

In Table 2, the demographic characteristics of residential and non-residential wildlife watchers are shown (*National Survey*). This a breakdown of the data in Table 1 for the 41.8 percent of the U.S. population who said they participated in either residential or non-residential wildlife watching. Characteristics of these groups are compared to characteristics of members of the American Birding Association. ABA members are generally serious birders, almost all of whom could be expected to travel away from home to watch birds.



Figure 6. Characteristics of Birders.

"Of the 43 million Americans who said they birdwatched during the last two years . . ."



Source: Kellert, 1985

From this table we can see that those who travel away from home to watch wildlife tend to be Anglo-American, 25 to 54 years old, have at least a high school education, and have incomes of about \$40,000 or more

Among the ABA members, 66 percent are male, 25 percent are 65 or older, most have a college degree or graduate degree, and 27 percent have annual household incomes of \$100,000 or more.

Kinds of Birdwatchers

Birdwatchers are not all alike. Knowing the different segments of the birdwatching population can help landowners and communities create and promote attractions for particular segments of the market. The two studies discussed below shed light on the various kinds of birdwatchers.



1994 Study of Birders in Alberta, Canada (McFarlane, 1994)

Birders were asked about their birding habits, perceived skill levels, number of species on their life lists, number of birding magazines to which they subscribed, and the total value of their birdwatching equipment. From this data, the researcher identified four distinct groups of birders: casual birders; novice birders; intermediate birders; and advanced birders (Table 3).



Casual birders comprised 43 percent of the respondents. They had the lowest level of skill and experience, and had invested the least in equipment. They were motivated by an appreciation for birds and nature (43 percent), their desire to learn about and conserve the environment (39 percent), and their desire to improve their birdwatching skills (17 percent). Only 33 percent of them main-

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Wildlife Watchers and ABA Members.

Characteristics	Unites States population %	Residential participants %	Non-residential participants %	ABA members %
Gender				
Male	48.0	46.2	50.0	65.9
Female	52.0	53.8	50.0	34.1
Race/Ethnicity				
Anglo-American	83.1	93.1	93.3	98.3
African-American	9.3	3.2	1.9	0.0
All others	7.6	3.7	4.7	1.7
Age				
16 to 17 years	3.5	2.1	2.6	0.0
18 to 24 years	10.1	4.9	7.3	0.4
25 to 34 years	17.4	15.2	19.3	5.6
35 to 44 years	22.0	25.2	29.1	20.1
45 to 54 years	17.8	20.3	29.1	30.4
55 to 64 years	11.6	11.5	7.7	18.2
65 years and older	17.6	18.8	8.9	25.0
Level of education				
11 years or less	16.8	11.5	7.7	0.5
12 years	35.3	31.8	26.9	4.0
1 to 3 years college	22.3	24.2	25.5	18.6
4 years college	13.9	16.2	18.4	34.4
5 years or more college	11.4	16.4	21.5	42.5
Annual household income				
Less than \$10,000	9.2	6.4	4.1	1.6
\$10,000 to \$19,000	12.1	9.7	8.9	1.2
\$20,000 to \$29,999	15.6	14.4	13.9	8.9
\$30,000 to \$39,999	14.3	14.4	14.2	10.9
\$40,000 to 49,999	11.2	12.6	12.3	11.9
\$50,000 to \$99,999	29.1	32.7	35.7	38.5
\$100,000 or more	8.5	9.9	10.9	26.9

tained lists of birds they had identified. However, 41 percent had participated in organized bird censuses.

Thirty-eight percent of respondents were **novice birders**. They had greater skill and commitment than the casual birders. Their motivations were: learning about and conserving the environment (46 percent); appreciation for birds and nature (28 percent); and improving their birdwatching skills (25 percent). Fifty-six percent kept lists of birds and had participated in bird censuses.

Intermediate birders made up 12 percent of the people in the study. They were more skilled and committed than both casual and novice birders. Like novice birders, they were motivated primarily by conservation (40 percent). However, many also wanted to improve their birding skills and see new or rare species (37 percent). About 23 percent were motivated by an appreciation of birds and nature. Three out of four said they listed birds, and seven out of ten had participated in bird censuses.

Advanced birders comprised only 7 percent of respondents. They had the highest skill and experience levels. More than half were motivated by a desire to improve their skills and see new or rare species (55 percent). One-third wanted to learn about and conserve the environment. A large percentage of them (91 percent) kept lists of birds they had seen. Nearly eight out of ten had participated in bird censuses; in addition, many of them had led bird walks and made presentations.

Table 3. Characteristics of Birder Groups Identified by McFarland.

Characteristic	Casual birders	Novice birders	Intermediate birders	Advanced birders
Days on birding trips in 1991 (<i>M</i>)	0.98	8.60	48.03	96.47
Perceived skill level (4-point scale from casual to advanced) (<i>M</i>)	1.90	2.72	3.17	3.38
Number of species on life list (<i>M</i>)	3.29	33.95	65.46	362.82
Number of birding magazine subscriptions (<i>M</i>)	0.04	0.16	0.39	2.32
Replacement value of equipment (9 categories from \$0 to >\$5000) (<i>M</i>)	1.32	3.05	3.03	5.07
Farthest distance traveled to go birding in 1991 (6 categories from 0 to >500 km) (<i>M</i>)	0.55	2.16	3.87	3.95

Adapted from McFarland, 1996

 **1996 Study of Visitors to the Annual Hummer/Bird Celebration in Rockport/Fulton, Texas (Scott, et al., 1996)**

Based on answers to a survey, visitors to this event were categorized into four groups (Table 4).

Twenty-one percent of survey respondents were **generalists and water seekers**. They are not highly skilled birders, take relatively few birding trips, and do not spend a great deal of money on birding. They are attracted to places where they can enjoy water activities such as fishing and marine life tours, as well as nice lodging and restaurants. They like to combine birding with shopping, visiting small towns and historic sites, and other outdoor recreation. They especially like coastal areas.

Heritage recreationists and comfort seekers also are not highly skilled or committed birders. They made up about 40 percent of those surveyed. This group is attracted to communities that can provide heritage tours or historical sites, as well as birding opportunities, along with a restful environment and comfortable amenities. They are not interested in other outdoor activities. These individuals spend more money on trips than other groups.

Outdoor recreationists are relatively skilled birders. Twenty-five percent of the visitors in the survey were in this group. They are more likely than other birders to make trip decisions on the basis of other outdoor recreation available nearby. That is, outdoor recreationists are likely to birdwatch while involved in other activities such as skiing, hiking, camping and biking. These individuals have little interest in shopping, visiting historic sites or seeking comfortable amenities.

The fourth group was the **serious birders**, who made up 14 percent of the festival visitors. They are the most skilled and the most involved in birdwatching, and travel approximately 1,975 miles per year to pursue their hobby. Their interests are highly specialized. In short, they want to



Table 4. Characteristics of Birder Groups Surveyed at Hummer/Bird Celebration.

Characteristics	Generalists and water seekers	Heritage recreationists and comfort seekers	Outdoor recreationists	Serious birders
Number of birding trips taken last year (<i>M</i>)	6	9	14	28
Miles traveled last year to go birding (<i>M</i>)	667	1,415	1,930	1,976
Money spent last year on birding (<i>M</i>)	\$335	\$778	\$1,134	\$1,727
Number of field guides owned (<i>M</i>)	2.2	3.8	3.8	7.9
Number of organizational memberships (<i>M</i>)	0.6	1.4	1.4	1.8
Percent who keep a life list	15%	31%	37%	50%
Species able to identify by sight (<i>M</i>)	37	60	119	150
Total expenses at H/B Celebration (<i>M</i>)	\$254	\$353	\$242	\$289

M = Mean

Source: Scott et al., 1996

observe either new, rare, or a variety of birds, and are not overly concerned with lodging and food accommodations, shopping, or non-birding activities. While serious birders spend the most money overall for birding equipment and travel, it is interesting to note that the heritage recreationists and comfort seekers spent the most at the Hummer/Bird Celebration.

The popular media may portray all birdwatchers as being alike, but as these two studies show, there are many differences among them. Understanding the diversity among birdwatchers is helpful when developing a birding-related enterprise.

Beginning the Business

To establish any successful business you must first think about your personal motivations for starting the business. Then you should study the industry, determine the market segment you want to reach, and strategies for doing so. Deciding how to package, price and promote your product are other important decisions. The insights and experiences of people who operate birding-related businesses can be very helpful. Ideas in the following section were generated during interviews with seventeen such individuals. Five of them are birding tour guides, five own/operate birding locations and/or lodging, three are birding festival coordinators, and four own businesses that sell birding products (field guides, binoculars, birdhouses, artwork, etc.).

Recognize Your Motivations

Among the people interviewed, the most common reason for starting a birding-related business was a personal interest in nature, particularly birding. They wanted to transform a





hobby into a money-making business. A second reason, mentioned primarily by landowners, was the need to diversify economically.

While a personal interest in nature and birding is important, it is not sufficient to ensure business success. Those who cater to the public, in any business, must have a strong customer orientation. That means enjoying dealing with all kinds of people, being enthusiastic about entertaining and serving guests, having public relations skills, and having the stamina to work long hours. It is also important to be familiar with finance, accounting, business operations and marketing. Expertise

at birdwatching may also be very important, depending on the product or service you offer.

It is important to realize that a birding-related business is not likely to generate a huge profit. Business owners interviewed said they typically did not turn a profit for 3 years, and often their businesses are not fully self-supporting. One owner said his business simply allows him to pursue his birding hobby: "I'm thrilled if I make enough money at these festivals to cover my expenses. Having a booth at birding festivals allows me to travel to some of the best birding spots in the state and helps pay for my associated costs." Some owners said they probably would not attempt to make their birding businesses their main sources of income, especially if their businesses were rather small-scale.

Research the Industry and Determine Marketing Strategies

An owner of a birding enterprise made the following observation: "One thing I wish I had done to prepare myself for opening this type of business was to read up on it more. I could have saved myself a lot of time, money and energy if I hadn't learned about this market the hard way."

One way to learn about the market is to study the kinds of information presented earlier in this publication. Knowing the preferences, characteristics, and demographics of the individuals who might be attracted to your product or service will help you make crucial business decisions.

Subscribe to birding magazines and analyze articles about birdwatching. Ads in magazines can provide information about products and services with which you will be in competition. Also attend birding festivals to find out about the competition and meet others who are in the birding business.

Academic or professional journals such as the *Journal of Wildlife Management* and *Human Dimensions in Wildlife* can be helpful. These journals usually can be found in libraries at large universities.

A few national and state birding organizations provide information about their members and about birders in general. The American Birding Association and the National Audubon Society publish magazines and newsletters and have Web sites with information about the latest trends in birding.

State tourism, wildlife, and economic development agencies are another good source of information. In addition to distributing publications, they may also organize educational seminars or conferences or have experts who will consult with you. Local and regional information can be obtained through chambers of commerce and convention and visitors' bureaus.

Once you understand the birding market you can decide which segment of that market you will try to reach with your product or service. The birding market may be segmented by geographic area, demographics, skill level and commitment, or interest in particular products. Or, you may choose to market to more than one segment by developing two or more products, each with its own marketing strategy.

For example, a ranch might be habitat for a number of rare species, and have easy access to an international airport. The ranch owner might decide to pursue serious European birders as his desired market. His marketing strategy might be to advertise in European birding magazines aimed at serious birders.

Or, like the King Ranch in Texas, you might want to attract more than one market segment by offering different services for each. The ranch offers several different birding tours, from a 1-day tour for novice and intermediate birders in which the object is to see many different species, to a specialized tour for serious birders who want to see only rare species.

Develop the Product “Package”

Many birding enterprises rely on partnerships between two or more individuals or businesses. Small businesses that pool their resources often can create a more attractive product together than they could individually. Tour packages are a good example. A tour package groups several products and services to attract customers. The package might include lodging at a good birding location, meals, guided tours, etc. Some tour packages allow birders to visit areas, both public and private lands, to which they would not otherwise have access. Tour packages are attractive to customers because they include all necessary arrangements and services.

Birding festivals and events are also examples of partnerships in packaging products and services. Communities team up with members of the birding industry. The community provides the location, facilities, advertising, planning and event coordination. Members of the birding industry provide guide services, expert speakers for workshops, and products to purchase. Restaurants, hotels and non-birding businesses also can be part of these cooperative events.

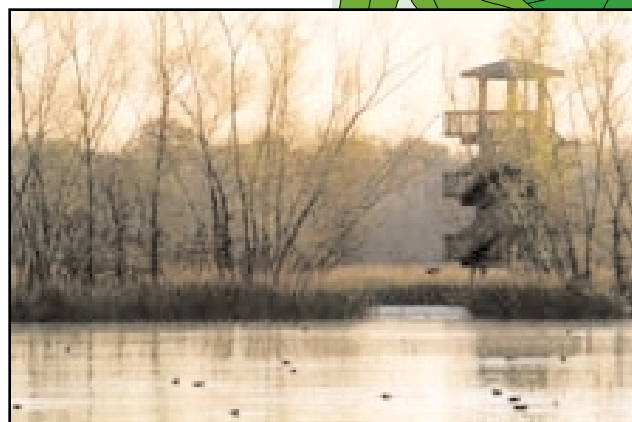
The product “package” also can be quite simple; for example, a landowner might offer access to good birding habitat on a day-fee basis.

Determine the Price

Whatever the product, its price is important to potential customers. It can be complicated to set a price that strikes a balance between what the customer is willing to pay and what the business needs to charge in order to be profitable. One business owner gives this advice: “People won’t always like, value or appreciate the same things you do. Just because you would be willing to pay a certain price for something doesn’t mean your customers will. Check out what the competition is offering its customers and what they are charging. How does your product compare? Then price accordingly. If your price seems particularly high, make sure to point out the differences between your product and everyone else’s.”

Promote Your Business

Promotion helps you gain the attention of potential customers. In the birding industry, a good promotional mix includes advertising, publicity and marketing to industry insiders.



Advertising is any paid communication about a product or service through the mass media. It can be a good way to reach a wide audience. Ads should be timely, and they should be placed in media that reach the business's intended audience. The King Ranch advertises its tours in birding magazines and newsletters, and reports good response.

Karankawa Plains Outfitting Company, Prude Ranch, B-Bar-B Ranch and other businesses have developed Web pages to reach birders who are scouring the Internet for information on new birding locations. To increase their site hits, these businesses have made an effort to link their sites to different search engines that provide information on birding. Such directories are often regional in nature, and are sponsored both by individuals and by organizations such as the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Birding festival organizers and large-scale tour operators often use direct mail to advertise. Costs of direct mail include purchasing mailing lists, postage and printing, but this can be an effective way to reach people in a given market segment.

Favorable **publicity** can be a powerful promotional tool for any business. An example is an article about a product or service, such as the opening of a new birding/wildlife watching business, in the state's fish and wildlife magazine or in a newspaper. News publicity has two advantages over other forms of promotion—it may influence people who are skeptical about advertisements, and it has the credibility of an unbiased news source.

Satisfying customers and gaining the acceptance of other birding business owners can be the most important way to promote your business. These **industry insiders** have information, contacts and influence that can help you succeed. An excellent way to meet and establish business relationships with others in the industry is to attend birding festivals and other events. You can also invite industry representatives to tour your location, or send them product samples, to gain their opinions and familiarize them with what you have to offer. They may then help spread the word to others.

Networking with nature tourism/birding associations, chambers of commerce, and visitors' bureaus will establish relationships that can help your business.

Birders are being bombarded with information from the many new businesses established in recent years. With so many choices, they are influenced by what they hear from other birders. Positive word-of-mouth promotion may be the most effective kind of all.

One owner of a birding location/accommodation explained how customer references and her association both with industry insiders and local organizations helped her business succeed: "An individual from Texas and Parks and Wildlife explained to us that the diversity of birds and wildlife on our ranch would be attractive to birders from around the country. From there, word got around that we had sort of a birding spectacle, which resulted in visitors coming to our ranch. Because of all the interest, we looked into building an observation room and a bed and breakfast. Now we place ads in various birding magazines, which brings us a lot of customers; but many of our guests are not heavy bird-



ers. The local visitors' bureau directs many tour groups to us for general interest tours. By far, I believe that guests who told others about their positive experiences are our greatest source of advertisement."

Developing Your Unique Product

Deciding what your product will be, and then developing it, requires some research and forethought. The steps in this process are:

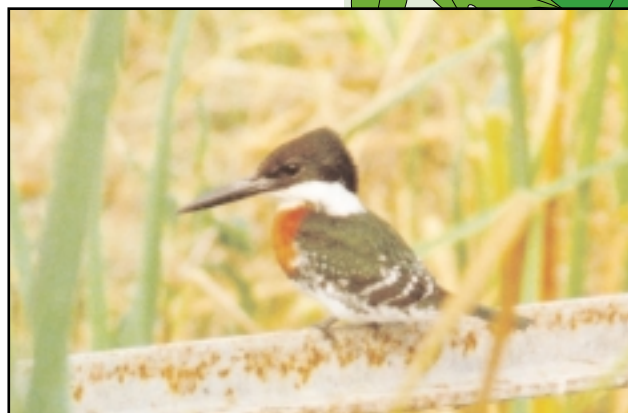
- Identifying your resources.
- Understanding what the true product is.
- Molding resources and experiences to meet customers' demands.


Identifying your resources means determining what it is you have to work with. To do this, list all possible resources, such as: indigenous birds on your land; facilities; business knowledge; familiarity with the outdoors; birding expertise; high quality optics; and business contacts. If you need help identifying resources, you might want to hire a wildlife biologist, wildlife consultant or expert birder to help you analyze your habitat, list the species, and evaluate your land for "birder appeal." A business consultant can help determine other resources.

Although they might not recognize it, customers of birdwatching and other nature-based recreational activities are looking for a mix of things that offers a total experience. For birders, this experience might include seeing a life bird, relaxing, enjoying beautiful surroundings, seeing new places, socializing with travel companions, and making new acquaintances. For some market segments, these and other benefits have a greater effect on customer satisfaction than the number or species of birds seen. For this reason, prospective business owners should be careful to adopt a benefits rather than a product perspective. In other words, what you have to offer is more than a product; it is an experience.

Some aspects of a birding business may be beyond human control. Weather isn't always predictable; rare and indigenous bird species may be present but not always seen; migration timing can vary. It's important to remember that while you may offer an exceptional product or service, these other factors may sometimes cause customers to have unsatisfactory experiences.

The ultimate success of a business often depends on identifying what it has to offer that meets customer demands. This seems to be especially true for the birding industry. To attract birders and their dollars, you need a rare species (or an abundance of species), a desirable atmosphere, or a special method of viewing. Your goal is to mold the resources you have with the experiences you can provide to deliver what customers want. Because not all birders are alike, your product or service may not be appealing to all birders. For examples of this, we can look again at the King Ranch and the B-Bar-B Ranch near Kingsville, Texas. The King Ranch offers a special guided tour for serious birders who want to see two rare Texas specialties—the Ferruginous pygmy owl and the Tropical parula. The tour guide concentrates on helping birders see just these two species in a minimum amount of time.





There are no rare birds to attract serious birders to the B-Bar-B, but the owners capitalize on their location along the route to South Texas and offer upscale accommodations for less devoted birders who may want a different kind of experience. Birders make up just one segment of the business's clientele. The owners recognize that their product consists of an opportunity to relax and socialize in comfortable surroundings, in addition to the birds that may be seen. Both the King Ranch and the B-Bar-B illustrate the way products should be molded from the resources and benefits you have to offer in light of the experiences customers seek.

Summary

Texas' diverse landscape and large number of bird species draw tourists and birders from all over the world. Many individuals and communities are looking for ways to profit from these visitors. Developing a birding-related business requires research, planning, business sense, personal commitment, customer relations skills, and patience. Those who succeed will recognize that this is a customer service industry; the goal is to provide an enjoyable experience for one's guests.

Sources of Information

For information on bird censuses and natural resource evaluation:

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Wildlife Diversity Branch

4200 Smith School Rd.

Austin, TX 78744

(512) 389-4800

<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us>

Gulf Coast Birding Observatory

9800 Richmond Ave., Suite 150

Houston, TX 77042

(713) 789-GCBO

<http://www.nol.net/~criley>

The Nature Conservancy of Texas

P.O. Box 1440

San Antonio, TX 78295-1440

(210) 224-8774

<http://www.tnc.org>

For information on birding clubs:

Texas Audubon Society

2525 Wallingwood Dr., Suite 301

Austin, TX 78746-6922

(512) 306-0225

<http://www.audubon.org>

American Birding Association

P.O. Box 6599

Colorado Springs, CO 80934

(719) 578-1614

<http://www.americanbirding.org>

For information about how to develop lodging for guests:

Historic & Hospitality Accommodations of Texas

P.O. Box 1399

Fredericksburg, TX 78624

(800) 428-0368

<http://www.hat.org>

Texas Hotel & Motel Association

900 Congress, #201

Austin, TX 78701

1-800-856-4328

<http://texaslodging.com/index.phtml>

For information on the nature tourism industry:

Texas Department of Economic Development

Tourism Division

P.O. Box 12728

Austin, TX 78711-2728

(512) 462-9191

<http://research.travel.state.tx.us>

Texas Nature Tourism Association

812 San Antonio, Suite 401

Austin, TX 78701

(512) 476-4483

<http://www.tourtexas.com/tnta>

Texas Agricultural Extension Service

Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences

Texas A&M University

2261 TAMU

College Station, TX 77843-2261

(979) 845-5419

<http://agextension.tamu.edu>

Other helpful organizations:

National Fish & Wildlife Foundation

1120 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 900

Washington, D.C. 20036

(202) 857-0166

<http://www.nfwf.org>

National Wildlife Federation

8925 Leesburg Pike

Vienna, VA 22184

(703) 790-4000

<http://nwf.org>

United States Small Business Administration

Office of Marketing and Customer Service

409 Third Street SW, Suite 7600

Washington, D.C. 20416

(202) 205-6744

<http://www.sbaonline.sba.gov>

U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Ecological Services Field Office

Hartland Bank Building

10711 Burnet Rd., Suite 200

Austin, TX 78758

(512) 490-0057

<http://ifw2es.fws.gov/AustinTexas>





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