

BIRD WATCHING

Definition

Tourist travel for the specific purpose of observing wild birds, otherwise known as *avitourism* or *birding*. People at all levels of fitness and ornithological knowledge can participate. Many countries have thriving bird watching societies, which promote and sponsor trips to destinations where there is an abundance of bird life.



Estimate of Global Market Size

An estimated 3 million international trips are taken each year for the main purpose of bird watching. However, there is considerably more interest at a domestic level. Around 20 million US citizens took bird watching trips in 2007, of which most were within the country.

It should be noted that bird watching is often a secondary purpose of trip. For example, visitors to game reserves are often attracted by large mammals, but also enjoy exotic bird life at the same time.

In the USA, birdwatchers are estimated to spend over \$2.5 billion each year. In the UK, expenditure is estimated at \$500 million each year.

Potential for Growth

Bird watching is reported as being the fastest growing outdoor activity in America with 51.3 million Americans claiming to watch birds (US Fish and Wildlife Service). The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) in the UK has membership of over 1 million people.

There can be no doubt that bird watching has the potential to be a significant tourism market segment. However it will always remain a niche market, although growth is expected to be strong over the next 10 years.

Brief Profile of Consumers

Bird watchers are usually highly educated, affluent, interested in wildlife, keen to see as many species as possible, and travel to areas where bird life is abundant. They are roughly evenly split between women and men, and are almost exclusively white. Almost 75% of US bird watchers have achieved degree level education or better.

For many bird watching tourists, the primary objective is to see as many species as possible in the most cost-effective manner. Bird watching operators report that clients usually travel by themselves or with one other person (usually spouse or partner). Large groups of bird watchers may travel together though the incidence of these

groups is somewhat rare.

The US and Australian markets seem to be dominated by the 40-49 year olds, however it is suggested that the average age is slightly older than this. Most international bird watchers are likely to be members of their local bird watching clubs.

Main Source Markets

- United States
- United Kingdom
- Continental Europe (in particular Germany, Netherlands, France)
- Australia

Main Competing Destinations

Due to the migratory instincts of the indigenous American birds, the main competing birding destinations for US consumers are Mexico and Colombia, with secondary destinations being Venezuela, Costa Rica and Panama.

In terms of international places of interest, the main bird watching destinations for European consumers are situated in Africa, with Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Botswana and Namibia being the leading destinations. Other key destinations include New Zealand, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Brazil and Colombia while all countries on migratory routes are looking to develop this type of tourism e.g. India. Ecuador and Galapagos Islands tend to attract a significant number of organised bird watching tours.

One US company suggests the following top 10 bird watching destinations:

1. Panama: Canopy Tower
2. Belize: Chan Chich Lodge
3. Venezuela Ranches: Hato Pinero and Hato Cedral, or Brazil: Pantanal
4. Antarctica
5. Kenya
6. Namibia and Botswana
7. Australia and Papua New Guinea
8. Northern India and Bhutan
9. Manu Wildlife Centre in Peru, or Napo Wildlife Centre in Ecuador
10. US: the Texas Coast

Key Tour Operators

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours - Vent Bird

United States

<http://www.ventbird.com>

2525 Wallingwood Drive, Suite 1003, Austin TX 78746

Tel: 0800 328 VENT (8368)

Wings

United States

<http://wingsbirds.com>

1643 N Alvernon Ste 109, Tucson, Arizona 85712
Tel: 888 293 6443 (toll-free), 520 320 9868 (local)
Email: wings@wingsbirds.com

Bird Quest

United Kingdom
<http://www.birdquest.co.uk>
Two Jays, Kemple End, Stonyhurst, Lancashire BB7 9QY
Tel: (+44) 1254 826317
Fax: (+44) 1254 826780
Email: birders@birdquest.co.uk

Naturetrek

United Kingdom
<http://www.naturetrek.co.uk>
Tel: (+44) 1962 733051

Key Points for Marketing and Distribution

The media, in particular television utilising increasingly ingenious filming techniques for the coverage of bird life, have generated considerable interest in recent years. In the UK, "The Life of Birds" television series attracted 9 million viewers. This has in turn led to an increased circulation of bird publications that offer options for marketing and distribution of travel products, such as:

Bird Watchers Digest
<http://www.birdwatchersdigest.com>

Birder's World
<http://www.birdersworld.com>

Wild Bird Magazine
<http://www.wildbirdmagazine.com>

Birds and Blooms
<http://www.birdsandblooms.com>

Europe's Largest Birding website
<http://www.fatbirder.com>

Surfbirds – International birding website, featuring a guide to tour operators and a member's blog.
<http://www.surfbirds.com>

Targeted marketing can be undertaken using these journals and through direct mail to memberships of bird watching clubs and associations.

Social Networks

Birding trip reports – Guides to over 6,400 birding trips worldwide
<http://www.travellingbirder.com>

Worldbirds.org: their vision is to create a network of Internet systems that provides a

platform for the collection, storage and retrieval of bird observations worldwide. Each country has its own system and database that links into the worldbirds.org website.
<http://www.worldbirds.org>

eBird – portals from US and Canada to the US Virgin Islands, a real-time online checklist programme providing data on bird abundance and distribution.
<http://ebird.org/content/ebird/index.html>

Trade Fairs

Birdfair
The World's first and largest bird watching event
United Kingdom
<http://www.birdfair.org.uk>

Additional Information

General Information

Global partnership of conservation organisations for birds
<http://www.birdlife.org>

Bird watching resource website
<http://www.birding.com>

Organisations/Institutions in the Caribbean

SCSCB: Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds
<http://www.scscb.org/>

eBird – US Virgin Islands
<http://ebird.org/content/usvi/>

eBird – Dominican Republic and Haiti
<http://ebirdrg/content/hispaniola/>

eBird – Puerto Rico
<http://ebird.org/content/pr/>

Guyana Birding – Guyana Tourist Authority
<http://www.guyanabirding.com/>