

**Birding Festivals, Sustainability, and Ecotourism: An Ambiguous Relationship**

Author

Lawton, Laura J

Published

2009

Journal Title

Journal of Travel Research

DOI

[10.1177/0047287509332330](https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287509332330)

Rights statement

© 2009 SAGE Publications. This is the author-manuscript version of the paper. Reproduced in accordance with the copyright policy of the publisher. Please refer to the journal's website for access to the definitive, published version.

Downloaded from

<http://hdl.handle.net/10072/26790>

Griffith Research Online

<https://research-repository.griffith.edu.au>

## **Birding Festivals, Sustainability and Ecotourism: An Ambiguous Relationship**

Submitted to  
*Journal of Travel Research*

by

Dr. Laura J. Lawton

Department of Tourism, Leisure, Hotel & Sport Management

Griffith Business School

Griffith University - Gold Coast Campus

QLD 4222, Australia

Tel. 61-7-5552-8709

Fax: 61-7-5552-8507

Email: [laura.lawton@griffith.edu.au](mailto:laura.lawton@griffith.edu.au)

*Keywords: birding festivals, ecotourism, sustainable tourism, event management, festivals, cluster analysis, USA*

Published: November, 2009

DOI: 10.1177/0047287509332330

## **AUTHOR BIOGRPHICAL NOTE**

**Laura Lawton**, PhD is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Tourism, Leisure, Hotel and Sport Management within the Griffith Business School at Griffith University – Gold Coast Campus, Australia. Her research interests include: ecotourism, event management sustainability, and tourism management.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The author is grateful to all participating birding festival organizers for taking the time to fill in the survey used to compile the raw data for this study.

## **ABSTRACT**

*A survey of 108 US-based birding festivals revealed overall basic adherence to ecotourism criteria, although. cluster analysis revealed four distinct sub-groups whose members were labeled as normatives (47%), minimalists (30%), recruiters (15%) and fundraisers (8%). Formal identification with ecotourism through promotion or membership was low and did not predict cluster membership or increase in visitor numbers. Hence, while ecotourism organizations could benefit from an influx of birding festival memberships, the reciprocal benefits for birding festivals with regard to performance and sustainability outcomes is unclear.*

Birding and other wildlife-based festivals constitute a growing niche within the global tourism sector, but they have been neglected as a topic of investigation within the tourism literature. Thus, even though a close affiliation between such festivals and ecotourism may be reasonably assumed because of the mutual emphasis on non-consumptive interactions with wildlife, it is unclear whether this assumption is warranted. This is more than a purely academic question given the emergence of environmental and sociocultural sustainability as both an increasingly ubiquitous societal aspiration and a broadly recognized core characteristic of 'ecotourism' products, along with related learning opportunities and outcomes. Birding festivals may be wildlife-focused, but do they exhibit the sustainability and learning characteristics that at least in theory uniquely position the ecotourism sector to contribute positive outcomes to society and the environment? And do they pursue these under the 'ecotourism' banner?

The broad purpose of this research, therefore, is to investigate the relationship between birding festivals (as the most dominant type of non-consumptive wildlife-based event) and ecotourism, in particular from a sustainability perspective. More specifically, the research identifies the degree to which birding festivals display core characteristics of ecotourism as well as indications of its 'comprehensive' and 'minimalist' dimensions, the former being more conducive to deep sustainability outcomes. Second, it examines the degree to which birding festivals are explicitly promoted by their organizers as ecotourism events and are formally affiliated with ecotourism organizations. Third, the research explores the relationship between the first two objectives, that is, whether there is a relationship between explicit identification with ecotourism and adherence to

ecotourism-related objectives of sustainability and learning. It also investigates whether identification with ecotourism is related to performance. Following a review of the relevant literature, the methodology of the study is described, results are presented, and the theoretical and practical implications of the findings are discussed.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### Ecotourism

Over the past twenty years ecotourism has emerged as one of the most widely investigated concepts within the broader tourism sector. In addition to a proliferation of general ecotourism texts (Fennell, 2003; Page and Dowling, 2002; Wearing and Neil, 1999; Weaver, 2001, 2008) and texts focusing on specific aspects of ecotourism (Black and Crabtree, 2007; Buckley 2003, 2004; Garrod and Wilson 2003), over 400 refereed journal articles have been written on this topic from the late 1980s to the mid-2000s (Weaver and Lawton, 2007). One indication of the successful transition from a niche to mainstream sub-field is widespread agreement that ecotourism entails three core criteria in addition to its implicit status as a form of tourism (Blamey, 1997, 2001; Weaver, 2008).

First, ecotourism attractions primarily involve the natural environment or some element thereof. These attractions are engaged from either a 'holistic' perspective that focuses on a particular ecosystem (e.g. desert or rainforest) or an 'elemental' approach whereby one or more non-captive species of charismatic megafauna or megaf flora within a particular ecosystem, or a charismatic megalith (e.g., Japan's Mount Fuji) are the focus of attention.

Examples include Australia's kangaroos and koalas, polar bears in Churchill, Manitoba (Lemelin and Smale, 2006; Lemelin and Wiersma, 2007), redwood trees in California (Forbes, 1998), sandhill cranes in the US Great Plains (Stoll, Ditton, and Eubanks, 2006), and giant pandas in China's Sichuan province (Kontoleon *et al.*, 2002). According to Newsome, Moore and Dowling (2005), mammals receive by far the most attention from ecotourists, followed by birds, reptiles and invertebrates. Most ecotourism definitions also take into account a cultural dimension of the product that is both contemporary and relict, since humans have co-existed and interacted with the natural environment for millennia and are supposedly responsible for many of the attributes found within the 'natural' environment. This cultural component is especially important in areas inhabited by indigenous people (Butler and Hinch, 2007; Hinch, 2001; Zeppel, 2006).

Second, the interaction between the ecotourist and the attraction is focused around education and learning. This differentiates ecotourism from other forms of nature-based tourism, such as 3s tourism (sea, sand, sun) and adventure tourism, where the natural environment fulfills other motives such as hedonism or thrill seeking. Learning is facilitated in diverse ways, including guidebooks, accredited classes, non-assessed but highly structured live or recorded interpretation, strategically positioned signage along interpretive trails, etc. Where interpretation is presented by site managers, a 'shallow' -to- 'deep' continuum may be evident. The former focuses on superficial information about the attraction. In contrast, 'deep' interpretation conveys in-depth learning about long-term inter-relationships, including effects of human activity such as climate change. Often,

deep interpretation attempts to realize transformative outcomes on the ecotourist's environmental attitudes and behavior (Butler in Scace, 1993).

Finally, ecotourism is the only tourism product which has explicit expectations of environmental and socio-cultural sustainability. The concept of sustainable tourism emerged in the early 1990s from the parent concept of sustainable development, which in turn gained widespread publicity as a result of the release of the Brundtland Report in the late 1980s (WCED, 1987). Subsequent impetus for the recognition of sustainable tourism by the UNWTO, WTTC and other peak global tourism organizations as a process and outcome critical to the future of the tourism industry was provided by high profile international initiatives such as the Rio Earth Summit, its accompanying Agenda 21 aspirations, and the UN Millennium Goals of poverty alleviation. Concurrent concerns about relationship between tourism and climate change as well as energy price escalations have further stimulated government, corporate and public interest in sustainability.

While widely accepted in principle as a desirable outcome, considerable controversy surrounds the meaning and implementation of sustainability (Stabler, 1997, Swarbrooke, 1999, Weaver, 2006). Managing a product or business 'sustainably' in effect means employing industry best practices to minimize associated ecological, socio-cultural and economic costs while maximizing the concomitant benefits. A related issue is whether ecotourism should adhere to the basic expectations of 'status quo' sustainability (i.e. ensuring only that the current situation is not allowed to deteriorate) or promote



‘enhancement’ sustainability (i.e. deliberately trying to improve on the current situation, as for example through habitat rehabilitation, donations, etc.). In either case, the pursuit of sustainability is complicated by the need for more knowledge about appropriate indicator thresholds and benchmarks, and the slow emergence of appropriate certification and other monitoring and measuring protocols that better ascertain whether sustainable outcomes are being achieved. There is also growing recognition that sustainability incorporates an element of long-term financial viability, since without this a product is unlikely to survive and all other aspects of sustainability then become meaningless (Weaver, 2006).

According to Weaver (2005), differences in the three core ecotourism criteria described above yield ‘minimalist’ and ‘comprehensive’ ecotourism ideal types. The former is easier to attain and may be more satisfying to visitors since it is ‘elemental’, and focused on ‘shallow’ learning and ‘status quo’ sustainability. However, there is a greater risk that it could more easily be transformed inadvertently or otherwise into unsustainable mass tourism. Comprehensive ecotourism is more conducive to sustainable environmental outcomes due to its holistic focus on attractions, its emphasis on transformational and ‘deep’ learning, and its pursuit of ‘enhancement’ sustainability. However, it is more difficult to attain and may negatively impact product profitability at least in the short term since it is not as focused on market satisfaction. Both dimensions (presented here as ideal types), nevertheless, can be accommodated as legitimate forms of ecotourism if sustainable tourism is construed as an ‘adaptive paradigm’ having both strong and weak manifestations, the latter applying for example to urban areas and existing beach resorts,

and the former being appropriate to more sensitive natural and cultural sites (Hunter, 1997).

Since first appearing in the literature during the mid-1980s, ecotourism has not only achieved some consensus in terms of its core criteria, but has also experienced a high level of institutionalization as manifested for example by the designation of 2002 as the 'International Year of Ecotourism' by the United Nations. Many destinations, moreover, explicitly recognize the sector through specialized plans or as part of broader tourism planning initiatives. An important aspect of institutionalization for the evolution of the sector is the creation of specialized organizations that, among other functions, provide a forum for networking, engage in recruitment and lobbying, educate and market to the public, and lead the development of certification and other initiatives that assert quality control and professionalism. According to Weaver (2008), there were about 50 such organizations as of 2006, established mainly at a national level. One US-based entity, the International Ecotourism Society (TIES), can be regarded as the lead international organization, though its activities are largely carried out through collaboration with affiliated environmental and other organizations, and its funding is derived mainly from membership dues. Ecotourism Australia is perhaps the most active and accomplished national organization, best known for its certification efforts.

### Birding festivals

Festivals are an increasingly important manifestation of tourism, with many destinations adding them to their core repertoire of visitor attraction products to attain various

economic and sociocultural benefits (Hall, 1992; Goldblatt and Supovitz, 1999; McKercher, Mei, and Tse, 2006). Getz (1997, p.21) defines a festival as a “public, themed celebration” around which numerous participatory activities are centered over a short time period, thereby creating experiences that may appeal to potential tourists as well as local residents (Saleh and Ryan, 1993; Uysal and Gitleson, 1994). According to Janiskee and Drews (1998) small community-based festivals have always featured prominently in the economy and culture of the rural US, proliferating since the 1960s as a strategy for stimulating local and regional development (Getz and Frisby, 1988, Higham and Ritchie, 2001). In addition, such events are a potentially effective vehicle for gaining competitive advantage by promoting and reinforcing the destination’s unique ‘sense of place’ (Derrett, 2003).

According to one industry source there were more than 200 birding festivals in North America alone in 2006, purportedly up from 10-15 in the early 1990s (Mazurkewich, 2006). This pattern of growth is consistent with Scott, Baker, and Kim (1999), who reported 79 birding festivals in North America as of 1997. The addition of other types of wildlife related festivals (e.g. those focused on mammals, fish, insects and/or reptiles) suggest about 250 such events being held in North America each year. All these events are ‘non-consumptive’ in the sense that they involve the observation and appreciation of the focus wildlife. This growth can be attributed in part to the growing realization of the economic and social benefits that such events provide. Local communities can benefit from wildlife festivals, as with any other type of festival, through the revenues and other direct and indirect impacts they produce, and from the sense of community identity that

they foster or reinforce. The role of raised public consciousness about the environment is less clear, though potentially they do appear well positioned to provide environmental and social benefits associated with the sustainability and learning parameters of ecotourism. For the ecotourism industry, benefits are potentially derived from the critical mass of participants that are generated over a concentrated period of time and space. The financial viability of specialized ecotourism businesses, for example, is enhanced by direct exposure to concentrations of otherwise widely dispersed potential customers. In addition, economic and cultural benefits from ecotourism could foster a favorable public impression of the sector and may induce or increase community support for target and other wildlife (as well as environmentalism more generally). Exposure of attendees to well-organized birding events may translate into direct ecotourism participation, thereby further reinforcing a cycle of ecotourism industry support and expenditure as well as more and larger festivals.

Despite the considerable synergies that could be realized through the combination of ecotourism and birding festivals, the literature on this topic is extremely sparse and related mainly to the calculation of economic impacts and other contributions from individual festivals to regional economic development (Hodur, Leistritz and Wolfe, 2005, Hvenegaard, Jenner and Manaloor, 2005, Hvenegaard and Manaloor, 2004, Kim, Scott, Thigpen and Kim, 1998)., These and the following studies all identified attendee profiles that are consistent with the broader ecotourism literature as it pertains to ‘ecotourists’, that is, more highly educated, higher income, and more likely to be older than 50.

Motivation is a second focus of this limited literature, and one that is more directly relevant to ecotourism. Scott, Baker and Kim (1999), for example, found attendees at a Texas birding festival to be highly skilled and committed, but motivated less by a desire to compete than to socialize with other birders and enjoy the event while making a contribution to avian habitat protection. Scott and Thigpen (2003), in contrast, found a greater diversity of skills among visitors to another Texas event, and, accordingly, a greater array of motivations focused around non-birding leisure activities. This pattern of heterogeneity was corroborated by Burr and Scott (2004) in relation to a Utah festival and by Ellis and Vogel song (2004) in a North Carolina event. Finally, Singh, Slotkin, and Vamosi (2007) investigated the environmental attitudes, opinions, and behaviors of visitors at two large birding festivals held in a southeastern state of the United States. A substantial proportion of the market solicited in this study indicated a willingness to engage in philanthropic activities and other pro-environmental behaviour, suggesting the potential of birding events to manifest the practices and objectives of comprehensive ecotourism.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The focus of this research is on US-based birding festivals, given the large number of such events in that country, the rapid increase in their number, the convenience of communicating with organizers in English, and the availability of festival inventories at a state or national level which include a high proportion of qualifying events. The two primary inventories consulted were the American Birding Association's *Birding Festivals Directory* (ABA, 2006) and *Bird Watcher's Digest Festival Finder* (Birdwatcher's

Digest.com). Both directories are extensive, but even by the American Birding Association's own admission are "by no means complete" since they rely on organizers to supply information about their birding festivals (Hartley, 2005). Several other published state-level birding directories were also consulted, including the *Annual Birding & Nature Festivals of Texas* (Texas Parks and Wildlife, 2006), *California Nature Events & Festivals Birding Events* (Audubon California, 2006), *Birding Festivals of Louisiana* (BirdLouisiana.com, 2006), *Minnesota Birding Festivals, Field Trips & Meetings* (Ekblad, 2006), and *Florida Birding and Wildlife Festivals* (Space Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival, 2006). Finally an extensive Internet search for birding festivals was also made. Once all duplicates had been eliminated from these various sources, a list of 135 birding festivals emerged as the population for this study.

A mail-out questionnaire was designed to obtain the desired information from high level festival organizers. The first section requested general characteristics about each festival (e.g., year established, duration, attendance and change over the previous year, type of setting) and their formal association with ecotourism through membership in relevant organizations and ecotourism-focused promotion. The second section contained 21 potential birding festival objectives related to ecotourism. The responses to these statements determined whether relevant ecotourism criteria were met or not. Author expertise and peer corroboration were employed to devise the statements, since no such scale, statistically reliable or not, was found in the literature. As depicted in Table 1, the objectives were divided into the three core criteria outlined above. In each category, minimalist (e.g., observing featured wildlife, provision of entertaining learning

opportunities, non-disruptive observation) and comprehensive dimensions (e.g., exposure to local ecosystems, teaching about environmental problems, raising money, enhancing environmental awareness, recruiting new bird watchers) were both included.

(Table 1)

Respondents were asked whether they considered each of the 21 statements to be a 'major objective' (= 2), 'secondary objective' (= 1) or 'not an objective' (= 0) of their festival. If the organizer indicated that they were either a major or minor objective of their festival, they were asked to elaborate how each objective was met. Respondents were also given the opportunity to state and elaborate on any additional objectives not covered in this section. During late 2006, the questionnaire was mailed to the organizers of all the inventoried festivals along with a reply-paid envelope and cover letter outlining the purpose of the research. Reminder phone calls and follow-up surveys were sent to non-respondents one month after the initial mail-out, and periodically after that to maximize response rates.

Hierarchical cluster analysis, using Ward's method, was used to identify relatively homogeneous subgroups within the population. This method divides the sample into stipulated numbers of clusters wherein the diversity of the membership within each cluster is minimized while inter-cluster differences are maximized. The selection of a 'correct' cluster solution with regard to the number of items and clusters included is an essentially subjective process that takes into account differences in cluster means, cluster size, and interpretability, given that the presence of 'natural' clusters in the sample cannot be assumed. Hair et al. (1995) recommend that at least five cases be available for each

item that is clustered, indicating that representatives of at least 105 festivals, or 78% of the identified population, should submit a valid completed questionnaire in order for cluster analysis to proceed on the basis of all 21 objectives.

## **RESULTS**

By mid-2007, 108 valid surveys were received, yielding a response rate of 80%. This not only satisfies the 78% threshold required for cluster analysis in this instance, but substantially exceeds the sample yield of at least 100 (or 74%) that Sarantakos (1998) recommends to best ensure representativeness in a population of 135 cases. The response rate means that cluster analysis can proceed using all 21 variables, if warranted.

### Overall profile

As depicted in Table 2, five objectives approached consensus with means of 1.50 or higher. Three of these were related to nature-based criteria and, unsurprisingly, included the objective of providing opportunities to observe featured wildlife in the field (i.e., a relatively natural setting). High rankings also for the provision of learning opportunities relative to featured wildlife, and for non-disruptive observation opportunities, suggest that US-based birding festivals collectively can be regarded as a form of ecotourism.

While these three particular objectives also indicate a minimalist orientation, comprehensive attributes are evident on the nature-based attractions criterion in the high means obtained for immersion in the natural environment and exposure to local ecosystems. The recruitment of adults and children, which also yielded relatively high means (1.42 and 1.21 respectively) are also associated with comprehensive ecotourism.



However, most ‘enhancement’ sustainability-related comprehensive criteria, including the raising of money and encouraging participation in volunteer activities, fell below a mean of 1.00. Exposure to environmental issues in general, a learning-related objective, also yielded a mean below 1.00. On the minimalist side, the provision of entertaining learning opportunities was relatively important.

With regard to explicit ecotourism affiliation, 38% of the respondents (n = 41) stated that their festival is promoted as an ‘ecotourism’ event, but none indicated membership in specialized ecotourism organizations such as TIES or related entities. T-tests were run to see whether statistically significant differences in mean item responses existed between those who promoted their festivals as ‘ecotourism’ events and those who did not.

Differences were revealed for just two statements, with those responding in the affirmative being more likely to report seeing as many species as possible (1.34 vs. 1.04,  $p < .046$ ) and getting children interested in birding (1.41 vs. 1.09,  $p < .039$ ) as festival objectives. No significant differences were obtained with respect to festival characteristics such as years in operation and estimated number of attendees, or in change in attendance numbers – that is, promoting the festival as an ecotourism event did not influence whether numbers were higher, the same, or lower than the previous time the festival was held (Pearson chi-squared = 2.660,  $p < .265$ ).

(Table 2)

Population variations

Cluster analysis based initially on all 21 objectives yielded no interpretable results for the two, three, four and five-cluster outcomes. Moreover, in all cases the Cronbach's alpha statistic for internal reliability fell below the .70 threshold regarded as acceptable in social science research by Ruckert and Churchill (1984). Subsequent removal of two objectives that did not significantly differentiate the clusters in any of the solutions (helping the economy of the local community, and giving attendees opportunities to learn about local culture/history), and one that is peripheral to the learning criterion (providing learning opportunities that are entertaining) resulted in an 18-item, four-cluster solution that (1) produced an alpha statistic of .78, (2) was dominated by items in which inter-cluster means are differentiated at the 99% level or higher, and (3) produced clusters with readily discernable, differentiating and interpretable characteristics.

Cluster 1 accounts for 47% of the sample (n = 51) and includes cases that most closely resemble the overall sample profile described above (Table 2). Accordingly, members are described as *normative* birding festivals with regard to their exhibition of ecotourism characteristics. Cluster 2, accounting for 30% of the sample (n = 32), comprises festivals where means for even the most popular objectives are noticeably lower than those obtained from the other clusters (although not necessarily to a statistically significant extent). Concurrently, most of the 'comprehensive' items yield especially low means. The overall pattern for this cluster merits the label of *minimalist*. The final two groups are both small with specialized activist characteristics. Cluster 3 (n = 16, or 15% of the sample) is distinguished by five objectives related to comprehensive ecotourism with means much higher than the cumulative result and significantly higher than the means for

the other three clusters. These objectives focus on exposing and raising awareness of attendees to environmental issues, and encouraging them to join sponsoring organizations and to volunteer in festival events. Relatively high means were also yielded for getting adults and children more interested in birding. Members of this cluster can therefore be described as *recruiter* birding festivals. Finally, cluster 4 includes just nine festivals (8% of the sample) distinguished at a high level of statistical significance by their emphasis on raising money to protect featured wildlife and its habitat. These members are therefore are described as *fundraiser* festivals.

There were no statistically significant differences in the proportion of members for each cluster that reported being explicitly promoted as an ‘ecotourism’ festival, with rates of 35%, 41%, 38% and 44% being respectively yielded ( $\chi^2 = .413$ ,  $p \geq .938$ ). Moreover, there were no differences based on market, with 77%, 69%, 100% and 78% of each respective cluster reporting a ‘mixed’ attendance of ‘serious’ birders, ‘casual’ birders and ‘non-birders’. Clusters, in addition, were not differentiated by years in operation or number of attendees.

## **DISCUSSION**

With respect to the first objective, the results of this study confirm that US-based birding festivals as a whole satisfy basic ecotourism criteria of nature-based attractions, learning outcomes from interactions with those attractions, and also non-disruptive interactions as per the sustainability agenda. More specifically, about one-half of the festivals deviate from a normative pattern either through a minimalist pattern, or in a smaller number of

cases through a focus on at least one specialized aspect of comprehensive ecotourism, that is, recruitment or fundraising. None of the festivals is truly ‘comprehensive’ in terms of satisfying more rigorous standards for all three criteria. Regarding the second objective of the study, it is apparent that formal affiliation with ecotourism is weak, with a minority explicitly marketing their festival as an ‘ecotourism’ event and none having formal affiliation with specialized ecotourism organizations. Finally, apart from two of the 21 items, the display of ecotourism characteristics, and cluster membership, are not significantly related to promotion of festivals as ecotourism events.

The implications of these findings focus on the significance of the disconnect between birding festivals, sustainability and identification with ecotourism. For ecotourism organizations, the benefits of formal affiliation with birding festivals are clear. The addition of 135 festivals, for example, would represent a 17% increase in membership of TIES, and potentially generate enormous exposure to the public through visibility at festivals. For the festivals, the advantages of affiliation with ecotourism organizations are less clear. The data show that identification of festivals with ecotourism in marketing, for example, does not increase visitor numbers or the proclivity for adherence to a more comprehensive mode of ecotourism. Thus there is little benefit for festival organizers to incorporate ecotourism semantics into their marketing. There is also little benefit to society, since this identification does not increase the likelihood of pursuing comprehensive and environmentally beneficial objectives such as recruitment or fundraising.

Further research is required to identify specific reasons for organizers' not choosing to affiliate with TIES or other specialized ecotourism organizations, but possible factors include the limited benefits provided in exchange for membership fees, which mainly involve display of the organization logo, a listing on its website, and access to newsletters and other supposedly privileged strategic information and communiqués. Unlike Ecotourism Australia, moreover, TIES does not currently play a lead role in certification initiatives or lobbying, and is an international entity (though based in the US) that is not focused specifically on the US context even though the latter account for about one-half of the membership. That membership in TIES is not necessarily perceived as beneficial by managers of ecotourism products may be indicated by the fall in membership from about 1,500 members in the early 2000s to about 800 in 2006 (Weaver 2008). This trend, and the apparent irrelevance of the organization to US-based birding festivals, may indicate an existential crisis for TIES that requires a fundamental rethinking of its structure and activities.

A related issue may be a broader cynicism or discomfort with the term 'ecotourism' (or the 'eco' prefix more generally) which despite its institutionalization is commonly regarded as fuzzy, and associated with greenwashing as well as the absence of rigorous standards of criterion adherence. It may also be that the festivals already associate with highly specialized entities such as the American Birding Association (ABA) or Audubon that provide an adequate level of institutional support for some festival organizers, although such affiliations were not revealed in the survey.

Despite the ABA or Audubon connections of some festivals, a tangential implication of this research is that the 135 US-based birding festivals could benefit from formal internal affiliation, that is, through the establishment of an ‘American Birding Festival Association’ or similar. This would better allow the normative and minimalist festivals to emulate the innovative recruitment and fundraising activity carried out by the specialized activist clusters. It would also be more feasible for this new organization, rather than individual festivals, to pursue the most appropriate relationship with broader ecotourism organizations on behalf of its membership, and to explore focused initiatives such as festival eco-certification and collective marketing. It may not be necessary, however, for such an organization to be formally configured as an ecotourism entity in order to bring about the sustainability and learning outcomes that are associated with the sector.

## **CONCLUSION**

Further research is now required to see whether the US results are idiosyncratic or indicative of a wider pattern of disconnect between birding festivals, sustainability and ecotourism. Birding festivals in Canada, Europe, Australia and other countries are one logical target of investigation, as are festivals that focus on whales and other charismatic non-bird wildlife. A limitation of this or future studies is relatively small population size, which inhibits the utility of statistical tests of significance. However, this also suggests the usefulness of interviews with festival organizers, and other follow-up qualitative research, to gain insight into the reasons for using or not using ecotourism in festival promotion, and for not belonging to specialized ecotourism organizations. Collectively, the results of this and future follow-up research could help to foster mutually beneficial

relationships between festivals and ecotourism organizations with regard to recruitment, promotion, lobbying and other activities that advance the sustainability agenda for the environment, society and individual members.

## **TABLES**

### **Table 1**

#### **Survey festival objectives related to ecotourism**

##### **Nature-based criteria**

Immerse attendees in the natural environment

See as many species of wildlife as possible

Expose attendees to local ecosystems

Give attendees opportunities to observe, in the field, wildlife that is featured at your festival

Give attendees opportunities to improve their bird-watching skills

##### **Learning criteria**

Get adults interested in birding

Get children interested in birding

Give attendees opportunities to learn about the featured wildlife

Provide learning opportunities that are entertaining

Give attendees opportunities to learn about local culture and/or history

Teach attendees about environmental problems that are affecting the featured wildlife

Expose attendees to environmental issues in general

##### **Sustainability criteria**

Observe the featured wildlife in its natural setting in a way that is non-disruptive to the wildlife

Make attendees more environmentally aware in their everyday behavior

Publicize activities of organizations that are sponsoring this event

Raise money that will be used to protect the target wildlife



Raise money that will be used to purchase wildlife habitat

Raise money that will be used to protect the natural environment more generally

Attract new members for selected environmental and/or bird watching clubs or organizations

Give attendees opportunities to volunteer in activities that help protect focus wildlife and/or its habitat

Help the economy of the local community

**Table 2**

**Cluster means for festival objectives**

<b>Festival objectives included in final cluster solution</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>1<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>2<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>3<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>4<sup>1</sup></b>
<b>(Chronbach's <math>\alpha = .78</math>)</b>	<b>(n=108)</b>	<b>(51)</b>	<b>(32)</b>	<b>(16)</b>	<b>(9)</b>
(N <sup>2</sup> ) Give attendees opportunities to observe, in the field, wildlife that is featured at your festival	1.80	1.80	1.69	1.88	2.00
(N) Immerse attendees in the natural environment	1.69	1.75	1.44	1.88	1.89
(L) Give attendees opportunities to learn about the featured wildlife	1.68	1.90	1.41	1.88	1.00
(N) Expose attendees to local ecosystems	1.64	1.69	1.34	1.94	1.89
(S) Observe the featured wildlife in its natural setting in a way that is non-disruptive to the wildlife	1.56	1.63	1.25	1.94	1.67
(L) Get adults interested in birding	1.42	1.53	1.00	1.94	1.33
(L) Get children interested in birding	1.21	1.31	<u>.75</u>	1.75	1.33
(N) Give attendees opportunities to improve their bird-watching skills	1.19	1.29	<u>.63</u>	1.56	1.89
(N) See as many species of wildlife as possible	1.16	1.22	1.00	1.06	1.56
(L) Teach attendees about environmental problems that are affecting the featured wildlife	1.06	1.24	.56	<b>1.69</b>	.78

(S) Make attendees more environmentally aware in their everyday behavior	.78	.73	.41	<b>1.88</b>	.44
(L) Expose attendees to environmental issues in general	.77	.71	.44	<b>1.56</b>	.89
(S) Publicize activities of organizations that are sponsoring this event	.72	1.04	.16	1.13	.22
(S) Attract new members for selected environmental and/or bird watching clubs or organizations	.71	.73	.28	<b>1.50</b>	.78
(S) Give attendees opportunities to volunteer in activities that help protect focus wildlife and/or its habitat	.54	.65	.03	<b>1.31</b>	.33
(S) Raise money that will be used to protect the target wildlife	.42	.31	.16	.50	<b>1.78</b>
(S) Raise money that will be used to protect the natural environment more generally	.25	.14	.00	.69	1.00
(S) Raise money that will be used to purchase wildlife habitat	.17	.02	.00	.25	<b>1.44</b>
<b>Festival objectives omitted from final cluster solution</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
	<b>(n=108)</b>	<b>(51)</b>	<b>(32)</b>	<b>(16)</b>	<b>(9)</b>
(L) Provide learning opportunities that are entertaining	1.33	1.39	1.13	1.69	1.11
(S) Help the economy of the local community	1.19	1.22	1.06	1.31	1.33
(L) Give attendees opportunities to learn about local culture and/or history	.85	.88	.72	1.06	.78

<sup>1</sup>Numbers indicate the following cluster labels: 1 = ‘Normative’; 2 = ‘Minimalist’, 3 = ‘Recruiter’,

and 4 = ‘Fundrasier’.

<sup>2</sup>Letters in parentheses mean S = ‘Sustainability’, L = ‘Learning’, and N = ‘Nature’

Bolded mean indicates that this value is significantly higher than means obtained for this objective from the three other clusters.

Underlined mean indicates that this value is significantly lower than means obtained for the objective from the three other clusters.

## REFERENCES

- American Birding Association (ABA) (2006). *American Birding Association's Birding Festivals Directory*. Retrieved November 15, 2006), from <http://www.americanbirding.org/festivals/index.html>
- Audubon California (2006). California Nature Events & Festivals – Birding Events. Retrieved November 16, 2006, from [http://www.audubon-ca.org/california\\_nature\\_festivals.htm](http://www.audubon-ca.org/california_nature_festivals.htm)
- Bird Louisiana (2006). *Birding Festivals of Louisiana*. Retrieved November 16, 2006, from <http://www.birdlouisiana.com/festivals/festpage.html>
- Bird Watchers Digest.com (2006). *Bird Watcher's Digest Festival Finder*. Retrieved October 26, 2006, from <http://www.birdwatchersdigest.com/site/finderTool/birdFestFinder/birdFestSearch.aspx>
- Black, R.S., and A. Crabtree (eds.) (2007). *Quality Control and Certification in Ecotourism*. Wallingford, UK: CABI.
- Blamey, R.K. (1997). "Ecotourism: The search for an operational definition." *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 5(2): 109–30.
- Blamey, R.K. (2001). "Principles of Ecotourism." In *Encyclopedia of Ecotourism* edited by D.B. Weaver. Wallingford, UK: CABI. Pp 5-22
- Buckley, R. (2003). *Case Studies in Ecotourism*. Wallingford, UK: CABI Publishing.
- Buckley, R. (2004). *Environmental Impacts of Ecotourism*. Wallingford, UK: CABI Publishing.

- Burr, W. W., and D. Scott (2004). "Application of the Recreational Specialization Framework to Understanding Visitors to the Great Salt Lake Bird Festival." *Event Management*, 9(1/2): 27-37.
- Butler, R.W., and T. Hinch (Eds.) (2007). *Tourism and Indigenous Peoples: Issues and Implications*. London: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Derrett, R. (2003). "Making Sense of How Festivals Demonstrate a Community's Sense of Place." *Event Management*, 8(1): 49-58.
- Ekblad, B. (2006). *Minnesota Birding Festivals, Field Trips & Meetings*. Retrieved November 15, 2006, from <http://www.birding-minnesota.com/MN-Event.htm>
- Ellis, C. L., and H. Vogelsong (2004, July). Measuring birdwatcher preferences through importance-performance analysis. In J. Murdy (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 2003 Northeastern Recreation Research Symposium. Gen. Tech. Rep. NE317*. (pp. 203-210). Newtown Square, PA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Northeastern Research Station.
- Fennell, D. (2003). *Ecotourism: An Introduction* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). London, UK: Routledge.
- Forbes, B. (1998). Curry county sustainable nature-based tourism project. In *Sustainable Tourism: A Geographical Perspective* edited by C. M. Hall and A. A. Lew. New York: Addison, Wesley, Longman Limited. Pp 119-131
- Garrod, B., and J. Wilson (eds.) (2003). *Marine Ecotourism: Issues and Experiences*. Clevedon, UK: Channel View.
- Getz, D. (1997). *Event Management & Event Tourism*. New York: Cognizant Communication.
- Getz, D., and W. Frisby (1988). "Evaluating Management Effectiveness in Community-run Festivals." *Journal of Travel Research*, 27(1): 22-27.

- Goldblatt, J., and F. Supovitz (1999). *Dollars and Events: How to Succeed in the Special Events Business*. Mississauga, Ontario: Wiley.
- Hair, J., R. Anderson, R. Tatham, and W. Black. (1995). *Multivariate Data Analysis*. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Hartley, D. (2005, January/February). Birding festivals. *Birding*, 34-37.
- Hall, C.M. (1992). *Hallmark Tourist Events: Impacts, Management and Planning*. London: Belhaven.
- Higham, J.E.S., and B. Ritchie (2004). "The Evolution of Festivals and Other Events in Rural Southern New Zealand." *Event Management*, 7(1): 39-49.
- Hinch, T. (2001). Indigenous territories. In *The Encyclopedia of Ecotourism* edited by D.B. Weaver. Wallingford, UK: CABI Publishing. Pp 345-57
- Hodur, N. M., F. L. Leistritz, and K. L. Wolfe (2005). "Assessing the Economic Impact Development Potential of Nature Tourism." *Great Plains Research*, 15(2): 279-96.
- Hunter, C. (1997). "Sustainable Tourism as an Adaptive Paradigm." *Annals of Tourism Research*, 24, 850-67.
- Hvenegaard, G. T., M.L. Jenner, and V. Manaloor (2005). "A Comparison of Local Expenditures Resulting from Low Community Wildlife Festivals." In *Book of Abstracts of 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Association for Leisure Studies* edited by T. Delamaere, C. Randall, and D. Robinson. Malaspina University-College. Nanaimo, B.C., Canada. Pp 277-281
- Hvenegaard, G. and V. Manaloor (2004). "Current Potential Expenditure Patterns of Birding Festival Participants." *Recent Advances and Research Updates*, 5(1): 51-60.

- Janiskee, R.L., and P. Drews (1998). "Rural Festivals and Community Reimaging." In *Tourism and Recreation in Rural Areas* edited by R. Butler, C.M. Hall, and J. Jenkins. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons. Pp 157-175
- Kim, C., D. Scott, J. F. Thigpen, and S-S. Kim (1998). "Economic Impact of Birding Festival." *Festival Management & Event Tourism*, 5: 51-58.
- Kontoleon, A., T. Swanson, Q. Wan, Q. Xuejun, and C. Yang (2002). "Optimal Ecotourism: The economic Value of the Giant Pandas in China." In *Valuing the Environmental in Developing Countries: Case Studies* edited by D. Pearce, C. Pearce, & C. Palmer. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar. Pp 206-235
- Lemelin, R.H. and B. Smale (2006). "Effect of Environmental Context on the Experience of Polar Bear Viewers in Churchill, Manitoba." *Journal of Ecotourism* 5(3): 176-191.
- Lemelin, R.H. and E.C. Wiersma (2007). "Perception of Polar Bear Tourists: A Qualitative Analysis." *Human Dimensions of Wildlife*, 12(1): 45-52.
- Mazurkewich, K. (2006, April 1). "Wild West is now for the birds: The soaring business of bird watching transforming tiny Arizona towns." *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved September 10, 2008, from [http://online.wsj.com/article/SB114384419787613937.html?mod=todays\\_us\\_pursuits](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB114384419787613937.html?mod=todays_us_pursuits)
- McKercher, B., W. Mei and T.S.M. Tse (2006). "Are Short Duration Cultural Events Tourist Attractions?" *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 14(1): 55-66.
- Newsome, D., S. A. Moore, and R. K. Dowling (2002). *Natural Area Tourism: Ecology, Impacts and Management*. Clevedon, UK: Channel View.
- Page, S., and R. Dowling (2002) *Ecotourism*. London: Pearson.

- Rukert, R. and G. Churchill (1984). "Reliability and Validity of Alternative Measures of Channel Member Satisfaction." *Journal of Marketing Research*, 21: 226-233.
- Saleh, F., and C. Ryan (1993). "Jazz and Knitwear: Factors that Attract Tourists to Festivals." *Tourism Management*, 14(4): 289-297.
- Sarantakos, S. (1998). *Social Research*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. South Melbourne: Macmillan.
- Scace, R.C. (1993). "An Ecotourism Perspective." In *Tourism and Sustainable Development: Monitoring, Planning, Managing* edited by J.G. Nelson, R.W. Butler & G. Wall. Waterloo, Canada: University of Waterloo. Pp 59-82
- Scott, D., S.M. Baker, and C. Kim (1999). "Motivations and Commitments Among Participants in the Great Texas Birding Classic." *Human Dimensions of Wildlife*, 4(1): 50-67.
- Scott, D., and J. Thigpen (2003). "Understanding the Birder as Tourist: Segmenting Visitors to the Texas Hummer/Bird Celebration." *Human Dimensions in Wildlife*, 8(3): 199-218.
- Singh, T., M. Slotkin, and R.A. Vamosi. (2007). "Attitude towards ecotourism and environmental advocacy: Profiling the dimensions of sustainability." *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 13(2): 119-134.
- Space Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival (2006). *Florida Birding and Wildlife Festivals*. Retrieved November 15, 2006, from <http://www.nbbd.com/fly/festivals.html>
- Stabler, M.J. (ed.) (1997). *Tourism & Sustainability: Principles to Practice*. Wallingford, UK: CAB International.
- Stoll, J.R., R.B. Ditton, and T.L. Eubanks (2006). "Platte River Birding and the Spring Migration: Humans, Value, and Unique Ecological Resources." *Human Dimensions of Wildlife*, 11(4): 241-254.



- Swarbrooke, J. (1999). *Sustainable Tourism Management*. Wallingford, UK; CAB International.
- Texas Parks & Wildlife (2006). *Annual Birding & Nature Festivals of Texas*. Retrieved October 18, 2006, from [http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/publications/pwdpubs/media/pwd\\_bk\\_w7000\\_0267.pdf](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/publications/pwdpubs/media/pwd_bk_w7000_0267.pdf)
- Uysal, M., & R. Gitelson (1994). "Assessment of Economic Impacts." *Festival Management & Event Tourism*, 1(1): 5-10.
- WCED (World Commission on Environment and Development) (1987). *Our Common Future*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Wearing, S. and J. Neil (1999). *Ecotourism: Impacts, Potentials and Possibilities*. Oxford, UK: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Weaver, D. B. (2001). *The Encyclopedia of Ecotourism*. Wallingford, UK: CABI Publishing.
- Weaver, D. B. (2005). "Comprehensive and Minimalist Dimensions of Ecotourism." *Annals of Tourism Research*, 32(2): 439-455.
- Weaver, D. B. (2006) *Sustainable Tourism: Theory and Practice*. Burlington, MA: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Weaver, D. B. (2008). *Ecotourism* (2nd ed.) Milton, QLD: John Wiley & Sons Australia Ltd.
- Weaver, D. B., and Lawton, L. J. (2007). "Twenty Years On: The State of Contemporary Ecotourism Research." *Tourism Management*, 28(5): 1168-79.
- Zeppel, H. (2006). *Indigenous Ecotourism*. Wallingford, UK: CABI Publishing.