

# The Economic Value of Bird-watching in New Zealand

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Birding is the activity of viewing birds in their natural environment for the purposes of recreation and education. Bird-watching is also considered a fast-growing segment of nature-based tourism. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in 2001 there were 46 million birdwatchers (1 in 5 Americans) spending \$32 billion in retail sales, which accounted for \$85 billion in overall economic output, contributed \$13 billion in taxes and created 863,406 jobs. Although the economic impact of birding can be significant, there are no substantial studies on the economics of bird-watching in New Zealand. Moreover, there are limited studies that illustrate how funds from birding are allocated towards conservation. The purpose of this research is to illustrate the economic characteristics of bird-watching in New Zealand on a national, regional and local economic scale.

The research will emphasize the significance and potential birding can have for the New Zealand tourism industry. The Initial step of the methods (on-going) is a web-based audit to determine major birding operators and sites within New Zealand. Two case studies were selected: Tiritiri Matangi for the regional scale and Stewart Island as the local economic scale. The second step involved interviewing representatives of five national level key organizations, 15 tour operators, and 10 key informants at each selected case study. Lastly, online surveys are being distributed to birdwatchers (nationally and at each case study). Results indicate that birder expenditures are directly correlated with commitment level. More committed birders travel further and spend more money. There are approximately 60 commercial birding tour operators in the country. Most international birders are part of organized birding tour groups with an average of 8-12 individuals, each paying between \$300-400NZD for a day trip. These are tentative results and more will follow as the research evolves, which will be available by the conference date.