

# GENDER-BASED MOTIVATIONS OF NON-RESIDENTIAL BIRDWATCHERS IN NEW YORK STATE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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**Abstract.**—Birdwatching is the fastest growing outdoor recreation activity in the United States, and birdwatchers are an important economic development force in many rural communities. Wildlife management agencies are being challenged to develop products and programs for non-consumptive natural resource users such as birdwatchers. For effective planning and management of these programs, it is important to understand the characteristics and motivations of birdwatchers.

The purpose of this study is to explore, through qualitative research methods, the motivations of male and female non-residential birdwatchers. Sixty birdwatchers (i.e., 30 males and 30 females) were interviewed by phone using an interview guide. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Results indicate that motivations of non-residential birdwatchers can be grouped into five categories (i.e., emotional, intellectual, physical, social, and spiritual). Emotional motivations were the most commonly indicated concepts. Analysis of the qualitative data also revealed similarities and differences in motivations between male and female birdwatchers. Results of this qualitative study will aid in the development of a birdwatcher participation survey that will be used for a quantitative investigation on motivations of birdwatchers.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Birding is a popular outdoor activity in the United States (Cordell & Herbert 2002). Forty-six million Americans aged 18 years and older participated in birdwatching in 2001. These birdwatchers spent an estimated \$32 billion that generated \$85 billion in economic benefits in the United States. This effect on the economy also produced

\$13 billion in tax revenues and supported more than 863,000 jobs. The states of New York, California, and Pennsylvania had the most birders (La Rouché 2003).

To be considered a birdwatcher, an individual must take a trip a mile or more from home for the primary purpose of observing birds or must closely observe or try to identify birds around the home (La Rouché 2003). Watching birds around the home is the most common form of birding. Eighty-eight percent of birders (approximately 40 million individuals) are backyard birders. Birders who take trips away from home (i.e., “away-from-home or non-residential birdwatchers;” La Rouché 2003) accounted for 40% of birders (about 18 million). Those who notice birds while mowing the lawn or picnicking at the beach are not considered to be birders. Trips to zoos and observing captive birds also do not count as birdwatching.

Wildlife management agencies and recreation service providers have recognized the importance of birdwatching to the U.S. economy and thus are being challenged to develop better programs and products for the birdwatching population. They are also faced with a number of management issues that have emerged in connection with the growth of birdwatching. These issues include possible impacts of birdwatching on nesting birds, the trampling of soils and vegetation, and the compatibility of birdwatching with other forms of wildlife recreation (Kellert 1985). In order to address the aforementioned issues and to develop programs and products that meet the needs of birders, a more thorough understanding of the motivations of birders is needed.

The purpose of this study is to identify motivations of male and female non-residential birdwatchers using qualitative methods. It should be noted that this study is exploratory in nature; results were used as the basis of a quantitative investigation that took place in the spring of 2006. The results of this qualitative study will be combined with those of the quantitative study to provide a stronger support for the results through convergence and corroboration.

## 1.1 Motivations of Wildlife-Related Recreationists

In a study of motivations of hunters, Decker et al. (Decker et al. (2001) concluded that the majority of specific goals for wildlife-related recreation are included in three categories: (1) affiliation (i.e., individuals become involved in an activity primarily to accompany another person and to enjoy their company or to strengthen/reaffirm personal relationships); (2) achievement (i.e., wildlife recreationists become involved in an activity primarily to meet some standard of performance); and (3) appreciation (wildlife recreationists seek the sense of peace, belonging, and familiarity and the resulting stress reduction that they have come to associate with the activity). These three goal-orientations provided a framework for a wildlife recreation involvement model created by Decker et al. (1987). The goals (i.e., achievement, affiliative, and appreciative) of the individual combined with psychological (internal) and sociological (external) influences determine a person's involvement in wildlife recreation. However, involvement has a temporal dimension. For example, over time an individual may try the activity, identify with it, and adopt it as a means to meet his or her goals. A change in motivations occurs over time, shifting from an achievement or affiliation orientation during initial involvement to appreciation orientation during continued involvement.

These goal-orientations have been tested for both consumptive and non-consumptive wildlife-related activities. Decker and Connelly (1989) verified the existence of affiliation, appreciative, and achievement-oriented goals among hunters and they concluded that involvement in wildlife recreation is a dynamic process with the goal orientation changing with increased experience. McFarlane (1994) used the three above-mentioned goals to group motivations of birdwatchers and added a fourth goal called "conservation-related motivation" (p. 365). Kuehn (2002) adapted the three goals in relation to fishing participation in different life stages and found that affiliation influenced the level of fishing participation during adolescence and adulthood.

Scott et al. (1999) examined the motivations of participants in the Great Texas Birding Classic and

identified four dimensions of motives: competition, enjoyment and conservation, sociability, and self expression. Enjoyment and motivation constituted a single motivational dimension. In McFarlane's study (1994), conservation and enjoyment represented separate dimensions. Sociability was also regarded as an important motive for participants in the birding competition. In contrast, affiliation was relatively unimportant among Canadian birders (McFarlane 1994). It is important to note, however, that McFarlane (1994) focused on general motives for birdwatching, whereas Scott et al. (1999) were concerned with why people participated in a birding event. The results of the above-mentioned studies provide valuable insights into the varied motivations of birders, indicating that non-residential birdwatchers might also have different reasons for participating in birdwatching.

In addition to the need for a better understanding of motivations for birdwatching, more information on the influence of gender on birdwatching is also needed. The 2001 National Survey on Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (La Rouché 2003) shows that a slightly larger percent of birdwatchers were women (52%). In an earlier study, it was found that more male birders (85%) participated in a birding competition (Scott et al. 1999). In a more recent study (Scott & Thigpen, 2003), participants in a birding competition were found to be disproportionately female (74%). Differences in primary motivations were also found to exist between genders. Other studies also indicate that gender likely influences recreation participation. For example, results of qualitative interviews of anglers done by Kuehn (2002) found that males were more achievement-oriented while females were affiliation-oriented. Gender can be an important factor to take into account in understanding birdwatchers' motivations.

## 2.0 RESEARCH METHODS

This exploratory study used qualitative data collection and analysis techniques to provide information on the motivations of non-residential birdwatchers in New York State. The sample of interviewees was chosen through a three-step process. First, all the names with corresponding e-mail addresses listed on the 2004 American Birding Association (ABA) membership directory were retrieved from each of the 20 ABA regions in New York State.

Only those who are residents of New York State were chosen. Second, an e-mail requesting birdwatchers to participate in telephone interviews was sent to the sample of birdwatchers. Twenty-five males and 17 females responded to the e-mail indicating their willingness to participate in the interviews. Third, snowball sampling was employed by asking those who were interviewed for names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses of friends, colleagues, and relatives who participate in non-residential birdwatching. The researcher then contacted the individuals through either e-mail or telephone and asked permission to conduct the interviews. Five males and 17 females responded positively and were interviewed. Overall, a total of 60 birdwatchers (i.e., 30 males and 30 females) were interviewed.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted from April 4 to May 19, 2005 by telephone and were recorded using a tape recorder (with interviewee permission). The interviews ranged in length from 10 to 45 minutes. The interview guide used several questions, but the central question was "What motivates or encourages you to currently participate in birdwatching?"

All the interviews were transcribed using Microsoft Word. Qualitative data derived from the phone interviews were analyzed using QSR-N6, a qualitative software program. Data were analyzed separately for males and females in order to facilitate gender comparisons. General categories and subcategories related to motivations of non-residential birdwatchers were generated from the data analysis. The categories and subcategories that emerged in this phase were used in the development of a birdwatcher participation survey. Quotes were also identified that illustrate trends in the data, and the unique experiences and perspectives of the interviewees.

### 3.0 RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Of the 60 interviewees, 50 percent were male and 50 percent were female, ranging in age from 33 to 84 with a mean age of 59. All of the interviewees were Caucasian and 68% were married. The average number of years of school completed was 17 years. Five categories of motivations were identified, namely: emotional, intellectual, physical, social, and spiritual. Table 1 shows the five general categories, subcategories, and the number

of times each subcategory was indicated by interviewees. The most commonly indicated category was emotional motivation (n=58), followed by intellectual motivation (n=28). Table 2 displays the categories and subcategories of motivations of birdwatchers by gender. Verbatim examples from the interviews are provided.

#### 3.1. Emotional Motivations

Emotional motivations are those relating to emotions or feelings. Five subcategories were identified under emotional motivations (Table 1). The most commonly indicated subcategory is *going outdoors and enjoying wildlife and the natural environment*. A 33-year-old male interviewee who started birding at the age of 4 indicated this subcategory by stating the following:

*MALE INTERVIEWEE: I just enjoyed it. I like being outside. I like nature. I think it's like hunting without shooting anything...I love being outside. I just grew up with them. It's like part of who I am.*

The second most common emotional motivation is *enjoying the sights and sounds of birds*. The following examples illustrate this type of motivation:

*MALE INTERVIEWEE #9: To find birds, and just seeing and hearing.*

*FEMALE INTERVIEWEE #45: I think the aesthetics...the beauty of birds.*

Six interviewees identified conservation of birds as their motivation as shown in the following example:

*MALE INTERVIEWEE #14: Well, I'm hooked on it, but I'm also a conservationist and a naturalist. And especially if I can, you know, do some activity or pump some money into a local resource that is pro-birding or pro-environment. I like to do that as well.*

Emotional motivations seem to vary by gender as can be gleaned from Table 2. For instance, more males (n=5) than females (n=1) mentioned *conservation of birds* as their motivation. However, more females (n=9) than males (n=4) indicated *enjoying the sights and sounds of birds* as their motivation.

**Table 1.—Categories, subcategories, and frequencies of motivations of non-residential birdwatchers**

| Motivations                                                      | Frequency <sup>a</sup> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Emotional                                                        |                        |
| Going outdoors and enjoying wildlife and the natural environment | 28                     |
| Enjoying the sight and sounds of birds                           | 13                     |
| Enjoying something that is fun, challenging, and exciting        | 6                      |
| Contributing to the conservation of birds                        | 6                      |
| Relaxing and escaping from everyday activities                   | 5                      |
| Total                                                            | 58                     |
| Intellectual                                                     |                        |
| Adding a bird to my list                                         | 8                      |
| Studying bird behavior and bird migration                        | 8                      |
| Seeing a new and rare bird species                               | 6                      |
| Improving my bird identification skills                          | 2                      |
| Sharing knowledge about birds with others                        | 2                      |
| Studying birds in their natural habitat                          | 1                      |
| Teaching others how to birdwatch                                 | 1                      |
| Total                                                            | 28                     |
| Physical                                                         | 6                      |
| Traveling to different places                                    | 1                      |
| Getting physical exercise                                        | 1                      |
| Taking photographs of birds                                      | 1                      |
| Total                                                            | 9                      |
| Social                                                           |                        |
| Competing with other birdwatchers                                | 3                      |
| Being with friends who are birdwatchers                          | 2                      |
| Meeting new people who have the same interest                    | 2                      |
| Enjoying birding with family and relatives                       | 2                      |
| Total                                                            | 9                      |
| Spiritual                                                        |                        |
| Connecting with nature or creation                               | 1                      |
| Communing with nature                                            | 1                      |
| Understanding and appreciating the Creator better                | 1                      |
| Experiencing the peace that birding provides                     | 1                      |
| Renewing or refreshing my spiritual self                         | 1                      |
| Total                                                            | 5                      |

<sup>a</sup> = the number of times the item was indicated by interviewees

### 3.2 Intellectual Motivations

Intellectual motivations relate to knowledge or use of the mind. *Adding a bird to my list* and *studying bird behavior and bird migration* were indicated eight times each (Table 1).

Birders enjoy adding a bird species to their life list as the following examples show:

*MALE INTERVIEWEE #59: I like the challenge of adding new birds to my list which is pretty difficult to do in the United States anymore. So, it has lost some of the challenge.*

*FEMALE INTERVIEWEE #26: Well right now, my husband and I are trying to see a member of every bird family in the world. So that's how we plan out trip. We wanted to go seeing five thousand birds by the time... our 70th birthday. In fact, that's what we're trying to plan now... to finish the families. We have three families short before completing everything. We're going to Botswana and Zambia in May. Our next thing is to try to go to the Philippines in February or March next year.*

**Table 2.—Frequencies of male and female non-residential birdwatchers indicating their motivations**

| Motivations                                                      | Males<br>Frequency | Females<br>Frequency |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Emotional                                                        |                    |                      |
| Going outdoors and enjoying wildlife and the natural environment | 15                 | 13                   |
| Enjoying the sight and sounds of birds                           | 4                  | 9                    |
| Enjoying something that is fun, challenging, and exciting        | 2                  | 4                    |
| Contributing to the conservation of birds                        | 5                  | 1                    |
| Relaxing and escaping from everyday activities                   | 1                  | 4                    |
| Intellectual                                                     |                    |                      |
| Adding a bird to my list                                         | 5                  | 3                    |
| Studying bird behavior and bird migration                        | 5                  | 3                    |
| Seeing a new and rare bird species                               | 3                  | 3                    |
| Improving my bird identification skills                          | 0                  | 2                    |
| Sharing knowledge about birds with others                        | 2                  | 0                    |
| Studying birds in their natural habitat                          | 0                  | 1                    |
| Teaching others how to birdwatch                                 | 0                  | 1                    |
| Physical                                                         |                    |                      |
| Traveling to different places                                    | 6                  | 0                    |
| Getting physical exercise                                        | 0                  | 1                    |
| Taking photographs of birds                                      | 1                  | 0                    |
| Social                                                           |                    |                      |
| Competing with other birdwatchers                                | 2                  | 1                    |
| Being with friends who are birdwatchers                          | 1                  | 1                    |
| Meeting new people who have the same interest                    | 0                  | 2                    |
| Enjoying birding with family and relatives                       | 1                  | 1                    |
| Spiritual                                                        |                    |                      |
| Connecting with nature or creation                               | 0                  | 1                    |
| Communing with nature                                            | 1                  | 0                    |
| Understanding and appreciating the Creator better                | 0                  | 1                    |
| Experiencing the peace that birding provides                     | 1                  | 0                    |
| Renewing or refreshing my spiritual self                         | 0                  | 1                    |

Also, some birders indicated that they like to study bird behavior and migration:

*MALE INTERVIEWEE #24: I record information that helps provide us good information regarding the movement of birds.*

*FEMALE INTERVIEWEE #57: I want to know more about what they are doing and how they behave and how they sing. I read lots of book about them 'cause I want to learn.*

Table 2 shows differences in intellectual motivations of male and female birders. For example, males (n=2) indicated *sharing knowledge about birds with others*, while none of the females mentioned this as their motivation.

*MALE INTERVIEWEE #35: ...and I like to, you know, keep the records of each county as current as*

*possible so that we can leave a legacy to others to look back and say "Well, this was it was like back in the late 20th and early 21<sup>st</sup> century."*

On the other hand, females (n=2) indicated *improving my birdwatching identification skills*, while males did not indicate this.

*FEMALE INTERVIEWEE #29: I like to use my eyes and I am good visually. I'm not good in hand-eye coordination, but I'm very good in assessing details and catching motion. And so, it's a challenge that I am up to and therefore can enjoy some of my personal skills.*

### 3.3 Physical Motivations

Physical motivations are those relating to the body. Six male interviewees mentioned *traveling* while none of the

female interviewees indicated this as their motivation (Table 2). Five of these six male interviewees consider traveling and birding to go hand-in-hand.

*MALE INTERVIEWEE #14: ...the aspect of getting out there and seeing different places...is definitely a draw for me...*

*MALE INTERVIEWEE #32: ...and seeing new different places. It takes me all over the state of New York and I've recorded a life list for all the counties in the state. I think it's the travel.*

One male interviewee uses birdwatching as an excuse to travel as shown in the following example:

*MALE INTERVIEWEE #27: The foreign travels that we do trying to find members of every family. It turns out that's more of an excuse to travel and to find places that we never ever would have gone to...*

### 3.4 Social Motivations

Social motivations relate to the interaction of the individual to other people such as personal interactions, relationships, and communication. Both males and females mentioned *competing with other birdwatchers* as their motivation.

*MALE INTERVIEWEE #4: ...there's kind of a competitive aspect to it too. You wanna find something unusual. You wanna go see the things that other people saw.*

*FEMALE INTERVIEWEE #12: ...birds I haven't seen before. I also have three friends that I do a competitive... we do the Montezuma. Yeah, so I'll bird with them a couple of times during the year. So competition. We're the only all-female birding team. I do it for competition but my friends do it for fun.*

A difference in the subcategory meeting people with the same interest can be noted. Two female interviewees identified this subcategory while none among the male interviewees mentioned this as their motivation.

*FEMALE INTERVIEWEE #16: ...And it's also a social... you know, it's a social thing because I'm meeting new friends.*

*FEMALE INTERVIEWEE #47: ...and certainly the social aspect of it. I meet lots of people out there. We meet in the field and I hike with them, walk with them, and enjoy the same thing.*

### 3.5 Spiritual Motivations

Spiritual motivations are those relating to the spirit, the intangible or non-material, and the search for subjective meaning or intrinsic value. They also relate to supernatural beings and natural forces that exist in the universe. One example of this motivation is from a birder who has 18 years of birding experience:

*FEMALE INTERVIEWEE #48: I'm not a spiritual person in any ways they perform, but I think it's like meditation. Because you get out there and it's very quiet and all your senses have to be attuned and you have to listen really carefully and it's peaceful. That's how I get in tuned with the universe. Really! Some people are religious and they go to church. I bird and that gets me in tuned really with creation. I have come to the conclusion over the years that that was a big part of it. It is something that puts me in tuned with... with the world and with nature or creation or whatever you wanna call it. It really does put me in tuned. I'm not a spiritual person. I'm not a religious person, so I don't want that misconstrued. I don't really know that I've expressed it really well, but it just came to me at point you know walking in the woods... it's like meditation. It's like when you sit and you center and you breathe and you concentrate. It's really kind of like that.*

Another subcategory under spiritual motivations is experiencing the peace that birding provides.

*MALE INTERVIEWEE #17: I enjoy the solitude. I frequently, if I have a major talk to give, speech or anything like that... the day before or a couple of days before, I would go out and take my binoculars. And I do that...it kinda clears my head...*

## 4.0 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Research on motivations helps wildlife professionals identify the reasons why people participate in wildlife-related activities such as birdwatching. Information derived from these studies help wildlife agencies create and develop programs and products for wildlife users. In the past, a few studies have utilized open-ended questionnaire items to identify motivations of birdwatchers. In contrast, this study employed a qualitative approach in order to understand in depth the various reasons for participating in birdwatching.

The results of this study show that motivations of non-residential birdwatchers can be grouped in five general categories (i.e., emotional, intellectual, physical, social, and spiritual). The two most commonly indicated categories are emotional motivations and intellectual motivations. Similarities in motivations between male and female birdwatchers were noted. For instance, for both genders, motivations such as *going outdoors and enjoying wildlife and the natural environment, adding a bird to my list, studying bird behavior and bird migration, and competing with other birdwatchers* were indicated. Results also suggest gender-based differences in motivations of birdwatchers. For example, more males than females mentioned *conservation of birds*, whereas more females than males indicated *enjoying the sights and sounds of birds* as their motivation. Males indicated *sharing knowledge about birds with other* and *traveling*, while none of the females mentioned these as their motivations. Females, on the other hand, indicated *improving my birdwatching identification skills* and *meeting new people with the same interest*, while males did not indicate these motivations. The results of this qualitative study will be combined with quantitative research methods in order to understand more fully the concepts being studied.

## 5.0 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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