



Bird-Watching In Rajouri: It's Impact On Human And Avian Communities, Ecological And Economic Implications And Conservation Measures.

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Abstract: Ecotourism can be a vehicle for community-based conservation if it is conducted with an emphasis on the well-being of local ecosystems and human communities. Birdwatchers form the largest group of eco-tourists, and are on average, well-educated, wealthy and committed. This makes them ideal eco-tourists for community-based conservation. Therefore, there is a need for a comprehensive review of bird-watching from a conservation biology perspective. Bird-watching tourism has a high potential to improve the financial and environmental well-being of local communities, educate locals about the value of biodiversity and create local and national incentives for successful protection and preservation of natural areas. The study area has one of the most diverse land-scape and avian biodiversity making it suitable for bird watching destinations. More initiatives should be taken to make the bird watchers experience wholesome.

Keywords: bird disturbance, bird watching, community-based conservation, ecotourism, protected areas, sustainable use.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The International Ecotourism Society's definition of ecotourism is 'Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people' (1). Ideally, ecotourism creates a local incentive for conserving natural areas by generating income through operations that are sustainable, low-impact (environmental and social), low-investment, and locally-owned (2). Unfortunately, this ideal is rarely reached, in part due to what may be an inherent paradox: eco-tourism aims to combine market-driven consumption of goods and services with sustainability (2). In some cases, ecotourism actually creates new financial incentives for encroachment of natural areas through land speculation (3). Nevertheless, true ecotourism is preferable to alternative forms of economic development, such as logging, mining, or agriculture, because properly conducted ecotourism has the potential to protect natural areas and benefit local people at the same time (4).

Bird watching is the act of observing and identifying birds in their native habitats. Birdwatchers are one of the best sources of ecotourism income since they form the largest single group of eco-tourists, are educated, and have above-average incomes (5; 6). Because of the zeal of many birdwatchers and the resources these people are willing to invest in this activity, bird watching is becoming the most rapidly growing and most environmentally conscious segment of eco tourism and provides economic hope for many threatened natural areas around the world (6). For the purposes of this paper, I will not consider residential birdwatchers since they do not engage in any bird watching-related travel.

Specific objectives here are:

- (1) to review the economic potential of non-residential bird-watching for community-based conservation;
- (2) to outline the potential benefits and problems associated with this activity; and
- (3) to provide suggestions for improving the conservation value of bird-watching.

ECONOMIC POTENTIAL OF BIRDWATCHING

According to the estimates of the most recent USA national survey on recreation and the environment (NSRE) about 69.0 million people over age 16, or about a third of the human population of the USA over 16, viewed, identified or photographed birds in the 12 months preceding the survey; as many people as did any fishing or day hiking in the preceding 12 months (6). In general, birdwatchers are educated and affluent. The average income of a birdwatcher in the USA is over US\$ 50 000, and about a third have at least a college degree (6). According to (7), 300 000 American bird-watchers can be considered committed. These committed bird watchers form the core group of international birding trip participants. Based on the 1994 American Birding Association membership survey (American Birding Association 1994), 49% of committed birdwatchers travel out of the country for bird-watching. Of those, 32% have taken part in an organized bird tour. There are at least 127 companies that offer bird watching tours worldwide (see, for example, Birding.com 2001), and considering that the average trip to a less developed country (4) from one of the largest six birding companies (over 150 birding tours per year) has 12 participants and costs over US\$ 4000 per person, the financial impact of international bird watching can be substantial.

ECOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF BIRDWATCHERS

Birdwatchers, like most eco-tourists, are highly educated, both in terms of conventional education, as well as in terms of ecological knowledge and their higher awareness of conservation issues (6). For example, about two-thirds of the 600 000 members of the National Audubon Society, a prominent conservation organization, are self-proclaimed birdwatchers (8). Compared to the average eco tourist, birdwatchers are also more independent, focused and committed (9). The high expectations of many bird watchers, combined with their high average incomes, can result in large financial contributions to the localities visited (10).

Benefits of bird-watching

Because most birdwatchers know what they want to see and have high expectations of seeing certain species, they are likely to spend more money in order to see bird species in their natural environment than the average eco-tourist who is not particularly interested in birds. The consequent increase in the local awareness of the value of bird biodiversity may be one key to preserving many natural areas near human population centres. Local people who derive direct monetary benefits from biodiversity as a result of showing various species to birdwatchers are more likely to conserve ecosystems that harbour unusual birds. That would not be as likely if locals mostly hosted eco-tourists for whom a muddy forest trail, a waterfall and a few unusual organisms may constitute an exotic adventure.

Inclusion of areas without official protection, better ecological knowledge and higher expectations of bird-watchers also result in the preservation of many areas without any link between avian diversity and local income. A financial incentive to conserve wildlife, less impact and more income than typical tourism, increased local control due to unique bird species. Visitation of areas outside traditional tourist itineraries, protection of unprotected areas with desired species, valuation of local natural history knowledge Education and employment of local guides. Generation of funds for bird conservation, contribution to ornithological knowledge, disturbing birds by playing tapes and by approaching, increased nest predation and nest abandonment, increased disturbance of rare and/or threatened bird.

Birdwatching guides

A knowledgeable guide is key to the success of any organized bird watching trip, and for independent birdwatchers with high expectations, hiring a local guide is highly beneficial because it increases the chances of seeing the less common and local species, contributes to the local economy and creates an incentive to protect birds. For example, in Sivrikaya, Turkey, Mustafa Sari maintains a chain across a dirt road to prevent illegal hunters from driving to the remote lakes of Caucasian grouse (*Tetrao mlokosiewiczii*), a potentially threatened species (11) and his main source of income.

BIRD SPECIES OF STUDY AREA: DARHAL VALLEY (RAJOURI J&K)

SEASONAL BIRD SURVEY: JANUARY- FEBRUARY

WHISKERED YUHINA, COMMON BUZZARD, ASHY PRINIA, BLUE ROCK-THRUSH, INDIAN SILVERBILL, VARIEGATED LAUGHINGTHRUSH, HIMALAYAN RUBYTHROAT, SIRKEER MALKOHA, ALPINE SWIFT, HIMALAYAN BUZZARD, MOUNTAIN CHIFFCHAFF, LITTLE SWIFT, BROWN-HEADED BARBET, PINE BUNTING, JUNGLE BUSH-QUAIL, WHITE WAGTAIL, INDIAN PEAFOWL, HIMALAYAN BLUETAIL, GRAY-HEADED WOODPECKER, PIED KINGFISHER,

COMMON IORA. , EUROPEAN STARLING, BLACK REDSTART, WHITE-BROWED WAGTAIL, BROWN DIPPER, YELLOW-BELLIED FAIRY-FANTAIL.

MARCH-APRIL: BLACK-WINGED KITE, MALLARD, ORIENTAL TURTLE-DOVE, EURASIAN JAY, HIMALAYAN BLACK-LORED TIT, SPOTTED FORKTAIL, ULTRAMARINE FLYCATCHER, GRAY HERON, PLAIN PRINIA, YELLOW-BREASTED GREENFINCH, ROCK BUNTING, COMMON RAVEN, WESTERN CROWNED WARBLER, EGYPTIAN VULTURE, SHIKRA, BLACK-THROATED THRUSH, GRAY WAGTAIL, SLATY-HEADED PARAKEET, LEMON-RUMPED WARBLER.

MAY –JULY: GRAY FRANCOLIN, ROCK PIGEON, ASIAN KOEL, COMMON HAWK-CUCKOO, EURASIAN HOOPOE. GREEN BEE-EATER, HIMALAYAN WOODPECKER, ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET, BLACK DRONGO, HOUSE CROW, LARGE-BILLED CROW, HIMALAYAN BULBUL, COMMON BABBLER, COMMON MYNA, BANK MYNA, ORIENTAL MAGPIE-ROBIN, HOUSE SPARROW, BLACK KITE, SPOTTED DOVE, PIED CUCKOO, HAIR-CRESTED DRONGO , GRAY-BREASTED PRINIA, BLUE-THROATED FLYCATCHER, KALIJ PHEASANT , LAUGHING DOVE, CATTLE EGRET, STEPPE EAGLE, PLUM-HEADED PARAKEET, ASHY DRONGO, INDIAN PARADISE-FLYCATCHER, BARN SWALLOW, BLACK BULBUL, BLACK-THROATED TIT, JUNGLE MYNA, VERDITER FLYCATCHER, RUSSET SPARROW

OCTOBER-DECEMBER: CHESTNUT-EARED BUNTING, ROSY PIPIT, CHESTNUT-BELLIED ROCK-THRUSH, LESSER WHITETHROAT, HIMALAYAN MONAL, SPECKLED WOOD-PIGEON, RUFOUS-NAPED TIT, CHESTNUT THRUSH, PLAIN MOUNTAIN FINCH, KASHMIR NUTHATCH, RUFOUS-BREASTED ACCENTOR. BLACK HEADED CUCKOOSHRIKE, COMMON SWIFT. GREY BELLIED CUCKOO, WHITE EYED BUZZARD, BLACK HEADED BUNTING.

II. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE CONSERVATION VALUE OF BIRDWATCHING

Research, promotion and education overall, there is a pressing need for data on the financial contributions and environmental impacts of independent birdwatchers and tour companies focusing on bird watching, especially in less-developed countries (10). Financial data on bird watching would increase the likelihood of tourism ministries becoming aware of the potential benefits of organizing and promoting bird watching in their countries. The study area has one of the most diverse land-scape and avian biodiversity making it suitable for bird watching destinations. More initiatives should be taken to make the bird watchers experience wholesome. Even in well-known bird watching destinations such as Ecuador, promoters of tourism know very little about bird watching possibilities in their country. The fact that Costa Rica, a small Central American country that has distinguished itself by emphasizing conservation and ecotourism, was estimated to generate US\$ 410 million from bird watching in one year (**R. Arias de Para, personal communication 2001**) should be enough to convince any country of the financial significance of bird watching

III. CONCLUSION

Bird watching is a most promising branch of eco-tourism because birdwatchers comprise a large and increasing pool of educated and wealthy individuals who desire to observe birds in their native habitats and whose activities have relatively low environmental impact. Among various kinds of ecotourism, bird watching has the highest potential to contribute to local communities, educate locals about the value of biodiversity, and create local and national incentives for successful protection and preservation of natural areas. The governments of less-developed nations, local and inter-national NGOs, and bird watching companies should give priority to bird watching promotion and education. The organizations should also strive to increase the contribution of bird watching to rural communities and local grass-root organizations since bird watching has a significant potential to generate income through the protection and promotion of natural areas. The study area has one of the most diverse land-scape and avian biodiversity making it suitable for bird watching destinations. More initiatives should be taken to make the bird watchers experience wholesome.

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