



Birder Friendly Business and Community Training Program

Training Synopsis and Resources



The Birder Friendly Business & Community Training Program was developed by Stacy Tomas (NC Cooperative Extension and NC State University, Dept. of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management) and Lena Gallitano (Audubon North Carolina).

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Introduction

What is the North Carolina Birding Trail?

The North Carolina Birding Trail (NCBT) is a driving trail connecting and marketing 310 great birding sites across the state. The Trail is organized into three regional components:

- Coastal Plain - sites east of I-95
- Piedmont - sites between I-95 and I-77
- Mountains - sites west of I-77

The trail is a partnership among the following six agencies and organizations in North Carolina: Audubon North Carolina, North Carolina Cooperative Extension, North Carolina Sea Grant, North Carolina State Parks, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Our mission is *“to conserve and enhance North Carolina’s bird habitat by promoting sustainable birdwatching activities, economic opportunities and conservation education.”*

To order a trail guide, download site descriptions, or for more information about the North Carolina Birding Trail project, please visit our Website, www.ncbirdingtrail.org.

What’s the connection between birding trails and economic development?

As birders and nature enthusiasts travel on birding or wildlife trails in search of birds and wildlife, they also bring their tourism dollars to local economies through expenditures on food, gas, overnight accommodations, and other local attractions. The longer they stay, the greater their potential economic impact. The length of their stay is likely related to how well a community caters to and makes welcome these nature-based tourists.

North Carolina has a wealth of natural areas: state parks, national wildlife refuges, national forests, state game lands, private reserves. These lands are, by their nature, located largely in rural portions of the state. Rural areas in North Carolina generally have higher poverty rates than urban areas, and are the most in need of economic development opportunities.

What is the Birder Friendly Business and Community Training Program?

The Birder Friendly Business and Community (BFB/C) Training Program was a grant-supported program¹ developed by members of the NC Birding Trail Steering Committee and carried out across the state from June 2006-November 2008. The program was developed to provide tools and information to help business and community interests market themselves to visiting birders traveling the NCBT.

The goals of the training were to:

- Build **communication and knowledge about local resources** of interest to birders

¹ Funding provided by the Golden LEAF Foundation.



- Help businesses **attract and cater to the niche market** of birders
- Provide ideas for **cooperative marketing** for businesses and communities

Participants received training through a combination of presentations and group work, and took home a training manual, a copy of the *Sibley Guide to the Birds of Eastern North America*, a certificate of completion, a logo decal for display, and permission to use the BFB/C logo on their website. In turn, they also received recognition on the NCBT Website.

Stacy Tomas (NC Cooperative Extension) and Lena Gallitano (Audubon NC) oversaw the development of the training curriculum and materials, handled training logistics, and traveled extensively to conduct 19 trainings across the state during this time. (See Appendix A for training locations). As a result of the BFB/C training program, nearly 300 individuals are recognized as a “birder friendly” business or community entity. Participants, in turn, took the knowledge they gained at the trainings back to their own staff and local networks.

For a list of the individuals and organizations who participated in the BFB/C Program by region, visit the NC Birding Trail Website (www.ncbirdingtrail.org) and search under the Birder Friendly menu.

The NCBT is no longer in a position to continue the BFB/C Program. However, this summary will provide a good starting point for anyone who would like to learn how they can make their business or community more “birder friendly.”

This document is organized just as the trainings were, by topics that build on one another. You’ll find a synopsis of important ideas and concepts, some questions to ask yourself along the way, and plenty of resources you can use for additional information.

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I. Economic Impact of Birding & Wildlife-watching

Wildlife-watchers, people who travel for the primary purpose of watching, photographing and enjoying wildlife, are a huge segment of the nature-tourism market. And birds are the most popular group of species that people travel to see. As the numbers below show, the national market consists of millions of people, spending billions of dollars.

1. 2006 US Fish and Wildlife Service National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (2007) (

National data

- 47.8 million US residents observed birds around the home or on trips (fairly narrow definition¹, as compared to NSRE, below)
- 19.8 million US residents traveled away from home to view birds.
- Over 71 million Americans spent nearly \$45 billion (in retail sales) on observing, feeding, or watching wildlife in the US in 2006.
- The data shows decreases in both angling and hunting participation from 1996 to 2006, while participation in other activities such as birding and photography has increased.

North Carolina data

- 2.6 million wildlife watchers in NC, who spent \$916 million in expenditures
 - 1.6 million observed birds around the home and on trips in the state

2. National Survey on Recreation and the Environment, NSRE (2007)

(<http://warnell.forestry.uga.edu/nrrt/nsre/Nsre/birding0807.pdf>)

- 81.5 million Americans participate in birding (broader definition than USFWS survey²), roughly 35.4% of the US population

3. The Outdoor Industry Foundation (2006) reported 1.86 million participants in wildlife viewing (bird watching and other wildlife watching) in NC; this accounts for 27% of the population.

4. The US Fish & Wildlife Service (2006) collected data from visitors at eight National Wildlife Refuges in NC and VA (Alligator River, Mackay Island, Pea Island, Roanoke River, Pocosin Lakes, Back Bay, Great Dismal Swamp, and Mattamuskeet):

- Visitor expenditures totaled \$166,612,257 within the region
- 2/3 of respondents considered themselves tourists (not locals)
- Fishing was the number one primary activity, followed by bird/wildlife watching

¹ Birding as the primary activity or a special interest; closely observing birds to identify species or otherwise study their habits around the home; those who may engage in birding as a secondary activity are not counted.

² Birders as people who view, photograph, study, identify, or otherwise take interest in wild birds in the outdoors, no matter how often or if the primary activity.



5. Survey of NC Birders – an on-line survey initiated by the NCBT in Fall 2006 and sent to members of the Carolina Bird Club and Audubon NC. The following was reported by the 463 survey respondents:

- 54% of respondents live in the Piedmont region of NC
- 72% travel away from their home to view birds at least 10 days/year
- 38% spend more than \$80 per trip on trip-related expenses
- 75% had heard about the NC Birding Trail prior to the survey
- 92.6% plan to use the NC Birding Trail regional guides to plan future birding trips in NC

6. The Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail, the oldest birding trail project in the country, consists of 300 distinct wildlife-viewing sites spread among more than 40 coastal Texas counties. In 1999, Eubanks and Stoll conducted an economic impact study of the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail. They found that:

- Travelers devoted an average of 31 days/year to birding on the trail.
- Their most recent trip lasted 8.7 days and 7.6 nights.
- Travelers on the trail averaged expenditures of \$78.50/person/day, within the region.
- Only 4.6% of travelers on the trail were residents within the region.

Citations

Cordell, H. K., T. L. Eubanks, C. Betz, G. T. Green, B. Stephens, S. Mou. (2007). *National Survey on Recreation and the Environment: Bird Watching Trends in the United States, 1994-2006*. USDA Forest Service, Southern Research Station.
<http://warnell.forestry.uga.edu/nrrt/nsre/Nsre/birding0807.pdf>

Eubanks, T. and Stoll, J. R. (1999). *Avitourism in Texas: Two studies of birders in Texas and their potential support for the proposed World Birding Center*. Report to Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, contract #44467.

Outdoor Industry Foundation (2006). *The Active Outdoor Recreation Economy: a \$730 billion contribution to the U.S. Economy*. Outdoor Industry Foundation.

US Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service. (2007) *2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, National Overview*. Washington, DC.: US Government Printing Office.
http://federalasst.fws.gov/Subpages/NationalSurvey/2006_Survey.htm

North Carolina tourism statistics - 2007

- NC is the 7th most visited state in the United States
- The vast majority of travelers come by car

For current tourism research, visit the NC Department of Commerce at:

www.nccommerce.com/en/TourismServices/PromoteTravelAndTourismIndustry/TourismResearch/



II. Birders as Clients

What's the difference between a bird watcher and a birder (and between bird watching and birding)?

Most people who aren't distinctly familiar with the hobby would probably use the terms birder and bird watcher interchangeably, but people who are serious about their hobby have a different view. Over time, these two terms have come to mean the difference in commitment and enthusiasm.

For years, the joke was that bird watchers were "little old ladies in tennis shoes" but that is certainly not the current state of affairs. Bird watching has come a long way during its long history, and the term "birder" itself, in the evolution of its meaning, reflects the change in our attitude toward birds. For centuries, a birder was someone who killed birds, usually for sport or for food. Shakespeare used the term in this sense. The modern meaning of the term arose in the 1940s, as bird watching became an increasingly popular pastime.

These days, "birder" is a term used about, and by, those people who are serious and committed to the hobby of observing birds in their natural habitat. A serious birder will tell you they do much more than just "watch" birds! They look for feather colors, patterns, size; they listen for songs and calls; they observe behavior and they study flight patterns, etc. You might start bird watching as you begin to pay attention to the birds that visit your back yard feeders, but when you're to the point that you're buying quality optics, making special trips to see particular species, or planning your vacations around bird migrations, then you've become a birder!

The evolution of a birder

What is that bird? This is where bird watching may change to birding, as you become interested in finding out exactly what bird you just saw. First, you'll need a field guide or reference book to help with identification. After that, you may think "I need some binoculars to get a better view," and then "A spotting scope would really be great, since it's too far away to identify with binoculars." Once hooked, birders want all kinds of books and information to satisfy their curiosity and quest to see new species. But that's not all; they also want to find more and more birds so they begin to travel to destinations farther from home – many of them come to North Carolina!

Listing - Once you've gotten into the fun and challenge of identifying birds, the next step is to keep a record of what you have seen. This is where listing starts, and for most birders, the most important list is a "life list" - a list of all the birds seen in one's lifetime. But listing is far more than just about a life list. It is a way of keeping track of observations, or of organizing a vast number of experiences and ensuring they are not lost.



What's the appeal of birding?

- **Birds are some of the most beautiful and accessible animals on earth.** Birds are literally everywhere. It's hard not to appreciate birds if you appreciate nature.
- **Birding gets you into the natural world.** Birding has grown in appeal alongside a whole host of other outdoor activities. It fulfills our curiosity about the natural world and provides an opportunity to discover new sights and sounds.
- **There are a tremendous variety of birds.** Worldwide, there are over 9,700 bird species. There are 2,041 species in North America, and the official NC bird list exceeds 460 species.
- **Birds exhibit a vast array of different behaviors and personalities.** Just watch the birds in your own back yard to see this – the loud Blue Jay, the curious Carolina Wren, the cautious Downy Woodpecker.
- **Birding takes you to great places!** Birding can involve a great deal of travel and is an excellent excuse to see new parts of the world. You can find birding tour operators for almost any part of the world. Many of the best places for birds are also some of the most beautiful places on earth and that includes North Carolina. If you want to meet someone who knows every hidden treasure in a new location, just find a local birder!
- **Birding is a challenge.** It is generally a leisurely and relaxing hobby, but birding also gives us the challenge to identify and learn about unfamiliar species. The key challenge is to identify the birds you see, and to find and identify particular birds you want to see. Birding grows from being an interest to being a skill. The skill of finding and identifying birds involves knowledge about the habits, plumage, shape and calls of a bird, as well as the habitat where it lives. The more one gets to know about birds, the better birder they become.
- **Birding is sociable.** Most birders are highly sociable and spend a great deal of time discussing birds with other birders. Many birding trips involve at least two people and many birding tours involve groups of from 8-15 people. Birders love to talk about what they have seen, as shown by the increasing number of on-line birding list serves where folks can share their observations. Birders may also share their experiences about the local food, lodging and hospitality.

The more birders search for new birds to add to their list, the more they travel. These birders are the target audience to benefit local communities when they use the NCBT. You might view the NCBT as a self-serve travel planner for birders and other nature-based tourists.

Birding facts for NC

- North Carolina can claim more than 460 species on our official bird list; some birds live here year-round, others pass through during their annual migrations north and south, still others only breed or over-winter here.
- North Carolina is a birding hot-spot due to the huge diversity of habitats in our state – everything from coastal beaches up through high Appalachian peaks - and due to our position on the east coast, within the Atlantic Flyway for many migratory species.



Birding 101

Learning the skills to identify and study birds takes time, practice and patience. To learn more, join a local birding club to become involved and improve your birding skills.

Identification - For a great basic lesson on how to identify birds that will give you the ability to talk to and relate to your birder clients, visit the Cornell Lab of Ornithology – All About Birds Website and take Birding 1, 2, 3 (<http://www.allaboutbirds.org/birdingbasics>).

Field guides – There are many different birding field guides available. One of the most acclaimed is the Sibley field guide series. Pick up a copy of *The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America*, by David Allen Sibley. And keep it handy and visible; it's a great conversation starter for clients or visitors.

Gear guide – Optics are a very personal choice because of many factors, such as face shape and size, inter-eye distance, eyeglasses, where you want to use them, and price range. Our best advice, if you're looking to purchase optics, is to try out many different styles and purchase the best you can afford; a good fit will last for years. A quick Google search for "how to select binoculars and spotting scopes" should land you plenty of on-line advice. The NCBT does not endorse any particular companies or products. The following Websites provide good information on learning more about birding optics:

www.betterviewdesired.com
www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/gear/scopes/sc_review

Ethics – As with any activity that becomes popular, birding brings with it a set of potential concerns and issues regarding human impacts on birds. The American Birding Association has developed a guide to Birding Etiquette & Ethics, <http://www.aba.org/about/ethics.html/>.

Birding Trails

As of 2008, more than 36 states have birding or wildlife trails. State and local officials realize the potential of nature-based tourism to bring significant economic impacts to local economies and to help promote local conservation and stewardship of natural resources. For more information on birding trails around the country, visit:

- American Birding Association: www.americanbirding.org/resources/birdingtrails.html
- National Audubon Society: www.audubon.org/

Bird organizations and clubs in North Carolina

- Audubon North Carolina: www.ncaudubon.org/
 - Look under Chapters for local Audubon clubs
- Carolina Bird Club: www.carolinabirdclub.org/
 - Look under Links for local birding clubs



III. Enhancing your Business and Community for Birders

This section focuses on the tourism experience, that is, the activities, actions and experiences that a visiting birder hopes to enjoy while they travel. First, we review some general principles of tourism and customer service, applicable to any sector of the industry.

What is the most important outcome for a tourism experience??

Produce happy and satisfied customers. A satisfied customer can give you free advertising through positive word of mouth and may return as a repeat customer.

How do I produce happy and satisfied customers? Offer a superior tourism product. Set yourself apart from other tourist opportunities.

Focus on the experience. People vacation to enjoy an experience. An experience is influenced by tangible things such as customer service, activities, meals, accommodations, but also by intangible things, like first impressions and memories.

How can I improve the experience for my clients? Customer Service! Provide excellent customer service, including both service quality and customer satisfaction. This means training your staff to uphold a standard of service and doing your research to understand and cater to the needs of your clientele, in this case, birders.

- *Common customer service complaints*
 - Blatant dishonesty, unfairness
 - Rudeness, disrespect, harsh behavior
 - Broken promises (scheduled events canceled)
 - The “I just work here” attitude – powerless employees
 - Waiting in lines, not enough employees
 - Auto-pilot employees; no eye contact, no emotion
 - Poor communication about how a problem will be solved
 - Unwillingness to make extra effort or help customers
 - Employees who don’t know the answers to common questions
 - Misplaced priorities – employees ignoring customers, conducting personal business in front of customers
- *Rudeness cost to business*
 - In a survey of 1,281 business professionals conducted by ETICON, Inc.(1999), 80% reported an increase in rudeness in business over time and 58% reported they take their business elsewhere when they encounter rudeness.
- *First impressions matter*
 - Make sure employees are dressed appropriately and trained in the standard you expect



- Make sure your front office (storefront, lobby, etc) is clean, organized and welcoming
- Courtesy counts; discourtesy detracts
- Be effective in both your verbal and nonverbal communication. Choose your words carefully, monitor tone, add 'welcoming' words, and keep the conversation professional. Apply these rules to in-person, telephone, and email communications.
- *Telephone and Email Etiquette*
 - From the first hello to goodbye, your business is reflected in the way a call is handled. Learn and practice good telephone skills and teach them to your employees.
 - Netiquette is the latest word to describe email etiquette. Email is another reflection on your business and community. Be sure you are handling correspondence quickly and professionally.
 - Many sources of help and training for both telephone and email etiquette are available on-line.

The importance of feedback. Feedback is essential to know if your customers are satisfied or dissatisfied. It can also be a source of ideas for new things you should start, others you should stop and good things that should be continued. Start, Stop, Continue - these questions will help you solicit customer feedback to assess current operations.

Important questions to ask of your customers

1. What is the most beneficial part of our service?
2. What is the least beneficial part of our service?
3. Did you receive from us what you were seeking?
4. Did we deliver the type and quality of service you desired?
5. What are the most important ways we could improve?
6. Are there services we did not provide you that you wish we did?
7. Do you believe you received good value?
8. Is our service good enough that you would recommend us to a friend?

Top 10 Customer Service Pointers

1. Listen to your customers and build customer loyalty
2. Follow through on customer feedback
3. Make customers feel important and appreciated
4. Sell customers what they need
5. Emphasize quality of products and services
6. Know where things are; show off your products and services
7. Educate staff on the importance of quality service
8. Treat your employees well
9. Sell more than your products and services, sell yourself!
10. Promote your business 24/7

Visitor surveys.

Surveys can be an important tool to assist in understanding your customer base and for developing marketing strategies. (See Appendix B for sample business and community visitor surveys).



Cooperative Marketing

Cooperative marketing combines creative and financial resources to collectively market a destination. When individual business or community enterprises join forces with others to pool shared resources, their collective marketing dollars can be used more efficiently.

Benefits of cooperative marketing

- Extends marketing resources through partnerships (i.e., cost-effective advertising)
- Supports local marketing strategies to increase tourism
- Provides incentives and opportunity for marketing growth and improvement
- Enhances industry partnerships

Use the NC Birding Trail in your cooperative marketing strategies: “We’re located near X site(s) on the NC Birding Trail!”

Tourists want packaged information, so cooperative marketing is a great way to give them ‘one-stop-shopping’ – all the necessary arrangements and services. Tourists also want easily accessible information.

Marketing pointers

- Develop the necessary marketing materials (brochures, a Website, maps, signage)
 - Is a link to your business found on your county or community tourism Website?
If not, contact them to find out how to get connected!
- Pursue media and public relations opportunities
 - Free media coverage, media releases
 - Familiarization tours
- Work with local organizations
 - Volunteer with or become a member of your local Chamber of Commerce
 - Volunteer with or become a member of a local birding club
 - Get to know your local cooperative extension, economic development, arts council, tourism, and visitor center staff
 - Volunteer for, donate to, and/or sponsor local organizations and events
- Group tours, meetings, conferences
 - Do you have unique opportunities for meeting facilities?
 - Could your destination/cooperative be part of a group tour?
 - Consider church groups, boy scouts, 4-H, business retreats, senior travel
- Promote your community!
 - Similar businesses or nearby communities aren’t competition; they are part of the overall tourism experience.
- Remember that....
 - Tourists need a reason to travel – the more there is to do in an area, the more appealing the place becomes
 - Tourists must spend time in a destination – the more appealing a place becomes, the longer a tourists is likely to stay
 - Tourists must spend money – the longer tourists stay, the more money they spend.



IV. Enhancing your Business and Community for Birds

What does bird conservation have to do with your business or community? Everything! Here's how.....

- There is a huge market for wildlife-watching and nature-based tourism in the US, and specifically in NC. This means that people are spending money to travel in search of wildlife and other nature-based experiences (paddling, camping, hiking). And once they're in an area, the longer they stay, the more impact their stay has on the local economy.
- Birds and habitats at sites on the NCBT are the "hook", or the attraction, that can entice nature-travelers and birders to a community.
- Protecting and enhancing those resources can, in turn, attract more birders, who will spend more money in your local economy.
- But if an area's natural resources (the attraction) are degraded or lost, so too is the nature-based tourism potential.

Nature-based tourism enables communities to thrive economically, while preserving and restoring the resources on which the travel and tourism industry and local communities depend. In response to the fact that nature-based tourism and birding is such a growing market segment, many businesses involved in the travel industry have a new incentive to reevaluate their model of operations, and to develop sustainable practices that are desirable for their local communities, beneficial to the economy, and good for the natural world.

You can do a lot to generate a conservation ethic built around your business, community and local resources by "thinking globally and acting locally" – taking care of the natural environment that makes your home and community unique.

What's the global connection?

Migration. Migration refers to the regular seasonal journeys undertaken by many groups of animals, often in response to changes in food or habitat availability, or weather. Birds can undertake especially long-distance migrations, because of their ability to fly. Some birds migrate thousands of miles in a single year, from breeding grounds in northern Canada to wintering grounds in South America. Many birds that breed in North Carolina in the spring and summer fly south for the winter to the tropics of Central America. These long-distance travelers must rely upon the availability of food and habitat all along their migratory routes to survive the journey. The conservation of such species relies upon the management of key habitats and stopover sites along the entire flyway, hence the "global connection."



Bird Conservation

For more information on bird migration, visit the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center:

<http://nationalzoo.si.edu/scbi/migratorybirds/default.cfm>

The National Audubon Society's Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program helps to identify areas that are vital to birds and other wildlife: <http://www.audubon.org/bird/IBA/>

Click on the map to see where North Carolina's IBAs are located.

Partners in Flight is an international organization dedicated to bird conservation. For more information on Partners in Flight, visit <http://www.partnersinflight.org/>

Shade Grown Coffee: Most industrial coffee plantations are planted in areas cleared of the forest canopy (sun grown coffee), which means that natural habitat was lost in order to grow the coffee. But coffee can be grown under the shade of existing trees and without the loss of habitat, as shade-grown coffee. You, as a consumer, have a choice when you buy your ground coffee or beans. Shade-grown coffee is better for the birds because it keeps bird habitat intact. If you have clients who are bird-lovers, they will appreciate your taking this step to aid in bird habitat conservation.

Two North Carolina coffee roasters sell shade-grown, bird-friendly coffee. Visit them at:

Counter Culture Coffee: <http://www.counterculturecoffee.com/>

Larry's Beans: <http://larrysbeans.com>

For more information about shade-grown coffee, visit:

<http://nationalzoo.si.edu/scbi/migratorybirds/coffee/>

<http://www.fws.gov/birds/documents/hr-shadecoffee.pdf>

Where do I begin? Almost anything you can do to bring a little bit of nature to your home, workplace, or community will have a positive impact, from improving employee morale, to getting others to take notice of how nice your space looks. Here are some ideas that can help make your home, business, or community friendlier to birds and wildlife:

- Plant a window box or other planters with nectar-flowers
- Landscape with native plants that produce fruits or seeds and provide food for wildlife
- Use alternatives to pesticides whenever possible
- Maintain bird feeders and bird baths
- Keep your cats indoors
- Join a local conservation organization to get involved and stay informed about conservation issues in your area



Here are some organizations and programs to check out for other great ideas and free information to enhance your business and community for birds:

NC Cooperative Extension

(<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/nreos/wild/wildlife/>)

The NC Cooperative Extension has produced a number of useful guides related to backyard wildlife and habitat.

- Landscaping for Wildlife with Native Plants,
- Managing Backyards and Other Urban Habitats for Birds
- Butterflies in your Backyard

Audubon at Home Program (<http://athome.audubon.org/>)

The Audubon at Home Program includes information and guides to healthy homes, yards, schools, neighborhoods, and more.

- Creating a Healthy Yard
- An Invitation to a Healthy Neighborhood
- An Invitation to a Healthy Schoolyard

NC Wildlife Federation (<http://www.ncwf.org/Habitat%20Programs/index.php>)

The NC Wildlife Federation coordinates a number of habitat certification programs that can help you build a wildlife-friendly habitat in your backyard, school, workplace, or place of worship.

- Backyard Wildlife Habitat
- Wildlife and Industry Together (WAIT)
- Schoolyard Habitat
- Fellowship Actions Improving the Habitat (FAITH)

Cornell Lab of Ornithology (<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/Page.aspx?pid=1478>)

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology has become a leader in organizing and coordinating “citizen science” programs with great success. If you would like to get involved and become your own citizen scientist, check out some of these programs:

- Project FeederWatch
- Great Backyard Bird Count
- The Birdhouse Network
- Classroom BirdWatch
- House Finch Disease Survey
- NestWatch
- Birds in Forested Landscapes
- Species Atlas Project
- eBird

NC Birding Trail (<http://www.ncbirdingtrail.org>)

For links to a number of bird and wildlife related informational and educational resources, search under the Other Resources menu.



V. Expanding Your Business Horizons

Check out this free on-line resource from Texas Agricultural Extension Service and see how you can apply their advice to North Carolina!

Establishing a Birding-Related Business – a resource guide. By D. Scott and A. Callahan, 2000. www.agmrc.org/media/cms/birding_23AB74513640A.pdf

Scott and Callahan make the important point that within the group of people who consider themselves birders, there is still a wide range of self-characterization, from those who consider themselves generalists to those who consider themselves serious birders.

Here are some other tips from their guide:

- Your business must have a strong customer orientation
- You must know the preferences of your customers
- Subscribe to birding magazines and newsletters
- Attend birding festivals to meet other businesses
- Visit birding-related Websites
- Think about different segments of birders and how you would market to them differently (serious vs. generalist, etc)
- Develop a product “package” – as mentioned before, packaged tours or trips are appealing to all travelers
- Understand what the true product is – the experience!

How can you expand your own business horizons?

- Guide services – can you offer (or partner with someone else who offers) guide services? This will require someone with expert and local knowledge about their subject.
- Retail services – can you expand your retail offerings to include bird-related products, such as bird feeders, bird houses, field guides, nature-related books, crafts, etc.
- Education/information displays – can you develop or provide brochures, handouts, flyers, books that would be of interest to your clients?
- Festivals and events – do some research to find out if there are any local or regional events or festivals that you can participate in, to advertise your services, meet other like-minded businesses, and learn more about the people who attend such events. *Wings Over Water* is an annual birding festival on the Outer Banks each November (<http://www.wingsoverwater.org/>).



Greening Your Business

Birders and nature-based tourists are environmentally conscious. They will appreciate any actions you can take to demonstrate your commitment to the environment, and will likely go out of their way to patronize businesses and communities that stress environmental awareness. Plus, using “green” business practices can save you money and resources.

- Practice sustainable business habits
 - Spend your money locally, support local businesses
 - Hire locally
 - Conserve resources
 - Encourage walking, biking
- Recycle and use recycled products (including paper products)
- Reduce/eliminate your use of Styrofoam or non-recyclable products
- Use non-toxic cleaning products
- Use energy-saving appliances and devices
 - Compact fluorescent light bulbs
 - Water-saving shower heads and toilets
- Reuse towels, bed linens
- Buy in bulk to reduce packaging waste
- Compost
- Landscape with native vegetation
- Keep a list of wildlife seen nearby
- Maintain bird feeders, bird houses in safe and appropriate areas

And be sure to TELL your customers how you are being **green**.

- Use it in your advertising
- Create table-tents, brochures or posted lists of your green habits
- Encourage your customers to practice green habits

Expanding Your Horizons in North Carolina

- Events
 - Local events such as Earth Day, Arbor Day, International Migratory Bird Day, Great Backyard Bird Count, Christmas Bird Count, Trails Day and Tourism Day all provide an avenue to get involved
- Media
 - Local and regional TV, radio and newspapers will often publicize local events. Invite the media to see what your business and community have to offer.
- Website
 - Local city and county Websites can be a valuable resource to link your Website for broader exposure. Investigate all possible links and be sure your Website is always current and accessible!



VI. Knowing your Community Resources

“So what is there to do around here?” We’ve all heard the typical answer - *“not much”* or *“nothing”*- but if you really know your community, you’ll be able to say “there is a lot to do around here!”

See how well you know your community and the type of information that visiting tourists - including birders - might want to know about. Can you answer the following questions?

1. Where is the tourism office/welcome center located?
2. Where can I buy post card stamps?
3. Where can I go to send an email message?
4. What is the population of this town?
5. Where are the local eateries?
6. Where is the closest grocery store?
7. What outdoor recreation is available? Birding? Kayaking/canoeing? Biking?
Other?
8. Where are the three closest sites on the NC Birding Trail from here?
9. Are there any unusual or interesting birds in this area?
10. Where is the nearest hospital?
11. Where can I purchase souvenirs?
12. Where are local galleries for handmade crafts and artwork?
13. Are there any other trails in this area?
14. Where can I go for a late afternoon walk?
15. What are the historical and/or cultural attractions in this area?
16. What are the local festivals/events, parades, fairs and other annual attractions?
17. How much rain do you usually get?
18. What is the average temperature here?
19. What famous or unique things can you tell me about your community?
20. What is the local newspaper and where can I buy one?
21. Where can I get a map of the community?
22. What lodging options are available around here?



Developing a Plan of Action

Use the information and resources provided in this guide to help you get started creating your own plan of action and community resource list. And talk to other people in your community about your ideas!

- What tourism assets does your community already have?
- What types of assets would be a nice addition (e.g., visitor centers, galleries, museums, nature centers, parks, trails, restaurants, bed & breakfasts, motels, outfitters, etc.)?
- Who are some potential partners that you could work with to promote nature-based tourism in your community?
- Can you think of any cooperative marketing avenues for your business or community?
- What can you do to make your business or community more birder-friendly?
- Can you develop a plan of action to make modifications or changes in any of the following areas?
 - Employee training, public interactions
 - Website/marketing
 - Media
 - Events
 - Conservation practices
 - Appearance



VII. Are you a Birder Friendly Business or Community?

So, what do birders want in an experience?

It would be dangerous to categorize all birders the very same way, but here are some behaviors or tendencies that are true of many birders and nature-tourists:

- “The early bird gets the worm” – birders often keep very early hours, in order to be out in a particular habitat when the birds are most active – early morning.
 - Could you think about providing a breakfast alternative for early-risers, or something quick and easy for them to take along as a morning snack?
 - What about late check out options, for those returning from a morning outing?
- Serve shade-grown coffee. For more information, see page 12.
- Green business practices – as people who appreciate the environment, birders will also appreciate measures you can take to make your business more eco-friendly. For more about green business practices, see page 15.
- Ask them – build upon your ability to cater to your target market by focusing on customer feedback and by making a commitment to improve.

Having completed reading and studying this document, can you show you are a birder friendly business or community by correctly answering the following questions?

- f* What is the NC Birding Trail Website?
- f* Name three things you can provide for birds to attract them to your area/habitat?
- f* What makes North Carolina a unique location for attracting birds?
- f* What is the number one thing you can do to make the local habitat safer for birds?
- f* What areas of North Carolina are included on the NC Birding Trail?
- f* Name four organizations, other than the NC Birding Trail, where you can get birding information.
- f* List two common customer service complaints.
- f* List one way you can participate in cooperative marketing.
- f* List two ways you can “green” your business or community.
- f* What is the most important outcome for a tourism business?
- f* List a question you could ask to get customer feedback.
- f* List a festival or event in which you can participate.

The success of every business and community lies in the ability of the owners and citizens to be proactive in their focus, dedication and entrepreneurial skills, and to look for growth and expansion opportunities. The information provided in this publication is designed to open up new avenues for exploration using the NC Birding Trail. We hope as you become Birder Friendly, you’ll find new directions to explore and perhaps some day we’ll see you on the Birding Trail.

Our best wishes for your success!



Resources

Binoculars and Scopes

- www.betterviewdesired.com
- www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/gear/scopes/sc_review

Birding

- Cornell Lab of Ornithology: Birding 1, 2, 3, www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/birding123/
- American Birding Association: Principles of Birding Ethics, www.aba.org/about/ethics.html

Birding Clubs in NC

- Carolina Bird Club: www.carolinabirdclub.org/
- Audubon North Carolina: www.ncaudubon.org/

Birding-related Business

- Establishing a Birding-Related Business – a resource guide (TX Agricultural Extension Service, Scott and Callahan, 2000), www.agmrc.org/media/cms/birding_23AB74513640A.pdf
- Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail – Visitor Information for Bed and Breakfast Operators (Appendix C)

Books

- *The Sibley Guide to Birds of Eastern North America*, David Allen Sibley, 2003, Alfred A. Knopf

Customer Service

- Email Etiquette (Online Writing Lab, Purdue University, 2002), http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/pw/p_emaillett.html

Educational Resources

- Audubon at Home Program, www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/index.html
 - Creating a Healthy Yard
 - An Invitation to a Healthy Neighborhood
 - An Invitation to a Healthy Schoolyard
- Cornell Lab of Ornithology, www.birds.cornell.edu/
 - Project FeederWatch
 - Great Backyard Bird Count
 - The Birdhouse Network
 - Classroom BirdWatch
 - House Finch Disease Survey



- NestWatch
- Birds in Forested Landscapes
- Species Atlas Project
- eBird
- NC Birding Trail, www.ncbirdingtrail.org
- NC Cooperative Extension, <http://cnr.ncsu.edu/fer/ext/index.html>
 - Landscaping for Wildlife with Native Plants,
 - Managing Backyards and Other Urban Habitats for Birds
 - Butterflies in your Backyard
- NC Wildlife Federation, www.ncwf.org/Habitat%20Programs/index.php
 - Backyard Wildlife Habitat
 - Wildlife and Industry Together (WAIT)
 - Schoolyard Habitat
 - Fellowship Actions Improving the Habitat (FAITH)
- Shade Coffee and Migratory Birds (International Migratory Bird Day, 2001), www.fws.gov/birds/documents/hr-shadecoffee.pdf
- Top Ten Things Landowners Can Do For Birds – Partners in Flight/USFWS (Appendix D)
- The Piedmont Yardstick Workbook – Carolina Yards & Neighborhoods (NC Cooperative Extension and Piedmont Triad Water Quality Partnership); <http://guilford.ces.ncsu.edu/content/carolinayards/>



Appendix A. Birder Friendly Business and Community Training Program Locations, 2006-2008.

Year	City	County	Date
2006	Plymouth	Washington	6/25/2006
2006	Wilmington	New Hanover	9/25/2006
2006	Columbia	Tyrrell	11/6/2006
2007	Bolivia	Brunswick	2/8/2007
2007	Harkers Island	Carteret	3/22/2007
2007	Salisbury	Rowan	4/24/2007
2007	Pittsboro	Chatham	6/21/2007
2007	Fayetteville	Cumberland	8/16/2007
2007	Scotland Neck	Halifax	9/13/2007
2007	Kitty Hawk	Dare	10/18/2007
2008	Wilkesboro	Wilkes	2/7/2008
2008	Shelby	Cleveland	3/11/2008
2008	Stecoah	Graham	4/2/2008
2008	Reidsville	Rockingham	5/6/2008
2008	Mt. Airy	Surry	5/7/2008
2008	Wilkesboro	Wilkes	6/3/2008
2008	Newton	Catawba	8/19/2008
2008	Highlands	Macon	9/23/2008
2008	Kenansville	Duplin	11/5/2008



Appendix B. Example Visitor Surveys for Communities and Businesses.

EXAMPLE VISITOR SURVEY FOR COMMUNITIES

Thank you for taking the time to complete this short survey! The information you provide will be completely confidential and will help us better serve our customers. We appreciate your business and your time.

Your Community Name Here

What is your zip code?

Is your visit to this community:

- ☐ part of a vacation
- ☐ part of a bird watching trip
- ☐ part of a trip to visit friends or family
- ☐ a day excursion
- ☐ other (please elaborate)

How did you first learn about this area?

- ☐ road sign or billboard
- ☐ recommendation or word of mouth
- ☐ local tourism map or guide
- ☐ NC Birding Trail website
- ☐ visitor center
- ☐ read about it
- ☐ other (please elaborate)

Please estimate how much you will spend in the area on this trip:

- ☐ < \$10
- ☐ \$10-50
- ☐ \$50-100
- ☐ \$100-200
- ☐ >\$200

Will you come back to visit again?

- ☐ definitely
- ☐ probably not
- ☐ don't know

Please tell us what attracted you to this area (Check ALL that apply)

- ☐ just stopped by
- ☐ to shop for unique local arts and crafts
- ☐ to find a specific bird species at a NC Birding Trail site
- ☐ to explore the area's culture and history
- ☐ to explore an area I've not visited before
- ☐ to get out of town
- ☐ to do something different
- ☐ to enjoy outdoor recreation
- ☐ other reasons (please elaborate)

How many people are in your party?

- ☐ Ages 0-7
- ☐ Ages 8-18
- ☐ Ages 19-40
- ☐ Ages 40-60
- ☐ Ages 60 +

What did you like best about your visit?

What recommendations do you have to help us make your experience more enjoyable?

How long are you visiting this area?

Please drop this card in the collection box after you have completed it.



EXAMPLE VISITOR SURVEY FOR BUSINESSES

Thank you for taking the time to complete this short survey! The information you provide will be completely confidential and will help us better serve our customers. We appreciate your business and your time.

Your Business Name Here

What is your zip code?

Is your visit:

- _____ part of a vacation
- _____ part of a bird watching trip
- _____ part of a trip to visit friends or family
- _____ a day excursion
- _____ other (please elaborate)

How did you first learn about us? road sign

- _____ or billboard recommendation or
- _____ word of mouth
- _____ local tourism map or guide
- _____ NC Birding Trail website
- _____ visitor center
- _____ read about it
- _____ other (please elaborate)

Please estimate how much you spent in the area on this trip:

- _____ \$10-20
- _____ \$20-50
- _____ \$50-100
- _____ >\$100

Will you come back to visit again?

- _____ definitely
- _____ probably not
- _____ don't know

Please tell us why you decided to visit us (Check ALL that apply)

- _____ just stopped by
- _____ to purchase local crafts
- _____ to see what was available
- _____ to experience something new
- _____ to get out of town
- _____ to do something different
- _____ to get valuable or unique products
- _____ other reasons (please elaborate)

How many people are in your party?

- _____ Ages 0-7
- _____ Ages 8-18
- _____ Ages 19-40
- _____ Ages 40-60
- _____ Ages 60 +

What did you like best about us?

What recommendations do you have to help us make your experience more enjoyable?

How long are you visiting this area?

Please drop this card in the collection box after you have completed it.



Appendix C. Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail – Visitor Information for Bed and Breakfast Operators.

Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail – Visitor Information for Bed and Breakfast Operators

Visitor Demographics

- Couples in their 50's & 60's
 - 65% > 45 years old (2003 VTC study)
- Retired or close to retirement
- Kids gone, Empty-nesters
- College Educated
- Very Internet Literate (shop/travel planning)
- Average Annual Income: 78% > \$50K/yr, 54% > \$75K/yr. (2001 USFWS survey of hunting, fish and wildlife watching)
- 61% stay 2-6 nights, 18% > than 6 nights
 - \$566 - mean spending per travel party

They want:

- Hotels and Motels (59% of trip expenditures go towards food and lodging)
- 6% stay in B&B's (compared to 1.5% of all travelers)
- Clean Modern Bathrooms
- Restaurants (local places better than chains)
- Information/Attractions dealing with local history and culture

Additional Information (All statistics are compared to the average Virginia visitor)

- Birders are more likely to Travel in Spring before summer vacation season
- Birders average a higher rate of repeat visitation by 4%
- Birders, on average, spend two more nights on trips
- Birders are more than twice as likely to take extended stays in VA
- Birders spend nearly 50% fewer nights in hotel/motels
- Nearly 18% of Birders spend over \$1000 on a trip, compared to less than 10% of average visitors
- Birders are twice as likely to use the Virginia Travel Guide and three times as likely to use the VTC web site
- Birders are three times as likely to use visitor information centers

Top 15 states of origin are:

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Virginia | 9. Kentucky |
| 2. North Carolina | 10. California |
| 3. Maryland | 11. South Carolina |
| 4. New Jersey | 12. Tennessee |
| 5. Pennsylvania | 13. Delaware |
| 6. Ohio | 14. Georgia |
| 7. New York | 15. Texas |
| 8. Florida | |

This information was developed by the Virginia Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries Watchable Wildlife Program, Richmond, VA. For more information, contact Jeff Trollinger at jeff.trollinger@dgif.virginia.gov



One Possible Day in the life of a birdwatching guest

1 hour before sunrise – Leave for birding site

(They would generally like juice, coffee, muffins, bottled water – DO NOT HOLD THEM UP FOR A FULL BREAKFAST!! *This comment from several birdwatchers!*)

As of April 11, 2006 Sunrise ~6:30am

5:30am – 6:30am out the door

6:30am – 10am Birdwatching

10am – Noon Look for a place to eat lunch, possibly return to room to freshen up/ask for directions/etc.

1-3pm Come back in to rest, shower, relax

3-6pm Go out to look at local attractions

6-8pm Dinner or dinner theatre

8-9pm Shop, sit and chat

9pm Off to bed!

Things to Consider:

- This group is looking for easy solutions, consider package deals with local restaurants and attractions and offer a complete package highlighting local food, culture, history, and/or artisans.

Since breakfast is not an option:

- Offer self-serve muffins, coffee and fruit set up the night before
- Put small coffee makers in each room so they can make their own
- Provide a bag lunch ready to go in the morning
- Offer a “Bed and Lunch” or “Bed and Dinner” package for birders
- Don’t wait too long in the morning to get necessary work done....your guests will probably return around mid-morning to shortly after lunch and want to chat (*this from a comment from one inn owner who mentioned they couldn’t get anything done in the middle of the day.*)
- Provide resources on local attractions, local artisans, local shops, and other resources unique to your area.
- Your guests may have mud on their shoes when they return, provide instructions up front about where they can remove their shoes when they return (*they will usually be as concerned about your beautiful inn as you are.*)
- Provide field guides, binoculars, and local birding resources for your guests to use either in the inn or from their rooms (depending on your particular setup).
- Consider putting up birdfeeders around the inn. Birdwatchers NEVER STOP watching birds.
- Consider planting a butterfly garden at your inn. This is easy to do, attractive and it is another area of interest for many birders, who often switch to butterfly watching during the warmest part of the day.

Provide a list of birds that have occurred on your property. Many local bird clubs can assist you with this, and it immediately connects you to the local birding network. **NOTE HERE:** Birders have one of the most extensive communication networks in the world! They talk to each other and they often recommend great places to each other!

This information was developed by the Virginia Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries Watchable Wildlife Program, Richmond, VA. For more information, contact Jeff Trollinger at jeff.trollinger@dgif.virginia.gov



Appendix D. Top Ten Things Landowners Can Do for Birds.

Top Ten Things Landowners Can Do For Birds

By John Ann Shearer, US Fish and Wildlife Service
Partners in Flight

10. LEARN about birds.

Nothing will inspire you to take action to help birds more than to educate yourself about them. Learn what they need, where they go, and why they are so important. Become involved in a local bird club. Read books about birds. Listen to tapes and CDs. Put up a bird feeder. Buy bird books and binoculars and head outdoors! Warning: You may get hooked on birds!

9. PROVIDE COVER.

Birds need places to hide or rest. Small birds love brush piles; loosely arranged twigs and limbs that have openings throughout. Be sure your ground birds (like quail) have protection to and from the brush pile. If there is no vegetation around the brush pile, they may get eaten on the way to or from the cover it provides.

8. RECOGNIZE that food plots are like bird feeders.

Many people feel it is important to plant food plots. Food plots can be a great way to concentrate birds in one area for viewing, functioning somewhat like a bird feeder. However, they are not an essential part of bird management. Your efforts may be better spent planting long-lasting native vegetation to serve as cover or food sources.

7. MOW FIELDS ONLY outside of the nesting period.

Birds nest in grasslands and their nests are often destroyed by mowers. If you mow before April 1 or after August 1, then you will protect those nests and maintain good cover for the breeding season. It is also a good idea to keep some grassy or brushy areas around for the winter months for cover.

6. LIMIT CHEMICAL USE.

Pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers can directly impact birds. More often, they may unnecessarily kill the bird's insect prey, which they also need to feed young. Insects and other small animals are especially important when birds are feeding their young. Improperly used chemicals also can run off and impact the quality of water, especially if no vegetative buffers exist. Read pesticide labels carefully and follow directions exactly.

5. PROVIDE A DIVERSITY of habitat types and at all levels.

A diversity of habitats means a diversity of birds. If you have a forest, manage the forest so that sunlight reaches the floor and shrubs and herbaceous vegetation can grow. If you have a grassland, consider maintaining like nature used to, with fire! If you are working with a backyard habitat, plant many species of native trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants. Birds use low, medium and high sites within your landscape.



4. BE MESSY!

Avoid over-mowing, over-pruning, and clean farming. Areas that we often think of as ‘rough looking’ are appealing to birds. They provide food and cover. Let field borders, ditch banks, and fence rows grow up naturally and watch your birds respond! These areas also provide sources of cover and food for small mammals, which are wonderful food for hawks and owls. Leave snags (dead trees) standing. They provide great perching sites, excellent food sources, and even nesting sites for many birds and other animals. You may even want to consider creating a few snags if you have a lot of trees.

3. PLANT NATIVE vegetation.

The best foods for birds usually come from native plants. They also provide the best cover and nesting sites. And natives are generally easier and cheaper to grow and maintain than exotic plants. Plants native to our region are what the birds have evolved with and know how to use best.

2. PROVIDE CLEAN WATER sources.

Though birds do glean some water from vegetation and their food, they usually need open water sources. Naturally occurring water sources like spring seeps, marshes, and shallow wetlands should be preserved. Small ponds and impoundments with a vegetated edge can serve as manmade water sources. Birds like herons find their food in the water. Songbirds are often attracted to bird baths and misters for easy viewing.

And the #1 thing that landowners can do for birds is...

1. KEEP CATS INDOORS!

Over 100 million birds in the United States are killed every year by cats, who have a natural instinct to kill birds and other small mammals no matter how well fed they are by you! Even the presence of a cat outside can cause birds to alter their habits and expend critical energy that may prevent successful breeding. Besides, while outside, cats are exposed to many threats such as disease, cars, getting lost, stolen, poisoned or injured. Cats live longer indoors and birds live longer when cats remain indoors.

