

# New Wave Birder Journey and Quorum Platform Research

## Executive Summary

Recent years have seen birding explode from a niche pastime into a mainstream social-media-driven activity. Research shows that younger generations are driving the boom: a 2024 GetYourGuide survey found that two in five Millennial (42 %) and Gen Z (40 %) leisure travellers booked a guided tour in the previous year <sup>1</sup> and 94 % of those who tried guided tours intend to do so again <sup>2</sup>. Birdwatching tourism is now a US\$66.2 billion global industry (2024) and is projected to reach US\$95.2 billion by 2030 <sup>3</sup>. Millennials and Gen Z value authentic, small-group experiences curated by local experts and discover new hobbies through social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram and the Merlin bird-ID app <sup>4</sup>. Despite the interest, beginners face barriers: stereotypes that birding is for retirees <sup>5</sup>, price sensitivity, and imposter syndrome when interacting with more experienced “listers” <sup>6</sup>.

Trust and inclusivity are central to conversion. Gen Z has broad distrust toward institutions; McKinsey notes that businesses considered “digital trust leaders” are 1.6 times more likely than the average business to see revenue and EBIT growth <sup>7</sup>, and consumers are more willing to pay for higher-quality products from brands they trust. Birding organisations emphasise being intentionally welcoming; Audubon warns that it’s not enough to say birding is for everybody—leaders must use inclusive language, smile, and avoid talking down to newcomers <sup>8</sup> <sup>9</sup>.

For Quorum Tours, the opportunity is to design a mobile-first experience that reflects the social-media aesthetics and inclusivity Gen Z expects, clearly explains the threshold mechanics, and positions guided tours as accessible social experiences rather than elite expeditions. The platform needs to reassure users about value, community and fairness at each step of the journey while combating intimidation and building trust.

## Discovery & Awareness Findings

### Key Insights

Insight	Evidence
<b>Birding’s popularity has surged among young adults and women, propelled by social media.</b>	A TikTok page labelled “#birding” amassed over 340 million views and younger creators now produce most viral birding videos <sup>4</sup> . The PopSugar article notes that feeds are flooded with birding content and the videos “are made by creators who are at least 60–70 years younger than David Attenborough” <sup>10</sup> . InsideHook reports that birding has found footing among hip urban neighbourhoods, with many gentrifiers starting plants on their rooftops and later becoming avid naturalists <sup>11</sup> .

Insight	Evidence
<b>Pandemic and mental-health benefits drove many new birders.</b>	InsideHook quotes field guide author Marc Parnell noting that pandemic restrictions forced individuals outside and into “more self-directed hobbies” and that birds are everywhere, enabling people to experience exciting interactions with wildlife <sup>4</sup> . A Self magazine writer began birding after playing the board game <i>Wingspan</i> during pandemic lockdowns; she liked that birding could be done outdoors without a mask and became part of her self-care routine <sup>12</sup> .
<b>On-ramps include social media, casual games and bird-ID apps.</b>	PopSugar describes how TikTok videos of bird dialects, rare owl sightings and shorebird festivals attract users who previously had no birding interest <sup>10</sup> . Self’s article notes that downloading the Audubon app and setting a modest species-count goal made birding feel accessible <sup>12</sup> . InsideHook highlights the Merlin Bird ID app enabling young birders to identify species instantly, making the hobby more social-media-ready <sup>13</sup> .
<b>Guided tours appeal to millennials and Gen Z.</b>	GetYourGuide’s survey found that two in five Millennial (42 %) and Gen Z (40 %) travellers booked a guided tour in 2023 and 94 % of guided-tour participants plan to do so again <sup>14</sup> . Younger travellers value authentic experiences curated by locals <sup>1</sup> and 69 % of leisure travellers say guided tours give them deeper historical insight into destinations <sup>15</sup> .
<b>Birdwatching tourism is a growing market.</b>	Grand View Research estimates that the global birdwatching tourism market was worth US\$66.2 billion in 2024 and will reach US\$95.2 billion by 2030, with growth driven by sustainable travel and environmental awareness <sup>16</sup> .

## Implications for Quorum

- **Embrace social discovery.** Marketing should leverage Instagram, TikTok and viral-friendly content—short videos of charismatic species, behind-the-scenes looks at tours, and posts using hashtags like #birding. Collaborations with content creators who present birding as stylish, fun and social can attract the “hot-girl hobby” demographic.
- **Highlight mental-health benefits.** Messaging can connect birding tours to self-care, stress relief and outdoor well-being (e.g., “Find your calm with birds”).
- **Promote low-barrier entry points.** Encourage use of free apps (Merlin, Audubon) and board games to build interest. Provide starter resources (species checklists, mini-guides) on Quorum’s homepage to entice newcomers.
- **Frame tours as social experiences.** Position guided tours as a way to meet people with similar interests, not just to build long life-lists.

# Barrier Analysis Findings

## Key Insights

Barrier	Evidence
<b>Perception that birding is for retirees or wealthy hobbyists (“geriatric tinge”).</b>	InsideHook describes how birding has historically been associated with retirees and beige-fanny-pack enthusiasts, making it seem less cool <sup>5</sup> . PopSugar notes that the videos she sees are made by young creators rather than “David Attenborough lookalikes” <sup>10</sup> .
<b>Price sensitivity and budgeting.</b>	The user profile suggests a comfortable spending range of US\$50-500; amounts over US\$1,000 require major justification. Carson College of Business’s 2024 travel trends report found that nearly all Americans expect inflation to affect travel plans and will spend more time budgeting <sup>17</sup> . Younger generations (Gen Z and Millennials) are particularly concerned about budgeting and inflation <sup>18</sup> .
<b>Intimidation and imposter syndrome.</b>	Self’s author admits she did not consider herself outdoorsy and thought birding wasn’t for her; she emphasises that novices don’t need to be expert naturalists <sup>19</sup> . A BirdGuides columnist wrote that she suffered imposter syndrome, jokingly calling herself “thick,” and felt that birding can be male-dominated <sup>6</sup> . Audubon warns that even well-intentioned groups can feel exclusive; inclusive leaders should avoid talking down to novices and should encourage questions <sup>20</sup> .
<b>Fear of not fitting in with serious listers.</b>	InsideHook recalls that some competitive birders made the hobby appear like a “white-whale” obsession, and early portrayals (e.g., the film <i>The Big Year</i> ) showed participants chasing 700 species <sup>11</sup> . Such extreme examples can deter casual hobbyists who just want to enjoy nature.
<b>Uncertainty about the value of guided tours.</b>	Newcomers may assume they can see birds themselves for free and may not realise how guides increase sightings, provide photography opportunities or facilitate access to restricted locations. Quorum’s current pages may not clearly articulate these benefits.
<b>Logistical anxiety and group dynamics.</b>	Travellers care about guide personality: 74 % want guides who are knowledgeable, 64 % want them to be trustworthy, and 52 % value friendliness <sup>21</sup> . Nearly half of travellers prefer small or private group tours <sup>22</sup> . Beginners may worry about being judged or being the only novice in a group.

## Implications for Quorum

- **Normalize entry-level participation.** Use language and imagery showing novices and diverse backgrounds. Feature beginner-friendly tours with clear difficulty indicators.

- **Transparent pricing.** Offer flexible pricing tiers (e.g., shorter walks, half-day trips) and emphasise that payment is only charged when the tour is confirmed. Display total costs up front and compare them to typical entertainment spend.
- **Combat imposter syndrome.** Provide educational resources, encourage questions and highlight that misidentifications are common; adopt Audubon’s “trust but verify” approach <sup>23</sup>.
- **Highlight tour value.** Showcase the expert knowledge, exclusive access, photography tips and community aspects that make guided experiences worth the cost.

## Trust & Comfort Analysis

### Key Insights

Factor influencing trust/comfort	Evidence
<b>Digital trust is critical for Gen Z.</b>	McKinsey reports that public trust in institutions has been low for a decade and that Gen Z exhibits broad distrust toward major institutions; businesses considered “digital trust leaders” are 1.6 times more likely than average to see revenue and earnings growth <sup>7</sup> . Consumers are willing to pay more for high-quality products from trusted brands <sup>7</sup> , indicating that trust can justify higher tour prices.
<b>Inclusive communication is essential.</b>	Audubon emphasises that saying “birding is for everybody” isn’t enough; leaders must intentionally create environments where people feel they belong <sup>8</sup> . This includes checking assumptions about equipment requirements, being kind online, greeting participants by name, and avoiding condescension when correcting misidentifications <sup>24</sup> .
<b>Representation matters.</b>	Newcomers feel more welcome when they see “people like me.” PopSugar notes that the new wave of birding videos features young, diverse creators rather than older white naturalists <sup>10</sup> . Self’s author states that even without being outdoorsy she found birding accessible <sup>19</sup> , signalling to other non-outdoorsy millennials that the hobby is approachable.
<b>User-friendly mobile design influences trust.</b>	Millennials and Gen Z are mobile-first users who expect modern UX comparable to Airbnb or Instagram. They use apps like Merlin and Audubon for identification <sup>13</sup> , and a poor mobile experience can erode trust.
<b>Social proof and guide qualities.</b>	GetYourGuide’s survey shows travellers want knowledgeable (74 %), trustworthy (64 %), friendly (52 %) guides and appreciate a sense of humour (31 %) <sup>21</sup> . Small groups and local guides increase comfort <sup>22</sup> .

### Implications for Quorum

- **Invest in digital trust signals.** Use secure payments, clear language explaining the “conditional commitment” model, and transparent cancellation policies. Display trust badges, partner with reputable conservation organisations, and publish detailed operator credentials.
- **Inclusive imagery and language.** Feature a diversity of ages, genders and ethnicities in photos and testimonials. Encourage operators to share pronouns and highlight inclusive practices.

- **Mobile-first design.** Ensure the website and booking flow mirror the responsiveness and aesthetics of social platforms. Offer sign-in via Google/Instagram to reduce friction.
- **Amplify social proof.** Show reviews from “new birders,” highlight friend groups, and allow users to see who else has conditionally committed. Emphasise guide friendliness and local knowledge.

## First Booking Psychology Findings

### Key Insights

Psychological factor	Evidence
<b>Desire for authentic, curated experiences.</b>	69 % of leisure travellers say guided tours provide deep historical context, 40 % value exploring local cuisine and 28 % like meeting locals <sup>15</sup> . Gen Z and Millennials emphasise experiences over possessions; Quorum tours can satisfy this by focusing on unique species or landscapes and local culture.
<b>Comfort with small group sizes and local guides.</b>	Nearly half of travellers prefer tours with companions (49 %) or small/private groups (48 %), and 68 % seek tours led by local guides <sup>22</sup> . Beginners may fear being the only novice, so seeing group composition and size matters.
<b>Low risk encourages experimentation.</b>	GetYourGuide found that 94 % of travellers who tried guided tours planned to do so again <sup>2</sup> , suggesting that a positive first experience leads to repeat behaviour. Quorum’s threshold mechanism (payment only charged when minimum participants are met) reduces financial risk.
<b>Upfront cost and time commitment influence first bookings.</b>	New wave birders are comfortable spending US\$50–500 but treat US\$1,000+ trips as major decisions. Shorter experiences (half-day or day tours) provide a gentle entry.
<b>Anxieties include being judged, not knowing what to bring and post-booking uncertainty.</b>	Self’s author worried about not being a “nature person” <sup>19</sup> . First-time participants might worry about equipment, clothing, physical difficulty or cancellations.

### Threshold Mechanic (Quorum’s conditional commit)

- **Helps:** reduces fear of paying for a tour that never happens; fosters community by showing others who have committed; can create excitement when the quota nears fulfilment.
- **Hurts:** waiting period introduces uncertainty; novices may forget about their commitment or feel anxious about whether the tour will run; if thresholds are high, tours might never confirm.

### Implications for Quorum

- **Offer starter tours.** Create low-cost, 2–4-hour introductory outings with accessible species and inclusive guides to encourage trial.

- **Show progress toward thresholds.** Visual indicators (progress bars) and notifications can build momentum. Explain the mechanics clearly and emphasise that credit cards are only charged when the tour confirms.
- **Address anxieties post-booking.** Send preparation guides (what to wear, what to expect), offer chat support with tour operators and provide an easy cancellation window.
- **Encourage social participation.** Allow users to invite friends or join group chats once they've committed; emphasise the social aspect to reduce fear of being alone.

## New Wave Birder Journey Map

Stage	Trigger → Next Stage	Information / reassurance needed	Drop-off risk	Current coverage (page)
<b>Unaware of Guided Tours</b>	Casual birding via TikTok, Instagram, Merlin, friends, board games or pandemic walks.	Inspirational content showing that guided tours exist and are fun; messaging that birding isn't just for retirees; accessible price ranges.	People assume birding is DIY only; stereotypes deter interest.	<i>Home</i> page briefly mentions the "synchronisation problem" but doesn't target new birders.
<b>Aware</b>	Sees an ad, social post or friend mentioning Quorum or guided tours.	Clear explanation of what a guided birding tour is, why it's valuable (expert guidance, unique species, photography), and that tours can be short/affordable.	Confusion about whether tours are only for experts; suspicion of scam.	<i>How It Works</i> explains threshold mechanics but not why tours are valuable.
<b>Curious</b>	Clicks to Quorum's website; explores tours index.	Need to see appealing imagery, testimonials from beginners, price filters, and clear species/experience descriptions.	Overwhelmed by choices; unclear filters; perceives tours as too expensive or serious.	<i>Tours Index</i> shows forming/confirmed states but lacks "beginner-friendly" badges or price guidance.
<b>Browsing</b>	Filters by location, species or date.	Transparent pricing, group size, difficulty level; ability to compare tours side by side; trust signals (reviews, operator credentials).	Drop-off if tours appear too pricey, dates inconvenient, or details too technical.	<i>Tours Index</i> provides filters; <i>Operator Public Profile</i> lists credentials; <i>Tour Detail</i> includes species likelihood and logistics.

Stage	Trigger → Next Stage	Information / reassurance needed	Drop-off risk	Current coverage (page)
<b>Considering First Tour</b>	Opens Tour Detail of an appealing trip.	Reassurance about value (what's included), beginner-friendliness, small group sizes, and clear explanation of the threshold mechanic (no charge until confirmed).	Fear of committing funds; worry about not fitting in; uncertainty about equipment.	<i>Tour Detail</i> displays species focus, logistics and commit UI but may use jargon; <i>How It Works</i> explains mechanics separately.
<b>Overcoming Hesitation</b>	Reads reviews/ testimonials or sees friends join; maybe a discount or low-threshold tour.	Social proof from people like them; clear answer to "Do I need binoculars?"; customer support chat; flexible cancellation.	Abandons if reviews are from hardcore birders; if cancellation policy is hidden; if threshold seems unlikely to be reached.	<i>Operator Profile</i> contains reviews but distribution unclear; no explicit beginner-oriented testimonials.
<b>First Commitment</b>	Clicks "conditionally commit" and enters payment info.	Assurance about payment hold, refund policy, secure checkout; progress bar showing how many more participants are needed; ability to share with friends to help confirm.	Second thoughts about price or security; friction in payment flow.	<i>Commitment path</i> <i>UI</i> exists but may lack progress indicator or friend-invite feature.
<b>Waiting Period</b>	Receives email/ notification; monitors threshold.	Regular updates on progress toward confirmation; reminders of the value of the tour; option to cancel easily.	Loses interest; forgets about booking; sees threshold slow to fill and cancels.	No dedicated page; communication may not be emphasised.

Stage	Trigger → Next Stage	Information / reassurance needed	Drop-off risk	Current coverage (page)
<b>Tour Experience</b>	Tour confirms and runs.	High-quality experience with friendly, knowledgeable guide; inclusive environment; opportunities to socialise and capture photos.	Poor guide behaviour; feeling judged or left out; logistical mishaps.	Quorum's platform cannot directly control the experience but can curate operators and gather feedback.
<b>Repeat Consideration</b>	Enjoyed first tour; receives follow-up from Quorum.	Post-tour survey; personalised recommendations for next tours; community engagement to share photos and stories; reward points or referral credits.	If follow-up is absent or recommendations are irrelevant, the user may forget or choose other providers.	Currently no public-facing page covers post-tour engagement.

## Gap Analysis

### Critical Gaps (must address)

1. **Lack of beginner-friendly messaging and imagery.** The current pages mainly describe mechanics and logistics. They do not explicitly say "New to birding? You're welcome here" or show diverse, novice participants enjoying tours.
2. **Insufficient explanation of tour value beyond species lists.** Tour Detail pages focus on species likelihood but rarely articulate benefits like photography instruction, social interaction, or access to otherwise off-limits habitats.
3. **Opaque pricing and entry-level options.** There is no clear filter for price range or highlight of low-cost introductory tours. The threshold mechanic is explained separately from the booking flow, which may confuse novices.
4. **Limited social proof for the target demographic.** Reviews appear but may not highlight experiences of first-time birders; there is no way to see who else is joining or to invite friends, hindering the communal aspect.
5. **No post-booking or post-tour engagement.** There's no page addressing the waiting period or guiding users after booking; no follow-up to encourage repeat bookings or community sharing.

### Important Gaps (would strengthen journey)

1. **Trust and inclusivity signals.** Pages lack badges indicating secure payment, partnerships with conservation organisations, or statements about inclusive practices (e.g., pronouns, disability accommodations).
2. **Progress indicators and notifications.** During the waiting period, there's no dynamic progress bar or automated updates to keep users engaged and encourage them to share the tour with friends.



3. **Community features.** There's no forum or chat for newcomers to ask questions or share experiences, which could reduce intimidation and build loyalty.
4. **Educational content.** Beyond the How It Works page, there is no integrated "Getting into birding" section linking to resources (Merlin, Audubon, birding etiquette) for beginners.

### Minor Gaps (nice to have)

1. **Gamification.** Offering badges or rewards for attending first tour, referring friends or spotting certain species could encourage continued engagement.
2. **Carbon footprint and sustainability messaging.** Given younger generations' prioritisation of sustainability <sup>18</sup>, showing eco-friendly practices or offsets could enhance trust.
3. **Customization and AI recommendations.** Personalised suggestions based on interests (e.g., photography-heavy tours versus casual walks) could improve browsing.

## Recommendations

1. **Beginner-focused onboarding and content.**
2. Add a prominent section on the Home and How It Works pages titled "New to Birding?" that reassures novices. Include bullet points such as "No binoculars required," "All fitness levels welcome," and "Learn at your own pace." Use inclusive photographs featuring diverse young adults.
3. Offer short, affordable introductory tours (2–4 hours) clearly labelled as "Starter Tours."
4. **Strengthen value messaging on Tour Detail pages.**
5. Expand each tour description to include: photography opportunities, unique access (e.g., private hides), social aspects and guide qualities (friendliness, humour, inclusivity). Reference data showing travellers value local cuisine and meeting locals <sup>15</sup> to tailor tours accordingly.
6. Include a "Why join this tour?" section summarising benefits for beginners and experienced birders.
7. **Enhance price transparency and filters.**
8. Add price sliders and clearly show what's included (e.g., park fees, transport, binocular rentals). Indicate average tour lengths and per-hour value.
9. Provide deposit amounts and highlight that payments are only processed upon confirmation.
10. **Implement trust and inclusivity signals.**
11. Display secure payment icons, link to privacy policy and highlight partnerships with reputable organisations (Audubon, local bird clubs). Adopt the inclusive practices recommended by Audubon (greeting participants, inviting pronouns, avoiding jargon) <sup>9</sup> and encourage operators to do the same.
12. Show operator credentials, certifications, and safety records on the Operator Profile page in a concise, mobile-friendly format.

**13. Build social proof and community features.**

- 14. Allow users to see other participants (first names and profile photos), join waitlists and invite friends directly from the booking page.
- 15. Feature testimonials or short video reviews from novice birders describing their first tour experience.
- 16. Create a community hub or forum where new birders can ask questions, share photos and arrange meetups.

**17. Improve threshold mechanic communication.**

- 18. Integrate the “How It Works” explanation into the booking flow with tooltips and a progress bar showing the number of commitments needed. Send automated emails or push notifications when thresholds are near completion to encourage sharing.
- 19. Provide an FAQ addressing common concerns (“When is my card charged?”, “What if the threshold isn’t met?”, “Can I cancel my commitment?”).

**20. Post-booking engagement and retention.**

- 21. Send a welcome email once a user commits, including a packing list, expected bird species, meet-the-guide info and links to educational resources.
- 22. After the tour, ask for feedback and encourage sharing photos on social media using a Quorum hashtag. Offer referral credits or loyalty points for bringing friends.

**23. Adopt sustainable practices messaging.**

- 24. Include statements about leaving no trace, respecting wildlife and supporting conservation. Given younger travellers’ emphasis on sustainability <sup>18</sup>, this can enhance trust and justify the cost.

By addressing these gaps and implementing the recommendations above, Quorum Tours can create an inclusive, trustworthy and engaging platform that converts curious new birders into repeat customers and advocates.

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