



BULLETIN

from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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BIRDERS AND NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES MEAN AN ECONOMIC BONANZA FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Birders visiting national wildlife refuges mean big bucks to local economies, according to early preliminary findings from an independent survey conducted in 1993-1994.

The information was released today at a news conference held by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at the Patuxent Wildlife Visitor Center near Laurel, Maryland, as part of the third annual observance of International Migratory Bird Day. The survey, "The Economic Impact of Birding Ecotourism on Communities Surrounding Ten National Wildlife Refuges," was conducted at refuge birding "hot spots" across the country.

"These findings show that national wildlife refuges are important to the economies of nearby communities," said Dr. Paul Kerlinger, who conducted the study with funding provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, New England Biolabs Foundation, New Jersey Audubon Society, and the Cape May Bird Observatory.

"National wildlife refuges attract ecotourist dollars for local businesses, creating jobs and tax revenues at no cost to the community," Kerlinger said.

The actual economic impact in 1994 of visitors on the communities surrounding each of the refuges ranged from over a half-million to several millions of dollars, which included lodging (motels, campsites), meals, gasoline, and ancillary purchases.

At Quivira National Wildlife Refuge in Kansas, birders spent \$636,000 in the local area. "Birders from across the country come to Quivira to view the more than 250 species of birds that use the refuge," according to Refuge Manager Dave Hilley. "A new visitor center addition opening in late May should attract even more visitor dollars," he said.

The Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge in South Texas attracts visitors from all over the world to observe the 388 species of birds and other unique wildlife. They spent \$14.42 million, according to Kerlinger's survey.

"We are aware of the great contribution the refuge makes to the local economy," said Chuck Snyder, director of the McAllen

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Chamber of Commerce Convention and Visitor Bureau. "Birding is mentioned in all of our literature, but we have not promoted it because we don't want to jeopardize this treasure in our midst. But we would like to see an expansion of the lands and facilities."

Kerlinger's survey also revealed demographics on the visitors, whose age averaged in the low 50s. Their family incomes and education levels generally were higher than the national average. More than half of the visitors cited refuges as their primary destination.

The report and accompanying data will be available later this year from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Summaries of the preliminary findings were released on the following national wildlife refuges (NWR):

1994 Local Economic Impact

Salton Sea NWR, CA	\$3.10 million
Ding Darling NWR, FL	Data still being analyzed
Quivira NWR, KS	636,000
Forsythe NWR, NJ	4.01 million
Bosque del Apache NWR, NM	3.3 million
Ottawa NWR/Magee Wildlife Area, OH	5.61 million
Malheur NWR, OR	Data still being analyzed
Laguna Atascosa NWR, TX	3.98-5.63 million
Santa Ana NWR, TX	14.42 million
Chincoteague NWR, VA	9.7 million

Most of the 504 national wildlife refuges are strategically located along four major travel corridors, called "flyways," that migratory birds follow on spring and fall migrations. Refuges, found in every state, provide crucial resting and feeding stops on the birds' arduous journey from wintering grounds as far south as the tip of South America to nesting grounds at the Arctic Circle. Many also nest on the hundreds of national wildlife refuges in between.

"Bird migration, and how birds unerringly return to the same spot at the same time each year, is one of the great mysteries of nature," said Mollie Beattie, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "But it's no mystery, and no accident, that national wildlife refuges are located where they are, along these flyways. We would indeed have a 'silent spring' if these and other key areas were no longer there, when and where the birds need them."

Annually, 28-30 million people visit America's National Wildlife Refuge System, the world's most outstanding and diverse network of lands and waters dedicated to wildlife and to conserving wildlife habitat.

Additional information may be obtained from individual refuge managers, listed below:

E. Clark Bloom
Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge
POB 120
Calipatria, CA 92233
619-348-5278

David Hilley
Quivira National Wildlife Refuge
Rt. 3, Box 48A
Stafford, KS 67578
316-486-2393

Tracy Casselman, Acting Manager
Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge
POB 72, Great Creek Road
Oceanville, NJ 08231-0072
609-652-1665

Philip W. Norton
Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge
POB 1246
Socorro, NM 87801
505-835-1828

Ross Adams
Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge
14000 W. State Route 2
Oak Harbor, OH 43449
419-898-0014

Steven P. Thompson
Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge
POB 450
Rio Hondo, TX 78583
210-748-3607

Larry Ditto
Santa Ana/Lower Rio Grande Valley Complex
320 North Main Street, Room 225
McAllen, TX 78501
210-630-4636

John Schroer
Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge
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Chincoteague, VA 23336
804-336-6122