

# *Top 12 Economic Insights & Marketing Tips To Help You Attract Birders*

Welcome to the North Dakota Division of Tourism's newest endeavor. An exciting level of interest has been generated during recent years across the country, and around the state – in birding – so we want to share the latest information about birding with you, along with the many ways to attract birders to our state and local communities and businesses. Given that birders are spending billions of dollars (yes, billions!) on travel and equipment each year, and given that North Dakota is a premier birding destination, we want to help attract more birding-based tourism to North Dakota communities.

The North Dakota Division of Tourism has already initiated a strong national advertising campaign focused on attracting more birders to our state. Some community-based birding drives and festivals have also been advertising in national and regional publications. In addition, a number of articles featuring birding highlights across North Dakota have been published in national and regional magazines, with more to follow.

Birders are responding to the exciting messages they are hearing about North Dakota's wild places and wildlife - especially the diversity of birds that visitors can search for, observe and photograph. Now we want to help all interested communities, businesses, organizations, nature facilities and interested individuals across the state to welcome birders and prosper from birders' activities and commerce.

As a result, we have developed a *10-part Birding-based Marketing Program* that will assist you in your own planning, marketing and production efforts. Herein, we provide some exciting information and insights into the economics of birding and how to market to birders.

- More than 22 million Americans travel each year to enjoy birding activities – searching for, observing, photographing, censusing and studying birds. These people spend more than \$38 Billion annually in their birding endeavors! **Birding is big business!**

We want to be sure that birders spend more money in North Dakota. We are inviting them wholeheartedly, and we want to be sure they leave with the best impression of our birding resources, our natural resources and our state heritage including our wonderful people. And along the way, we hope birding will add appreciably to local and state economies, just as it has in a wealth of other states.

- The most recent government survey, completed in 2001, indicates that birders spent more than \$9 million in North Dakota on travel-related products and services, including gasoline, car rentals, motels, restaurants and associated items. In addition, birders spent about \$8 million dollars on equipment, ranging from binoculars, photography equipment, clothing, backpacks, etc.
- Because interest in birding in North Dakota has increased in exponential ways in the past 5 years, we expect that recent travel and equipment expenditures by birders already exceed \$20 million each year. We strongly believe birding-based commerce will increase dramatically in coming years as we continue to advertise birding opportunities and encourage improvements in infrastructure that attract more birders to all regions of North Dakota.
- Many states have prospered appreciably from birding-based tourism throughout the past two decades. Texas has taken a lead in birding-based tourism, which has paid off impressively with birders spending about \$230 million dollars per year on travel and \$310 million on equipment (\$540 million total). Even more impressive is Florida's birding income, which includes \$675 million on travel and \$268 million on equipment (\$943 million total, which is probably approaching \$1 Billion per year today!).

Now, Florida and Texas are large states with huge populations that attract millions of winter visitors and "snow birds," however it does give us an indication of the magnitude and potential of birding commerce. And when birders have been to a variety of birding sites in Texas and Florida, we hope to lure them to North Dakota with focused advertising that promotes our legendary natural resources and memorable birding opportunities. After all, we can offer many different and impressive birding opportunities that Florida and Texas can not, and we certainly expect that birders will contribute ever-increasing millions to our North Dakota economy year after year.

- How do you attract birders to your area?

Birders are simply looking for quality birding experiences. They are looking for a variety of birds; some are most interested in rare species or species that are hard to find in other parts of the country; and some are looking for great wildlife photography opportunities. The northern Great Plains is a premier location for birding, and North Dakota offers the best example of habitats and birding opportunities in this region.

But local conditions vary widely in North Dakota, and first you must ascertain that you have good birding opportunities in your area. Does your area possess an abundance of natural habitat? Do you have wildlife refuges, wildlife management areas and waterfowl production areas nearby? Will private landowners welcome birders to their rural landscape? These are some of the most basic questions to ask as you prepare a plan to attract birders to your area.

- When is the “birding season” in North Dakota?

Birders enjoy birding during every season of the year. There is always a peak in interest during spring migration, but birding is just as exciting during summer, fall and even during winter, when rare birds are most common. Birding is enjoyed during any hour of the day, sometimes even at night, and it is an all-season activity.

The birds found in North Dakota change with the seasons, and that’s certainly one of the great attractions about birding in North Dakota – the avifauna, landscape and climate is ever-changing.

- Contact North Dakota birders for advice about birding locations in your area, and about the potential of attracting birders to your community. Perhaps there are already people in your area who are active birders; visit with them first. Then consult with people who have a more statewide and national expertise. Also meet with wildlife professionals who are birders – refuge personnel, conservation officers, college professors and others.

- Market directly to birders.

Trying to attract everyone with one advertisement won’t bring birders to your door. You must focus your marketing endeavors directly to birders. You need to use their language, and you need to attract them with the kinds of birds and birding experiences that will get them to spend hundreds, even thousands, of dollars to travel to your community and spend time birding in the area.

- Always use the terms birders and birding.

Never use the archaic terms “bird watchers or bird watching” – these outdated terms are red flags to birders that indicate the people involved are not in tune with the activity of birding or the people who enjoy it. You must talk the talk and walk the walk, or find someone to help you who can relate directly to birders.

- What can businesses do to attract birders?

Start by placing a “Welcome Birders” sign in your front window. Motels, hotels and bed-and-breakfast facilities can install bird baths and bird feeders outside of select non-smoking rooms to attract local birds as an added attraction for birders. Some restaurants may be able to provide similar bird and birder attractions, plus they can print place mats that feature a checklist of the birds found in your area – or statewide - or a simple map that directs people to local birding hotspots. Have a collection of quality birding magazines and books that birders will enjoy. Offer a selection of books and equipment that birders will buy; a selection may include local history booklets or the best field guides; quality binoculars or a hat with a local bird on the brim, perhaps one that advertises your business or community.

- Businesses can use many of the same attractions they use to attract hunters in the fall, although remember that birding is an all-season activity, and be sensitive to the fact that a very small percentage of birders kill animals as hunters do, so spare them the hunting stories.

- How can you get birders to extend their stay once they arrive?

Make sure there are plenty of birding opportunities for them. Birders who enjoy photography will stay longer than birders who are simply listing birds and who tend to spend one period birding in one location, then move on to the next birding site. Hence, make sure your marketing and birding sites appeal to photographers. You can even provide photo blinds at appropriate locations. You can also encourage birders to return during another season of the year – spring, fall, winter – to enjoy the change of seasons and marvel at the birdlife of that period.

**Let birders know they are welcome in your area! Make sure they will return!**

#13 - Are you interested in getting more information about what birding and birders are all about? Next week we will provide an excellent primer on birding and birders, entitled *Birding Defined*, that will describe birders and the many activities they enjoy – in the field, at home, and on the road.

*Thank you for joining us in this initial segment of North Dakota Tourism's 10-part Birding-based Marketing Program. We hope you find this unique email program inspiring and helpful as we send you another segment of this birding-based tourism program each week. In the meantime, enjoy the remarkable spring migration of birds in your area of North Dakota!*

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