



GREAT BIRDING PROJECTS



An approach to bird-related editing, education, tourism, and marketing

22 November 2017

Ducks and Demographics *- birds with a long reach*



Photo: FWS-Chincoteague NWR

The much anticipated preliminary [2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation](#) by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was released two months ago. This is the thirteenth in a series of similar surveys conducted every five years since 1955. The idea is to collect and analyze information on the number of Americans engaging in outdoor-associated wildlife activity and the level of that activity in 2016.

According to the preliminary report, participation in fishing and wildlife-watching went up, but the number of hunters dropped by over 2 million people in the last five years.

The report indicates the described wildlife-watching activities increased a meaningful 20% from 2011 to 2016, from 71.8 million to 86 million participants during that time. The survey makes clear that the most significant increases in participation involve wildlife-watching - observing, feeding and photographing wildlife. Birdwatching is understood to account for the lion's share of that wildlife-watching, but most of the birding data have yet to be mined.

The good news is that "around the home" bird observers totaled 38.7 million. The disappointing news is that "away from home" bird observers - those who travel a mile or more away from home to watch birds - number only 16.3 million. Getting folks *outside and away from home* is perhaps the best way to get them to commit to saving wildlife, wild birds, and wild places, and there simply are not enough people doing this.

Still, comparing two bird-associated and wildlife-associated expenditures between 2011 and 2016 is encouraging: optic sales shot up from about \$919 million to \$1.8 billion, and cameras and photo equipment went up from c\$2.8 billion to c\$3.6 billion. The photography expenditure number (up 27%) corresponds well well, and is only slightly ahead of, the increase in Americans photographing wildlife from 2011 to 2016: up from 25.4 million to a nice 30.5 million. That's a 20% increase.

But let's look at some of the hunting numbers. Total hunters in 2011 was estimated at 13.7 million, while the number for 2016 was 11.5 million, a 2.2 million drop. But most of the drop came from big game hunters (elk, deer, etc.). The migratory bird-hunter number - which includes waterfowl hunters, but not only waterfowl hunters - only dropped 200,000. Given the cultural shift in outdoor recreation in general, that's not a surprising, nor particularly alarming, number at this point.

But to raise two important questions for the near-term: *where is the future and where is the overlap, if any?*

For starters, previous reports have indicated that 75% of those people who do leave home to enjoy birds will watch waterfowl (ducks and geese, primarily). Indeed, waterfowl have a "long reach" and are the most-watched away-from-home birds in the U.S., followed by birds of prey, songbirds, and other waterbirds. Basically, these waterfowl are accessible by season and location, highly photogenic, and simply beloved. This is true whether one considered the ducks in your local park pond or at the regional National Wildlife Refuge. What's more, "everyone" has now become a wildlife photographer, often equipped with iPhone for that spontaneous shot of a duck, a squirrel, a jay, or a butterfly. And photography, like hunting, is rewarded by the moment of immediate gratification - if the "shot" is done right. And, of course, no more must the participant wait for film development to see the quality of the results! Consequently, the watchers, the hunters, the photographers all have a lot in common.

The final National Survey has yet to be released, so some of the demographics have yet to be unveiled, but many of these trends and motivations have been in play for some time.

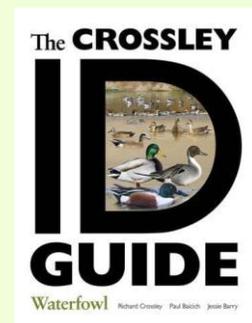
Some of these important concepts of audience and overlap formed the background and reasoning behind the new *Crossley ID Guide: Waterfowl*, by Richard Crossley, Paul Baicich, and Jessie Barry, which recently became available.

This new standard in waterfowl books, with the award-winning Crossley-style plates, is ideal for beginning and intermediate birders and kids. But, it is also destined to please avid waterfowl hunters. It should also excite the growing legion of wildlife photographers.

There is something in there for just about everyone. The book contains over 300 pages of images, using over 5,000 individual shots. It covers all of North America's ducks, geese, and swans with a friendly, interactive writing style covering identification, life history, and vital conservation.

For two interviews on *BirdCallsRadio* with two of the three authors, you can access recent broadcasts with Richard Crossley ([broadcast on 27 October](#)) and Paul Baicich ([broadcast on 9 November](#)). Both discuss the work's intended appeal and reach across multiple groups of outdoor enthusiasts.

And to find out more, and to order your own copy, go to [Richard Crossley's website](#).



One Festival Impact

- Looking at the Yellow Rails and Rice Festival



Photo: Paul J. Baicich

Every fall for almost a decade, birders, banders, other researchers, and conservationists have come to rice fields in southwestern Louisiana to observe, photograph, and study the presence of Yellow Rails in rice habitat.

Dedicated birders, Donna Dittmann and Steve Cardiff, have teamed up with rice farmer, Kevin Berken, to make it all possible. Along

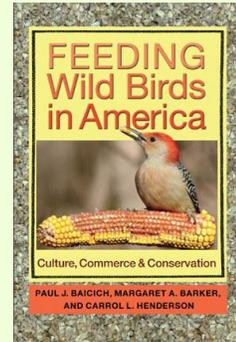
with a number of volunteers, the Yellow Rails and Rice Festival, profiled numerous times in these *GBP* pages, has been a unique experience. "It's a bird festival like no other," asserts Dittmann. Earlier this month, 120 participants, from 30 U.S. states and four countries, attended the ninth such festival. (The festival is limited to about 120 participants, given the logistics of the event and the carrying-capacity of the rice fields involved.)

"No one has left one of our festivals without seeing a Yellow Rail," said Berken. Whether observers view the rails from a ride on the rice-combine or from the edge of the rice field, the event is gratifying. Close views are also provided as the event works with qualified bird-banders who net and band at the edge of the rice fields. And everyone has probably left the festival with a better appreciation for the unique ways that bird-friendly rice makes such a difference. The rice fields in the area are also great for shorebirds, long-legged waders, waterfowl, and other birds.

The festival demonstrates an often-neglected side of farming and creates allies among researchers and birders. The rice industry has [praised the outreach experience](#) involved in this festival, connecting birders, conservationists, rice farmers, and the local community. Frankly, everybody wins... especially the birds. Or as Berken said to the interested gathering on his farm: "Rice farms provide more wildlife habitat than any other crop. Save a bird. Buy rice."

Speakers for *Feeding Wild Birds in America*

The authors of *Feeding Wild Birds in America: Culture, Commerce & Conservation* (Paul Baicich, Margaret Barker, and Carrol Henderson) continue to line up talks, interviews, and book-signings with bird and garden clubs, nature centers, festivals, parks and refuges, and stores. The presentations by these co-authors cover a wide range of bird-feeding history topics, linked with practical lessons for today.



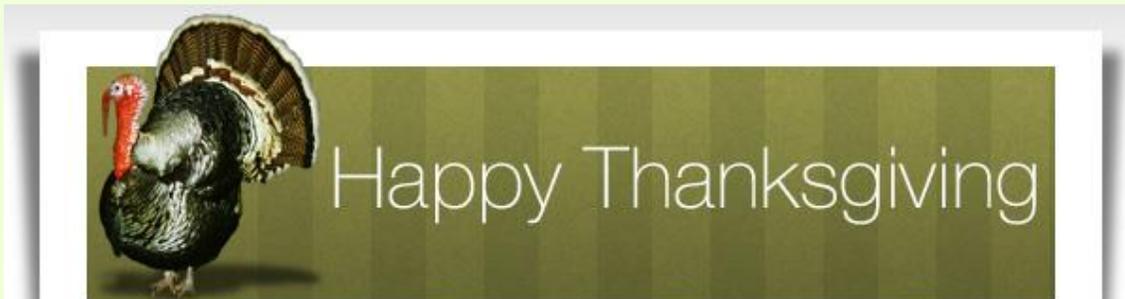
- For talks, book signings, festivals, interviews, etc. please contact [Margaret Barker](#).
- To order an individual copy of the book, use this [order-form](#).

Words to Consider:

"So, do you feel depressed?" - Dr. Jennifer Melfi

"Since the ducks left" - Tony Soprano

Episode 1, *The Sopranos* (1999)



GBP Bulletin Archives

Great Birding Projects is a vehicle to promote a creative approach to bird-related editing, education, tourism, and marketing. GBP functions as a bridge to an innovative engagement between people and birds. You can access all previous issues of the *GBP* bulletin on the GBP website [here](#).

