

Chapter 6
WILDLIFE VIEWING AND BIRDWATCHING HAS BECOME THE FASTEST GROWING RECREATIONAL ACTIVITY IN THE UNITED STATES!²¹

- ❖ Over 1,362,000 individuals participate in wildlife viewing and birdwatching in Kentucky creating 18,523 jobs and generating over \$1 billion (\$1,018,100,000) dollars for our economy.
- ❖ The number of participants and jobs created increased 20% and 18% respectively from 1996 to 2001 and an additional 5.5% from 2001 to 2006, making it one of the fastest growing “industries” in Kentucky.
- ❖ Across the U.S. there were over 71,000,000 participants in 2006, a 7.5% increase since 2001.

*The following section was written by Danny Watson, Wildlife Biologist for the Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources based on the publication, “Providing Positive Wildlife Viewing Experiences, a Practical Handbook”, by Deborah Richie Oberbillig, Colorado Division of Wildlife and Watchable Wildlife, Inc., March 2000. The statistical data above are preliminary findings from the 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, & Wildlife Associated Recreation.*²²

Wildlife viewing is among the fastest growing outdoor-recreational pursuits in North America; wildlife agencies must begin to address the needs and desires of those who watch wildlife. Wildlife agencies are also confronted with getting their message to Wildlife Viewers, which is a message to dispel myths and misinformation about wildlife behaviors, populations, and potential threats to humans. Wildlife needs empathy rooted in experience and technical understanding more than sympathy and emotion (Olendorff, Richard R. Golden Eagle Country 1975). To successfully accomplish a wildlife agency’s mission, people of all ages, in classrooms and outdoors, must learn to see, understand, and enjoy our nation’s wildlife.

WHO ARE THE WILDLIFE VIEWERS?

Wildlife Watchers can be divided into four distinct experience groups. Types 1 & 2 are the most involved groups, and Types 3 & 4 are the least involved groups:

- 1. The high involvement experience group:**
Prefers solitude, may participate solo or as a family, high value on new and different experiences, scenery, and tranquility. They seek information about wildlife and are more likely to participate in volunteer programs.
- 2. The creative experience group:**
Links wildlife with creative pursuits like photography, painting and other creative activities. They share many of the qualities of the high involvement experience group; however, they like social experiences and pursue fewer activities.
- 3. The generalist group:**
Combine wildlife viewing with other activities. They seek tranquility, relaxing outdoor experiences, and engage in new and different activities as

a family. They are less likely to obtain viewing guides, take guided tours, or use audiotapes.

4. The occasionalist group:

Share the same interests as the generalist group; however, they don't place as much importance on experience outcomes as does the generalists group. They are less likely to combine wildlife viewing and hiking and are limited by their lack of knowledge about wildlife viewing, specifically when and where to go.

Overall, Wildlife Watcher experience groups have these things in common: **They want to see wildlife in wild settings, they want to be outdoors, and they want new experiences.** This should indicate to wildlife managers that visitor centers should be gateways to the outdoors used to excite and educate people about wildlife recreation rather than simply as tourist destinations. The challenge is to facilitate an outdoor experience that will help viewers see nature from a perspective they have never considered before.

Wildlife Viewers/Viewing from the national perspective:

- Represent the largest potential constituency, with the largest representation of women and variety of ethnic groups.
- Make a significant impact on state and local economies.
- Use natural resources in a consumptive manner (contrary to early descriptions of "nonconsumptive" wildlife viewing).



Wildlife viewing blind used in Colorado

An excellent resource on wildlife viewing initiatives and ideas happening in other states can be found at <http://wildlife.state.co.us/Viewing/PartnerResources/>

Flather and Hoekstra (1989) projected the number of persons taking nonconsumptive wildlife-related (wildlife viewing) trips in the U.S. would increase by nearly 250% between 1990 and 2040. In 1995, >54 million people "birded", and the number could easily increase by an additional 25% by 2040 (Cordell, Herbert and Pandolfi, 1999).

According to the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife Associated Recreation (U.S. Department of Interior, 2001) 66.1 million U.S. residents, 31 percent of the U.S. population 16 years old and older, participated in a myriad of wildlife-watching activities. People who took an interest in wildlife around their homes (residential) numbered 63 million, while those who took trips away from their homes to watch wildlife (nonresidential) numbered close to 22 million people.

