



An Assessment of Bird Watching in Turkey as a Recreational Activity**

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Abstract

Due to the low damage of bird watching to nature, it is highly preferred as an alternative tourism activity, particularly in western societies. However, when Turkey is concerned specifically, we can claim that activities aimed at bird watching is not sufficient although the main migration flyways of birds pass through Turkey due to its geopolitical position and it has rich flora and fauna. In this study both qualitative and quantitative research methods are used with the aim of determining the current situation of bird watching in Turkey, which is rapidly developing in Western societies and specifying the profile of the participants in this context. In the first part of the study, secondary data related to bird watching in Turkey is gathered through document analysis method. In the second part, data were collected from 192 bird watchers via electronic questionnaire to obtain the demographic information and to determine the profiles of the people who participated in bird watching. As a result of the research, primarily we have tried to determine the revenues derived from bird watching worldwide, the number of the bird species breeding in our country and significant bird watching areas in Turkey by examining the reports prepared by non- governmental organizations dealing with bird watching both in Turkey and in the world. Afterwards, we have tried to identify the demographic information and profiles of bird watchers by cooperating with various non- governmental organizations. As a result of the statistical analysis, it was observed that the majority of the participants consisted of the male, juvenile people with high educational and income level. When the expenditures of the participants were analyzed, although people with high income level constituted the majority of the participants, the number of those who spent below the average were high. On the other hand, the bird watchers mostly participate in the bird watching activity once a month, they prefer the city they live in or the surrounding cities for this activity and they do not require any accommodation. Based on the findings, various suggestions were made to the tourism sector, practitioners and future studies in the last part of the study.

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INTRODUCTION

The International Ecotourism Society (2015), ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people”. TIES specifies ecotourism principles as follows; minimize environmental impacts, build environmental and cultural awareness, provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts, provide direct financial benefits for conservation, generate financial benefits for both local people and private industry, help raise sensitivity to host countries’ political, environmental, and social climates.

Ecotourism is an important strategy to provide protection and generate income in protected areas and surrounding communities. It can contribute to the economic development and conservation of the protected areas by generating revenues which can be utilized to manage in a sustainable manner, ensure local employment and create a sense of social property (Jalani, 2012). Natural living environment and national parks constitute a significant market for ecotourism which is based on natural resources and local culture (Surendran & Sekhar, 2011).

In Turkey the resources for eco-tourism consist of protected areas such as of urban forests, nature conservation areas, national parks, natural parks and natural monuments. According to 2018 statistics in Turkey, there are 137 urban forest covering a surface area of 105 km², 30 nature conservation area with a surface area of 470 km², 44 national parks with a surface area of 8670 km², 243 natural parks with a surface area of 1065 km² and 112 natural monuments with a surface area of 75 km². The number of wildlife protection and improvement area, which is one of the other important resources for eco-tourism, is 81 with a surface area of 12 thousand km² (Doğa Koruma ve Milli Parklar Genel Müdürlüğü, 2018). The ratio of the total protected areas (land and sea) corresponds to 8.9% of the country’s surface area (Çevre ve Şehircilik Bakanlığı, 2020). The country targets a growth of %17 in the total protected areas in accordance with the targets of Turkey Vision, 2023 (Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2007). Eco-tourism, one of the sub-sectors of tourism, grows three times faster than the world tourism market (Das & Chatterjee, 2015).

Special interest tourism is customized leisure and recreational activities performed by individuals or groups according to their specific interests (Çakıcı & Harman, 2006). Among the special interest tourism types, hunting tourism, yacht tourism, adventure tourism, golf tourism and bird watching tourism are listed as the most preferred activities (Syratt & Archer, 2003). Bird watching is considered as the fastest growing segment among them (Sevindi, 2013: 64). This type of tourism, which has developed rapidly all over the world, is also considered as the fastest growing field in America (Responsible Travel, 2017).

Turkey is located on one of the five main routes chosen as the flyway during the migrations of birds and hosts over 400 species of birds. In addition, it has more than 300 regions known as frequented the migratory birds (Orman Fakülteliler Derneği, 2018). Therefore, Turkey has significant potential for bird watching. Bird watching is defined as a recreational activity based on watching and identifying the wild birds in nature by means of optical devices (binoculars, telescopes, etc.) that enables the observation and identification of birds in their natural environment (Kandır & Erturhan, 2015; Kordowska & Kulczyk, 2014). In comparison with an average ecotourist, it is observed that bird watchers are more independent, focused and determined (Page & Dowling, 2002). The high expectations of many bird watchers, combined with their high average income, can make major financial contributions to the places visited (Kerlinger & Brett, 1995). In this context, we have attempted to determine the current situation of bird watching in Turkey as an important touristic activity and the profiles of the bird watchers as well as to reveal the

places they visit and the average expenses made by them in these places. The research is designed in four parts and the first part consists of the literature review on bird watching, alternative tourism and ecotourism and the research method constitutes the second part. The findings comprised of qualitative and quantitative data are listed in the third part and the results and suggestions of the research are included in the last part.

Literature

Alternative Tourism

Alternative tourism, which has been practiced since the mid-1990s and has emerged as a reaction to mass tourism is a type of tourism established by combining various new products with touristic value as an option completely opposite to the values, motives, attitudes and practices of traditional mass tourism with the aim of reducing the negative effects that may result from them (Cohen, 1987; Hacıoğlu & Avcıkurt, 2008; Uçkun & Türkay, 2003). Traditional tourists seek only entertainment, recreation or "relaxation"; however alternative tourism has emerged in response to traditional tourism which requires a differentiated tourism product presentation (Altınay, 1996; Cohen, 1987; Tekeli, 2001). In the emergence of alternative tourism, economic concerns such as options such as spreading of tourism activities throughout the entire year and increasing foreign currency revenues in relation with it and ensuring effective tourism investments played an important role (Oktayer, Susam & Çak, 2007).

The alternative tourism aims to support a moral economy based on sustainable trade, fair employment practices, social and environmental sensitivity (Gibson, 2010). The development purposes of this tourism are defined under several headings by the researchers such as; 'pro-poor tourism' (Hall, 2007), 'responsible tourism' (Spenceley, 2012), 'fair trade tourism' (Boluk, 2011; Evans & Cleverdon, 2000) and 'slow tourism' (Wearing, Wearing & McDonald, 2012). The common point of these practices is that they criticize mass tourism and the capitalist market economy more broadly (Molz, 2013). Alternative tourism creates the desire to have more authentic, individual and sincerely embodied experiences in the places visited by tourists (Bialski, 2012; McIntosh & Zahra, 2007).

Among the targets of "2023 Tourism Strategy" of Turkey, it is aimed to develop tourism types such as health tourism, thermal tourism, winter tourism, golf tourism, marine tourism, mountain tourism, convention and exhibition tourism (Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2007).

Ecotourism

According to the definition of the Romanian Ecotourism Association (2009), while practicing ecotourism the main motivation of tourists should be the observation of nature and local tradition in natural environments and the following conditions must be fulfilled in establishing ecotourism:

1. To contribute to the protection of nature,
2. To support the welfare of the local people, to provide job opportunities for local people (especially in rural areas),
3. To have an education component that raises awareness on the protection of nature both for tourists and local communities,
4. To have the lowest possible negative impact on the environment and socio-cultural component (Association of Ecotourism in Romania, 2009).

United States International Development Agency (1995) defined ecotourism as an initiative that positively contributes to the conservation of endangered biological resources in the synthesis report on the loss of biodiversity. Ecotourism is considered as a win-win solution and the contributions can be listed as raising local awareness about the value of biological resources, preserving biodiversity, increasing the benefits for local participation and generating revenues for the protection of biologically rich areas (Barna, Epure & Vasilescu, 2011).

Ziffer (1989) defined ecotourism as a type of tourism inspired by the natural history of a region that includes local cultures. In addition, he defined the ecotourist as a person visiting relatively underdeveloped areas with the spirit of appreciation, participation and sensitivity. Ecotourists also aim to protect the region and to contribute directly to the local people's economic welfare as well as to the region they visit in terms of creating employment opportunities or financial means.

Bird Watching (Ornithology)

Bird watching, which is included in ecotourism that satisfy different wants and needs by proposing alternatives, has become a common outdoor recreation activity without damaging and harming the nature (Çakıcı & Harman, 2006; Weaver & Lawton, 2002). Bird watching tourism (or ornithology) has been accepted as an important part of wildlife (Curtin & Wilkes, 2005; Page & Dowling, 2002). It is a niche market rapidly expanding in wildlife tourism; bird watching which is considered as a response to increased urbanization, the concerns on nature awareness and environment (Cocker, 2001) and has become the largest sub-segment in ecotourism and an important part of the nature-based tourism industry (Moscardo, 2000; Weaver & Lawton, 2002).

Bird watchers are seen as one of the most important sources of ecotourism income, as they constitute a large subgroup of eco-tourists, well-educated and have an income level above the average (Ceballos-Lascuráin, 1996; Cordell & Herbert, 2002). According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (2018) report, in 2001 bird watchers spent \$ 32 billion in birdwatching activities in the USA. It is estimated that in the American economy the total revenue obtained from bird watching activities is around \$ 82.5 billion. In addition, it is emphasized that bird watching creates employment for more than 1 million people. When at the statistics of 2011 are examined, it is found that the number of bird watchers over the age of 16 is 47 million and their expenditures are 41 billion dollars. In 2011, approximately 46.7 million people in the USA left their place of residence and participated in bird watching activities. Bird watchers spent an average of 111 days a year for this activity. Becker et al. (2005) estimates the economic benefit of the Gamla Nature Reserve in Israel at \$ 1.1-1.2 million, while 85% of tourists come to see griffon vultures. As of 2010, the number of the bird watchers living in China is 20.000 (Ma, Cheng, Wang & Fu, 2013). The number of the bird watchers is determined as 15 million in England and 61 thousand in the Netherlands (CBI, 2017). Gürlük and Rehber (2008) estimated the recreational economic value of bird watching as 103 million dollars annually in Lake Manyas (Balıkesir, Kuşçenneti National Park).

The natural sciences community has been involved in this field since the early 2000s, with studies addressing the potential positive and negative impacts of birdwatching on avian communities (Biggs, Turpie, Fabricius & Spenceley, 2011; Jones & Neelson, 2005; Puhakka, Salo & Sääksjärvi, 2011; Şekercioğlu, 2002). Although some of these studies mention potential hazards specific to bird watching tourism, it is much less when compared to the literature assessing the impacts of nature-based and general tourism on birds and habitats (Steven, Pickering & Castley, 2011). The knowledge of bird watchers on birds and their expectation to see various species provide a direct link between a

region's bird biodiversity and local income. Many rare bird species are highly susceptible to human and endangered (Buckton, 2001); therefore, bird watchers and guides should pay particular attention to minimizing the discomfort they create for rare species.

Table-1: The impacts of bird watching, suggestions on minimizing the discomfort and maximizing local participation.

Positive Impacts of Bird Watching	Negative Impacts of Bird Watching	Suggestions for Ideal Bird Watching
• The link between bird diversity and local income	• Disturbing the birds by playing tape or approaching the birds	• Adhering to ethical bird-watching behavior
• Financial incentives to protect wildlife	• Birds leave their nests due to harassment	• Staying away from nests and newborns as much as possible
• Less negative impact and more income than traditional tourism	• Disturbing the rare and/ or endangered bird species	• Particular attention should be paid to endangered and rare species
• Increased local control due to unique bird species	• Pollution due to visitors and damage to habitat	• Trying to minimize the use of tape players and visibility to birds
• Visiting to destinations other than the usual tourist routes	• Revenues not gained by the local community	• One should not get closer once noticed by a bird
• Protection of unprotected areas through the desired species	• Offending local community	• Sticking to established roads / paths/ walkways
• Assessment of local nature history knowledge	• Cultural degradation in relation with tourism	• Binoculars should be used for observation and photography
• Training and employment of local guides		• Local people should be informed and trained about birds and their financial benefits
• Fund raising for the protection of birds		• Local initiatives with low impact should be supported
• Contribution to the science of ornithology		• Contribution to NGOs active in bird protection areas

Source: Sekercioglu, 2002

Since birds fly and live in numerous areas throughout their lives, it may be impossible to protect all areas effectively. In this context, priority areas are determined through the project of Important Bird Areas (IBA) that will contribute to the better protection of birds. This project, which has been conducted since 1989, was initiated by the BirdLife International (formerly the International Council for Bird Preservation) and is being carried out internationally. 'Important Bird Areas Project' which became active in 1990 in Turkey, aims to protect the important areas for birds in Turkey, to raise public awareness, to actualize the campaign, to monitor the progress in the region continuously as well as to identify the new IBAs. Bird watchers prefer to visit IBAs or other natural areas for birdwatching, where many bird species or several particular species can be observed. IBA Project and required document work were conducted by the Society for the Protection of Nature (Yatırım ve İşletmeler Genel Müdürlüğü, 2020). Society for the Protection of Nature is a non-governmental organization based in Istanbul and established in 1975. The Society carries out activities in order to raise awareness and protect the rich habitats, flora and fauna of Turkey. In 2000, the Society received the title of WWF-Turkey as the Turkish Representative of WWF International and completed the process of becoming foundation (World Wildlife Fund, 2020).

Doga Association was established in 2002 and is a non-governmental organization with a wide network with its members and volunteers. The association introduced the "Important Natural Areas" method in 2004 together with the international scientific team, and the method established by the team was accepted as the international standard in determining the protected areas and enhanced further by the International Union for Conservation of Nature

(IUCN). As a Turkish partner organization BirdLife International, which has a very wide network, has put its signature under many national and international projects (Doğa Derneği, 2020).

Method

In order to make in-depth analysis, both qualitative and quantitative research methods are used in this study which is conducted to determine the current situation of bird watching in Turkey, a nature-based outdoor touristic activity, as well as the profile of the participants. The research method consists of two supporting stages. In the first stage of the study, secondary data related to bird watching in Turkey is gathered through document analysis method. The documents related to bird watching are obtained through the reports of World Wildlife Fund [WWF], Society for the Protection of Nature, Nature Association, Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks, BirdLife International and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

In the second stage of the study, the information of the participants on the gender, age ranges, marital status, income levels, education levels, cities they live in, training received for bird watching, average expenditure in the places visited, the frequency of the participation in bird watching and the mostly visited regions was collected and grouped statistically.

While collecting data in the study, limitations were encountered in the collection of secondary data and in the field of application in terms of time, cost and accessibility. Since the studies carried out on bird watching are limited, the data consists of the documents prepared by the bird watching communities/ associations. On the other hand, we could not obtain precise information on the number of the people participating in bird watching activities in Turkey (Sert & Arslan, 2019). Organizations related to bird watchers appear on the relevant internet and social media accounts. However, since anyone who is interested or not interested in bird watching may obtain membership in these platforms, the number of the members does not constitute precise information. In the study of Çakıcı and Harman (2006) which was conducted in coordination with the associations, the number of the people participating actively in bird watching activities was estimated as 550 in Turkey.

The questions used in the research consist of a questionnaire developed by Çakıcı and Harman (2006) which is further enhanced by us through adding more questions. The questionnaire form, which was created to collect data, was sent by e-mail to the group managers of birdwatchers, who are on the internet search engines and organized through social media. The questionnaire forms were sent to the e-mail addresses of the group members to be filled on an individual basis electronically since returning questionnaires take time. The people who could be reached were selected by convenience sampling method. A total of 550 people was sent electronic questionnaires and 192 questionnaires were answered. The return rate of the questionnaires was 34.90%. The data of the study were collected between December 10, 2019 and February 10, 2020. The data obtained were analyzed in computer environment and descriptive statistics were used in the analysis of the data.

Findings

In the findings part of the research, the reports drawn up through the documents prepared by various non-governmental organizations and public institutions related to bird watching are included. Turkey hosts hundreds of different bird species due to rich wetlands and various flyways the country possesses and located on the world's largest bird migration routes. The said flyway starts from northern part of Russia reaches out to the eastern part of

Africa following the Black Sea, the Straits and Anatolia. The ecological conditions in Turkey are very suitable for birds (Hocaoğlu, 1992). There are 570 bird species in Europe (Sezgin, Kaya & Ünüvar, 2017). The number of bird species found in Turkey is equal to the total number of birds in whole Europe (YİGM, 2020). According to Erdogan (TRAKUS, 2010), 502 species of birds have been identified in Turkey based on the records kept for the last 50 years. 436 of these bird species are seen very regularly. When we examine the situation in comparison with Europe, it is found that while there are 180 bird species in Portugal, there are 334 bird species only in Antalya in Turkey.

This shows that Turkey is in a very advantageous position in terms of bird watching. Regarding the subject, the spectacular results of Turkish Breeding Bird Atlas prepared by WWF-Turkey between the years of 2014-2017 and published in 2019 are listed in Table-2.

Table-2. The Results of Turkish Breeding Bird Atlas Project

313 Bird Species Breed Regularly in Turkey	In the project conducted between the years of 2014-2017, it was determined that 313 species continue to breed in Turkey out of 400 species seen regularly in Turkey. This number represents the value of Turkey's rich biodiversity and reflects the diversity of habitats in different geographical regions.
3 Bird Species Joined in the Fauna of Birds Breeding in Turkey	During the Atlas project, the first breeding records of the three species in the country were kept. These are known as <i>Falco Vespertinus</i> nesting in Eskişehir, <i>Iduna [Hippolais] Rama</i> nesting in Hakkâri and <i>Pycnonotus Leucotos</i> nesting in Şanlıurfa Birecik.
In Recent Years the Population of Breeding 3 Species Has Disappeared	In the past years, the breeding activity of the following species is not detected; <i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i> which used to breed in Göksu Delta, <i>Grus virgo</i> known to breed in four different wetlands in Eastern Anatolia and <i>Melanitta fusca</i> nesting in the high lakes of Eastern Anatolia.
Some Species with Decreasing Numbers Across Europe Have Healthy Populations in Turkey	In European countries, partially due to the transition to the European Union, the populations of some common species have decreased significantly as a result of the changes in agriculture and forestry. Among these species such as <i>Streptopelia turtur</i> , <i>Alauda arvensis</i> , <i>Lanius collurio</i> and <i>Emberiza hortulana</i> are still breeding prevalently and abundantly in our country.
3 Alien Species Are Included in The Breeding Bird List	<i>Psittacula krameri</i> , <i>Psittacula eupatria</i> and <i>Acridotheres tristis</i> has now formed populations that are settled in many areas.

Source: Turkish Breeding Bird Atlas, 2019: 40

Turkey's land, which extends over a wide geography, offer various geopolitical, natural and visual beauties. This vast geography hosts animals and plants as well as humans. Bird species are also among them. In Turkey, having a great potential with 466 species of birds, (Eskiyörük, 2012) there are numerous natural observation areas for bird watching due its rich geography. Some of them are listed in Table-3.

Table-3: Observation Areas of the Bird Watchers in Turkey

Mediterranean Wetlands
Aegean Olive Pastures
Migration Routes
Endorheic Basin Wetlands
Coast and Seas
Oak Forests
Mesopotamian Valley and Steppes
Central Anatolian Steppes
Taurus Valleys
Thrace Pastures
High Mountains

Source: Doğa Derneği, 2020

The other source which covers the basins and important bird observation areas in Turkey is ‘Important Bird Areas of Turkey’ book project prepared by Society for the Protection of Nature (Table- 4). IBAs are a project of international significance, aiming to ensure the sustainability of birds with other creatures and ecosystems. The selection of the areas is based on the scientific criteria set by BirdLife International. As of 2018, the number of IBAs was determined to be 184 in Turkey (Nature Association, 2020).

Table-4: The Basins and Important Bird Observation Areas in Turkey



	Page		Page		Page		Page
01 Meriç Deltası	31	26 Çorak Gölü	92	51 Palas Gölü	144	76 Tuzla Gölü	207
02 İğneada Ormanları	34	27 Salda Gölü	94	52 Sultansazlığı	146	77 Akyatan Gölü	209
03 Büyükçekmece Gölü	37	28 Karataş Gölü	96	53 Seyfe Gölü	150	78 Ağyatan Gölü	212
04 Küçükçekmece Gölü	40	29 Yarışlı Gölü	98	54 Hirfanlı Barajı	153	79 Yumurtalık Lagünlüleri	213
05 Boğaziçi	42	30 Burdur Gölü	100	55 Beynam Ormanı	155	80 Gavur Gölü	216
06 Şile Adaları	45	31 Eğirdir Gölü	104	56 Kızılırmak Deltası	157	81 Nur Dağları	218
07 İznik Gölü	46	32 Karamık Sazlığı	107	57 Yedigöller Barajı	161	82 Erzurum Ovası	220
08 Uludağ	48	33 Akşehir E. Eber Gölü	109	58 Yeşilırmak Deltası	163	83 Sansu Ovası	222
09 Uluabat Gölü	50	34 Çavuşçu Gölü	112	59 Akkuş Adası	166	84 Haçlı Gölü	224
10 Kuş Gölü	53	35 Altıntaş Ovası	114	60 Doğu Karadeniz Dağları	167	85 Bulank Ovası	226
11 Kocacay Deltası	56	36 Türkmenbaba Dağı	116	61 Samsam Gölü	171	86 Ardahan Ormanı	228
12 Foça Adaları	59	37 Aliken	118	62 Kozanlı Gökgöl	173	87 Aktaş Gölü	230
13 Murat Dağı	61	38 Balıkdama	120	63 Kulu Gölü	174	88 Çıldır Gölü	232
14 Demirköprü Barajı	63	39 Uyuz Gölü	122	64 Ereğli Sazlığı	176	89 Kuyucuk Gölü	234
15 Marmara Gölü	65	40 Çöl Gölü	124	65 Karapınar Ovası	179	90 Çalı Gölü	236
16 Gediz Deltası	68	41 Mogan Gölü	125	66 Eşmekaya Sazlığı	181	91 Balık Gölü	238
17 Ildır Körfezi Adaları	71	42 Kızılcahamam Ormanları	127	67 Beyshehir Gölü	183	92 Doğubeyazıt Sazlığı	240
18 Küçük Menderes Deltası	72	43 Kavaklı Dağı	129	68 Suğla Gölü	186	93 Nemrut Gölü	242
19 Akdağ	74	44 İnözü Vadisi	131	69 Hotamış Sazlığı	188	94 Sodalıgöl	244
20 İşıklı Gölü	75	45 Sarıyar Barajı	132	70 Boluluk Gölü	191	95 Erçek Gölü	246
21 Başa Gölü	78	46 Hamam Dağı	134	71 Tersakan Gölü	193	96 Van Gölü	249
22 Büyük Menderes Deltası	81	47 Sapanca Gölü	136	72 Tuz Gölü	194	97 Yüksekova	252
23 Çöllük Deltası	84	48 Ilgaz Dağları	138	73 Körsün Deltası	197		
24 Köyceğiz Gölü	86	49 Sarıkuş Gölü	140	74 Aydıncık Adaları	202		
25 Acıgöl	89	50 Tödürge Gölü	142	75 Aladağlar	203		

Source: Yarar & Magnın, 1997.

Nature and biodiversity function as tourist attractions both for more prominent niche markets such as the bird watching tours and the tourism market in general. Tourists prefer bird watching because they get the opportunity to observe the wildlife and watch increasing bird species. Many of the high priority areas for biodiversity conservation are also key areas for tourism development. Considering sustainable forms of tourism, correct conditions and proper planning, protecting valuable living spaces in key locations by the societies can provide an alternative means of living. Lee, Lee, Mjelde, Scott and Kim (2009) stated that at the Seosan Cheonsuman International Bird watching Fair in Korea, participants were prepared to pay about \$ 5 for bird interpretive services. In this case, the total value of interpretive services for 3189 tour bus participants is about \$ 15,820. The regions where bird movements are observed also ensure to become a brand in the world as well as its economic contribution to the country.

The statistical data which constitutes the quantitative part of the study related to the survey conducted to determine the profile of the bird watchers, their average expenditures, the regions they visit, whether they received training, and the frequency of participating in recreational activities are listed as follows (Table 5 - 9):

Table-5. Distribution of bird watchers by demographic characteristics

Demographic Characteristics		f	%
Gender	Female	59	30,7
	Male	133	69,3
Marital Status	Single	92	47,9
	Married	100	52,1
Group of Age	Ages 18 to 25	38	19,8
	Ages 26 to 35	64	33,3
	Ages 36 to 45	49	25,5
	Age 46 and over	41	21,4
Education Status	Primary School	2	1
	High School	16	8,3
	Associate Degree	7	3,7
	Bachelor Degree	98	51
	Postgraduate Education	69	36
Income Status	Less than 2000 TL	35	18,2
	Between 2001 - 4000 TL	49	25,5
	Between 4001 - 6000 TL	48	25
	6001 TL and over	60	31,3
Region of Residence	Marmara	67	34,9
	Black Sea	40	20,8
	Central Anatolia	37	19,3
	Aegean	31	16,2
	Mediterranean	13	6,8
	Southeastern Anatolia	2	1
	Eastern Anatolia	1	0,5
Cyprus	1	0,5	

When the participants were analyzed according to their education level, it was observed that the vast majority of them are graduated from a university and higher level (51% undergraduate and 36% graduate). When the income levels of the participants are examined, it was found that 18.2% earn less than 2000 TL, 25.5% earn between 2001 and 4000 TL, 25% earn between 4001 and 6000 TL and 31.3% earn 6001 TL and above. When the participants are analyzed according to the region they live in, the Marmara Region (34.9%) has the largest share with the majority of the residents living in Istanbul (f = 52). And following that, the Black Sea Region (20.8%), where the majority of the

residents are from Samsun province ($f = 25$), and the Central Anatolia Region (19.3%), where the majority of the residents are from Ankara province ($f = 25$), the Aegean Region (16.2%), where the majority of the residents are from İzmir province ($f = 19$), followed by the Mediterranean Region (6.8%), the Southeastern Anatolia Region (1%) and the East Anatolia Region (%0,5) and Cyprus with the same rate, respectively.

Table-6: Education rate of bird watchers

	f	%
Rate of educated people	100	52
Rate of uneducated people	92	48

When Table-6 is examined, 52% of the participants stated that they received training for bird watching, while 48% stated that they did not receive training. The vast majority of participants received training by means of the seminars or workshops organized in different cities or regions, by means of bird ringing education, by means of bird watching communities, by means of undergraduate and graduate education, by means of non-governmental organizations such as Nature Association, by means of KOSKS (Mid-Winter Water Bird Census) education, by means of Mountaineering clubs or the experts directly. Those who have not received training are thought to be experienced since they are able to distinguish bird species by improving themselves in the field through individual efforts.

Table-7: Distribution of expenditures for bird watching

	f	%
0-499 TL	132	68,8
500-999 TL	23	12
1000-1499 TL	19	9,8
1500-1999 TL	1	0,5
2000 TL and over	17	8,9
Lowest spending	20 TL	
Highest spending	5000 TL	

According to Table-7, participants are able to spend between 20 and 5000 TL for bird watching and equipment. It is observed that most of the participants spend between 0-499 TL (68.8%). Those who spend between 500-999 TL have a share of 12%, those who spend between 1000-1499 TL have a share of 9.8 and those who spend 2000 TL and over have a share of 8%. Only 0.5% stated that they spent between 1500-1999 TL.

Table-8: Frequency of participating in bird watching activity

	f	%
1 time per week	31	16,1
At least 2-3 times a week	30	15,7
Once a month	59	30,8
At least 2-3 times a month	28	14,6
1 time per year	18	9,3
At least 2-3 times per year	26	13,5

The majority of the participants stated that they participated in the activity once a month (30.8%). While those who participated once a week (16.1%) mostly constitute the excursionist's group, those who participate at least 2-3 times a week (15.7%) are the group that prefers to make observations in their region. Those who participate at least 2-3 times a month (14.6%) stated that they participate in case of a training or census. Those who participated least 2-3 times a year (13.5%) stated that they join the activities during migration periods. The rate of those who participate only once a year is 9.3%. In the responses given by the participants, the rate of change is determined as daily and once a year. The most repetitive value is observation at the weekend.

Table-9: Preferred regions for bird watching

	F	%
Black Sea	63	32,8
Marmara	51	26,5
Central Anatolia	30	15,6
Aegean	29	15,3
Mediterranean	15	7,8
Southeastern Anatolia	2	1
Eastern Anatolia	1	0,5
Cyprus	1	0,5

The vast majority of the participants who were engaged in bird watching activity preferred the Black Sea Region (32.8%) (Table-9). Kızılırmak Delta and the abundance of wetlands in Samsun played an important role in the preference of the city, which is the most preferred province. The province of Samsun is followed by the provinces of Trabzon and Ordu. Almost all of those who prefer Marmara Region (26.5%) stated that the province of Istanbul is the main reason of their preferences. For excursion purposes, it is stated that nearby cities and Gala Lake National Park are preferred. Respectively, the provinces of Ankara, Konya and Kayseri were preferred in the Central Anatolia Region (15.6%). Sultansazlığı National Park played a role in the preference of the province of Kayseri. In the Aegean Region (15.3%), those who prefer İzmir province are the majority. Most of the participants, except for İzmir province, stated that they made observations in Büyük Menderes Delta and Bafa Lake. Adana and Antalya provinces were mostly effective in the preference of the Mediterranean Region (7.8%). The participants in Southeastern Anatolia (1%), Eastern Anatolia Region (0.5%) and Cyprus (0.5) stated that they prefer to make observations only in their own places.

Conclusion

Alternative tourism, which has expanded and become widespread worldwide, is effective in the marketing activities of the countries, the sustainability of the region and the emergence of different trends. Bird watching, which is one of the alternative types of tourism, is important since it includes a large group of ecotourism. Due to the presence of the rich wetlands, mountains, hills and steppes, Turkey provides a natural habitat for birds.

Bird watchers are considered as individuals with high educational level who do not damage the natural environment and have a high level of awareness of the nature. The responses obtained by the participants in the research are in a way that confirm the idea about the bird watchers. It was observed that the vast majority of the participants are at an undergraduate or a graduate level. At the same time, since the income level of the participants is above the average, it can be considered as an important source of income for ecotourism. A well-organized

successful bird watching activity can increase both the income of local businesses and local tax revenues, as well as the influx of visitors to that area.

Documents and reports were utilized at the first stage of the study, which is conducted with the aim of revealing of the current situation of bird watching, the demographic characteristics and profile of bird watchers, due to limited time and limited studies carried out in this field and cost issues. In the second stage of the study, a questionnaire was prepared about bird watchers, mail was sent to the group managers of bird watchers, but due to the slow return of the questionnaire, the questionnaire was sent to the group members individually via e-mail. In this context, apart from the demographic characteristics of the participants, issues such as average expenditures, whether they received training and the type of the training they received, the frequency of the participation in the activity, and the regions preferred for observation by the bird watchers were determined. Within the scope of the data obtained, when the demographic characteristics of the participants were analyzed, it was found that the vast majority of the participants consist of male, juvenile people (aged 26-35) with high educational and income level.

The number of the participant with or without training were almost equal. Participants who have received training improved themselves through various NGOs, communities, associations or courses and those who did not receive training, on the other hand, have improved themselves by actively visiting the fields and areas, by reading books, articles published on this topic and have become at a level that they differentiate the bird species and become well-equipped. When their expenditures were analyzed, although the participants with high income level constitute the majority, the number of those who spend below the average were surprisingly high. Bird watchers mostly participate in the observation once a month prefer the province they live in or the surrounding cities and do not require accommodation.

Bird watching is a type of sustainability-oriented tourism that emphasizes the need to keep rural environments as sound as possible, increases biodiversity and heritage values and further supports rural tourism. It also attaches importance to protecting the fauna, which is endangered and rarely seen. In the studies carried out by International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), it is emphasized that 13% of bird species are in danger of extinction worldwide. The primary reason for this situation is considered as the destruction habitats of the birds and hunting activities. The interest of the bird watchers in birds' makes them a special group of people contributing to the sustainability of the birds in the wildlife. Due to the population growth and, accordingly, the change in natural soils and water, wild and natural places, habitats for birds in the world are more threatened than ever before. Therefore, 19 institutions gathered for the prohibition of hunting of the endangered bird species completely (WWF, 2019).

In order to contribute to the protection and sustainability of natural areas and to benefit from them in terms of tourism;

- People should be more sensitive to prevent rare bird species from being disturbed. In this context, it is necessary to raise the awareness of the public.
- If it is necessary to approach the birds, they should be approached slowly. The number of tour groups/ bird watchers should be kept low since they are quite sensitive to noise.
- Studies on the evaluation of the impact of tourism on birds, people and the environment should be encouraged.
- Code of conduct should constitute an important part of tourism operations for tourists and guides/ tour operators.

- The state, NGOs and companies engaged in bird watching should give priority to the promotional and training activities related to bird watching.
- Since bird watching is an income generating activity, NGOs and organizations should contribute more to rural people and associations.

Within the scope of the study, the current situation of bird watching in Turkey as an alternative type of tourism and the topics such as the profiles, expenditures and mostly preferred and visited regions of the bird watchers were attempted to determine in terms of creating resources for tourism activities. In future studies, researches can be made for other alternative tourism types that have developed in different parts of the world such as bird watching but have not yet developed enough in our country. In addition, the data in the research were collected from the participants through questionnaires. In other studies, for bird watchers, research can be diversified by using observation or interview techniques, which are among qualitative research methods.

Declaration

The authors' contribution to the article is 60% first author and 40% second author. There is no conflict of interest reported by the authors.

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