

A Guide to Birding Tourism in Saskatchewan

RESEARCH BACKGROUND:

This summary report compiles topline findings from four research projects conducted by Environics Research in 2022 and 2023.

This report is intended to guide the establishment of birding tourism in Saskatchewan by informing target audiences, marketing communications, and infrastructure development.

There were four phases of research:

1. **Stakeholder interviews** with local tourism operators in Saskatchewan
2. **Expert interviews** with established tourism operators across Canada
3. **Online birding communities** were examined through a social listening approach to identify key themes in conversations
4. **Consumer interviews** with avid birders from CAN, US, and UK

Similar reports are available for Astro-tourism, Snowmobiling, and Outdoor Photography.



MAIN TAKEAWAY:

- To establish Saskatchewan's reputation as a birding destination, key areas to address are community-building, improved infrastructure, and targeted marketing communications.

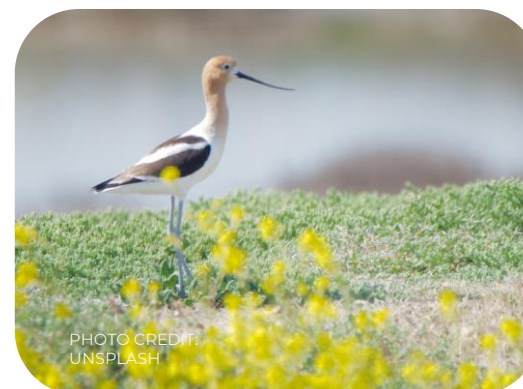


BUILD THE SASKATCHEWAN BIRDING COMMUNITY TO DEVELOP INDUSTRY AND REPUTATION:

- **Demographics:** Birders skew older, higher income, white, and male
 - Shift to greater participation from younger, female, and more diverse birders
- **Social Activity:** Meet like-minded individuals, eager to learn and share information with newcomers
- **Travel Inspiration:** Birding community shares travel experiences and recommendations on destinations
- Build local birding communities by encouraging birders to report sightings and facilitating group outings and annual festivals / events.

ENGAGING COMMUNICATION SHOULD SPEAK TO WHAT DRAWS BIRDERS IN:

- **Love of Nature:** Enjoy spending time outdoors and engaging in conservation efforts
 - Appreciation for intact ecosystems and biodiversity
 - Quiet relaxing activity to disconnect in nature, mental health benefits
- Communication should include strong visuals and sounds of birds.



- **Life-long Learners and Data-minded:**
 - Pride in mastering photography skills
 - Sense of accomplishment from identifying and collecting life lists (*Larry*)
 - Joy in observing birds in their natural environment (*Natalie*)
- Marketing communications can attract avid listers by promoting the volume and rarity of species that can be 'collected' in Saskatchewan. Consider gamification opportunities that appeal to younger audiences (e.g., collectable bird species cards).

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN DEVELOPING MARKETING MATERIALS FOR BIRDERS:

- **Strong Visuals:** Images and videos of birds grab attention and are a source of travel inspiration
- **Birds & Environment:** While close-ups of birds are key, birders are also interested in background nature / preserved ecosystems
- **Specific Details:** pictures should be accompanied by species names and locations spotted
- Encourage birders visiting Saskatchewan to share their positive travel experiences and photographs on social media.
- **Set Expectations:** Describe likelihood to see bird species and volumes that can be found in areas of the province
- **Rare Species:** Spotlight rare or sought-after bird species
- **Avoid Expressions:** Over-used expressions or puns are less effective in informative content
- Birders conduct extensive research about destinations, referring to online reviews.
- Birders require detailed trip planning information about bird species, hotspot locations, and timing to maximize chances of spotting bird species.



HIGHLIGHT SASKATCHEWAN'S STRENGTHS AS A BIRDING DESTINATION – MAIN DRAWS:



- Unique mix of woodlands, grasslands and wetlands birds in close proximity



- Migration season attracts large volume of birds passing and nesting



- Pristine, intact ecosystems allow birds to thrive in their natural habitats

➔ Continue to ensure conservation of untouched natural ecosystems rich with wildlife

CHALLENGES:

- **Low awareness** as a birding destination, especially outside of Canada
- **Perceived lack of rare birds** unique to Saskatchewan and not also found elsewhere in Canada or the United States

➔ Ensuring presence in specialized birding magazines, publications, and documentaries can raise awareness of Saskatchewan as a destination in consideration sets.

ADDRESS BIRDERS' KEY TRAVEL CONSIDERATIONS:

- **Infrastructure:** Trails and observation areas, and easy access to food, bathrooms, car rentals
 - *Nice to have:* Visitor centers, knowledgeable guides, observation canopies and blinds

- **Accommodations:** Located near birding spots, comfortable, clean
 - *Nice to have:* Immersed in nature, caters to birders

- **Accessibility:** Publicly accessible land at birding hotspots, limited driving distances expected at birding destinations
 - *Challenge:* Strict private property and trespassing laws are a barrier to attracting birders

- **Equipment:** Concerns about carrying expensive equipment while travelling for fear of theft or damage
 - *Nice to have:* Onsite equipment rentals (e.g., binoculars, cameras, microphones)

- **Cost:** Price is an important factor as birders want to maximize value on birding trips and use their budget to see more birds

➔ Focus infrastructure investments on building birding-friendly destinations with accommodations located near birding hotspots.



ATTRACT BIRDERS WITH COMPLEMENTARY ACTIVITIES:

- **Photography as a Hobby:** photography is incorporated into birding as an added challenge

- **Nature-based Activities:** hiking, camping, wildlife watching (mammals, insects, butterflies, reptiles), etc.

- *Active vs passive:* nature-based activities depend on age and physical abilities
- Some birders may prefer lower-effort activities like observation areas with water features for viewing birds and wildlife

- **Conservation Activities:** Volunteer opportunities to support local conservation initiatives (e.g., Citizen Science)

- **Tourism & Culture:** Sightseeing, learning about local cultures, experiencing local food, etc.

➔ Offering a variety of experiences is key for long-haul travelers, non-listers (Naturalist Natalie), and those travelling with partners who are not birders.

KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BIRDING AUDIENCES:

- **Geographical Differences:**
 - *NA:* More likely to have Central/South American countries on list
 - *UK:* More likely to have African countries on list
 - *UK:* When traveling to Canada considers a multi-purpose trip, visits multiple locations, and more likely to be unfamiliar with NA species and requires help
- **Persona Differences:**
 - *Lister Larry:* Prioritizes a large volume of species, more likely to visit multiple locations, curates bird list post-trip
 - *Naturalist Natalie:* More likely to seek complementary activities, more interested in conservation efforts
- **Partner is Not a Birder:**
 - Destination must include a variety of activities, better accommodations expected, more likely to have birding days interchanged with non-birding days



Birding Personas & Journey Summary



LISTER LARRY The Twitcher



Enjoys Challenges



Excited by Lists



Life-Long Learner

In a nutshell	Listers, looking to see as many species as possible every time they bird
About them	Affluent, older (boomers), many retired/close to retirement, skew male
Birding Motto	Gotta catch 'em all!
Motivations to travelling	Increase their lists (local, regional, national, life, etc.)
What they have in common	Love for nature, the natural environment, animals, engaged in conservation efforts. Life-long learners, curious, and take pride in improving their skills and sharing with others. Prefer smaller groups and intimacy. Enjoy quiet contemplation.
Shared Social Values	Primacy of Environmental Protection, Ecological concern, Attraction to Nature, Community Involvement, Need for Escape
Barriers for Saskatchewan	How to get Saskatchewan-native bird species on their dream list
Opportunities for Saskatchewan	Complete North American lists for Canadian / British birders who don't wish to visit the US. High probability to see certain birds
What they need to see and hear	What rare birds will I check off? Which lists can I complete? What's my probability?



NATURALIST NATALIE The Observer



Enjoys Observing



Excited by Discovery



Peaceful & Engaging

In a nutshell	Generalists, looking for quality experiences over quantity (though seeing new birds is always a positive)
About them	Mid-high income, across all ages, skew female, more likely to be a photographer
Birding Motto	I love watching birds in their natural habitat
Motivations to travelling	See and experience new birds (up close), observe their behaviour in their habitats.
What they have in common	Love for nature, the natural environment, animals, engaged in conservation efforts. Life-long learners, curious, and take pride in improving their skills and sharing with others. Prefer smaller groups and intimacy. Enjoy quiet contemplation.
Shared Social Values	Primacy of Environmental Protection, Ecological concern, Attraction to Nature, Community Involvement, Need for Escape
Barriers for Saskatchewan	How to show that Saskatchewan offers opportunities to observe birds up close
Opportunities for Saskatchewan	Great, uninhabited pristine habitats, opportunity to observe birds undisturbed, other interesting and unique wildlife
What they need to see and hear	What else is there to do? How many habitats can I see? How protected are they?

PHASES

GOALS

TOUCHPOINTS /
RESOURCES

BARRIERS

	1 INSPIRATION / DISCOVERY	2 RESEARCH & CONSIDERATION	3 PURCHASE	4 PRE-TRIP	5 DURING TRIP	6 POST-TRIP
	Learning / hearing about new destinations	Researching a destination of interest / (potentially) adding it to the list	Planning & booking a birding trip	Studying for the trip	Enjoying the trip, building my list. Birding!!	Sharing the trip
	Discover new destinations to visit / add to your list Chase dream species or life species	Deciding if a destination of interest fits with their criteria for travelling	Book flights, accommodations, transportation, parks and preserves (if needed), guides (if relevant) and anything else that may need to be booked.	Purchase field guides, research local bird species, learn how to identify them, talk to locals, find hotspots (and mark other potential sightings). Learn about other animals and habitats found in the area	To see the target / expected bird species & enjoy the local culture, food, nature and people To relax and challenge myself	Sharing the experience with other birders in your circle – photos, tips, learned experiences, recommendations.
	Online and in-person birding community → word of mouth Scientific community → magazines, documentaries, people who share photos they like, who have lists they respect, respected in the scientific community	eBird (species, hotspots, probability, timing) Other members of the birding community (WOM) Internet searches Field guides iNaturalist (for other wildlife)	Internet searches (general google) Online booking (Expedia, Trip Advisor, Airbnb, etc.) Travel agencies (when booking packages → rare, in situations where travelling solo is not possible/safe)	Field guides eBird Guide at the destination (if using one) Bird Pals (to connect with local birders) Internet searches (for regulations, weather, local wildlife, general conditions, important information)	Visitor centres → for advice on best spots, current update on what has been seen in the past few days Hotel staff Guide (if using one) → getting the 'lay of the land' and advice for solo exploration eBird → listing	Birding groups (in-person and online) Social media
	Having too many places to visit Distance Cost	Ensuring personal timelines are aligned with birding seasons for the specific species. Distances within the destination. Physical effort (can they reach the spot?)	Expensive flights, hotels Lack of accommodations close to the birding areas Difficulty getting the desired areas Lack of guides that speak English	Not finding enough information about the location, regulations, etc.	Not being able to see the target species Bad guides (not knowledgeable, inflexible, not social) Crowded locations Difficulty getting to birding locations	Negative experiences and destinations that don't deliver on expectations will gain a bad reputation