

Watchable Wildlife: A Partnership Approach to Elevating the Value of Wildlife



2003 Watchable Wildlife Conference

David K. Whitehurst Director, Wildlife Diversity Division

Louis Verner, Watchable Wildlife Biologist

Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries

Watchable Wildlife: A Partnership Approach to Elevating the Value of Wildlife

- Why do we need to elevate the value of wildlife?
- What's the connection with Watchable Wildlife?
- Why partnerships?
- Putting the pieces together

Why the need?

The decline of wildlife species in the United States is significant and widespread across many vertebrate and invertebrate taxa

- 100 of 448 native landbirds in US and Canada on PIF Watch List
- 31 species of birds have declined > 50% over last 30 years
- Major declines in amphibian populations in CA, Rocky Mountains, areas of Southwest
- 25 of 55 U.S. species of turtles in decline
- Marked decline in many pollinator species



We are losing specialist species...



while generalists increase...

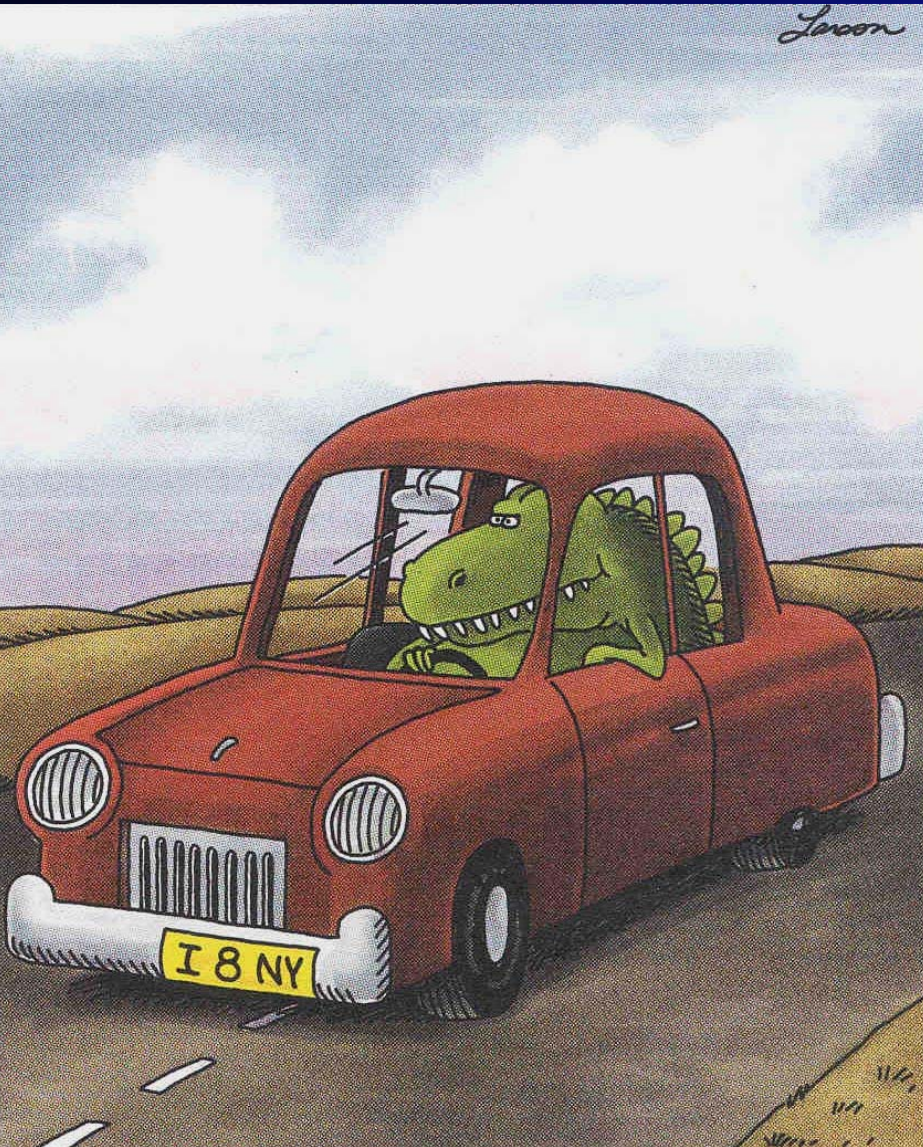




aliens expand and...



...take over!



- 5,000 Alien plant species in U.S. vs. 17,000 Indigenous species.
- Alien weeds are invading 1.75 million acres of U.S. wildlife habitat per year
- Alien invasives #2 reason for species extinction - 400 of 958 species on threatened or endangered list primarily due to impact of invasives.
- Total economic damages and associated control costs:
\$138 Billion/yr!

Why the need?

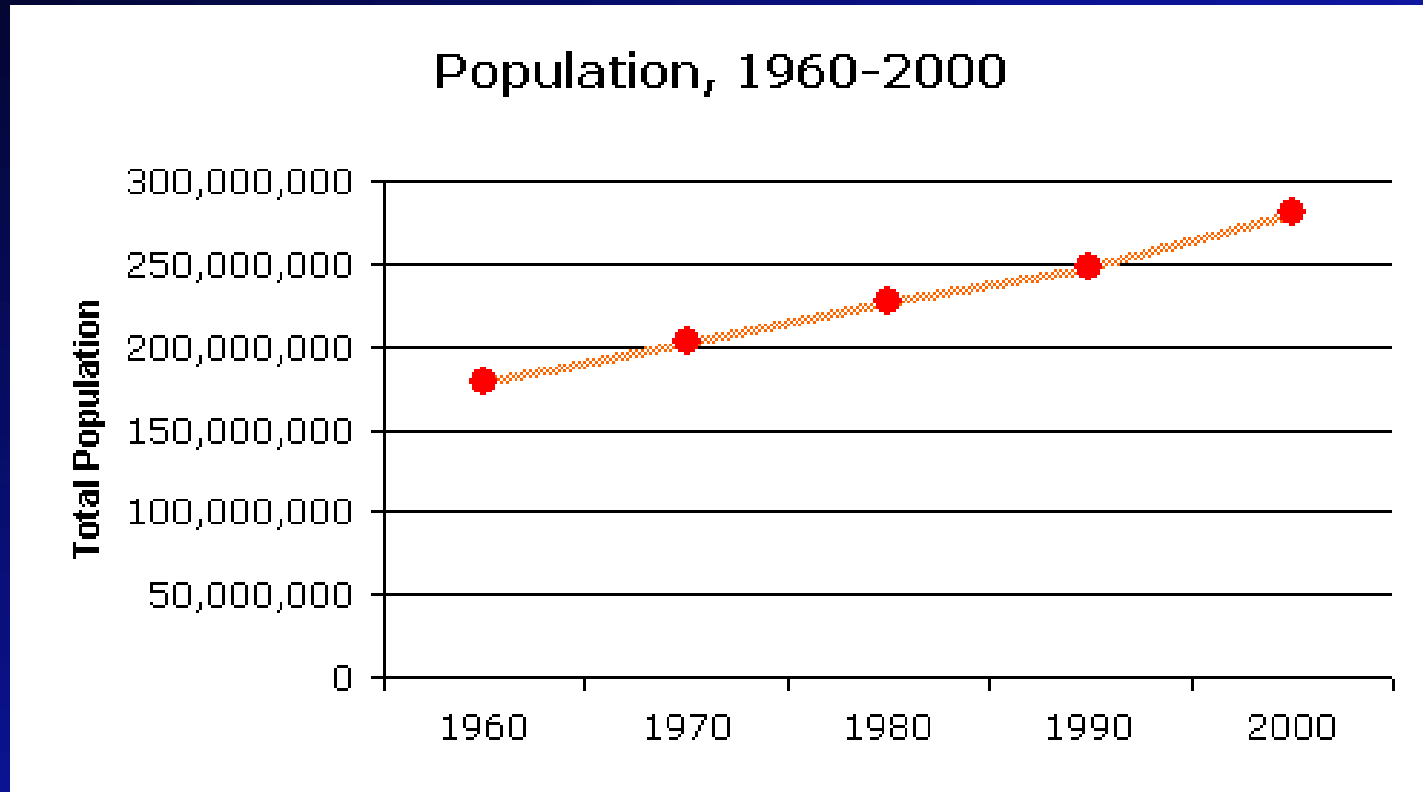
The single most important factor in these declines is reduction in the quantity and quality of habitat.

Increased human sprawl means continued loss and fragmentation of wildlife habitat.



Why the need?

- The US Population continues to grow



Current Population: 293 Million
Up 17% since 1990

Why the need?

- Land Consumption is increasing 2-2.5X faster than population growth
 - Increase in low-density zoning
 - % Adults living alone > 75% 1970-2002
 - Size of average home > from 1,500 to 2,200 sq. ft.



Bottom Line

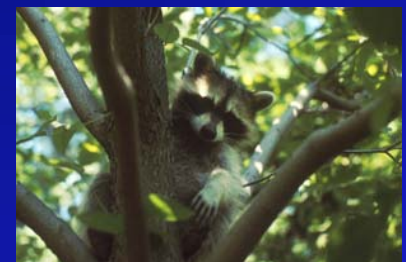
Unless habitats and functional ecosystems are conserved, wildlife populations will continue to decline.

Wildlife and native habitat will be conserved only if society determines they are **VALUABLE!**



What's the connection with Watchable Wildlife?

Watchable Wildlife



Creates Wildlife Enthusiasts



Enthusiast Activities = \$\$\$\$\$

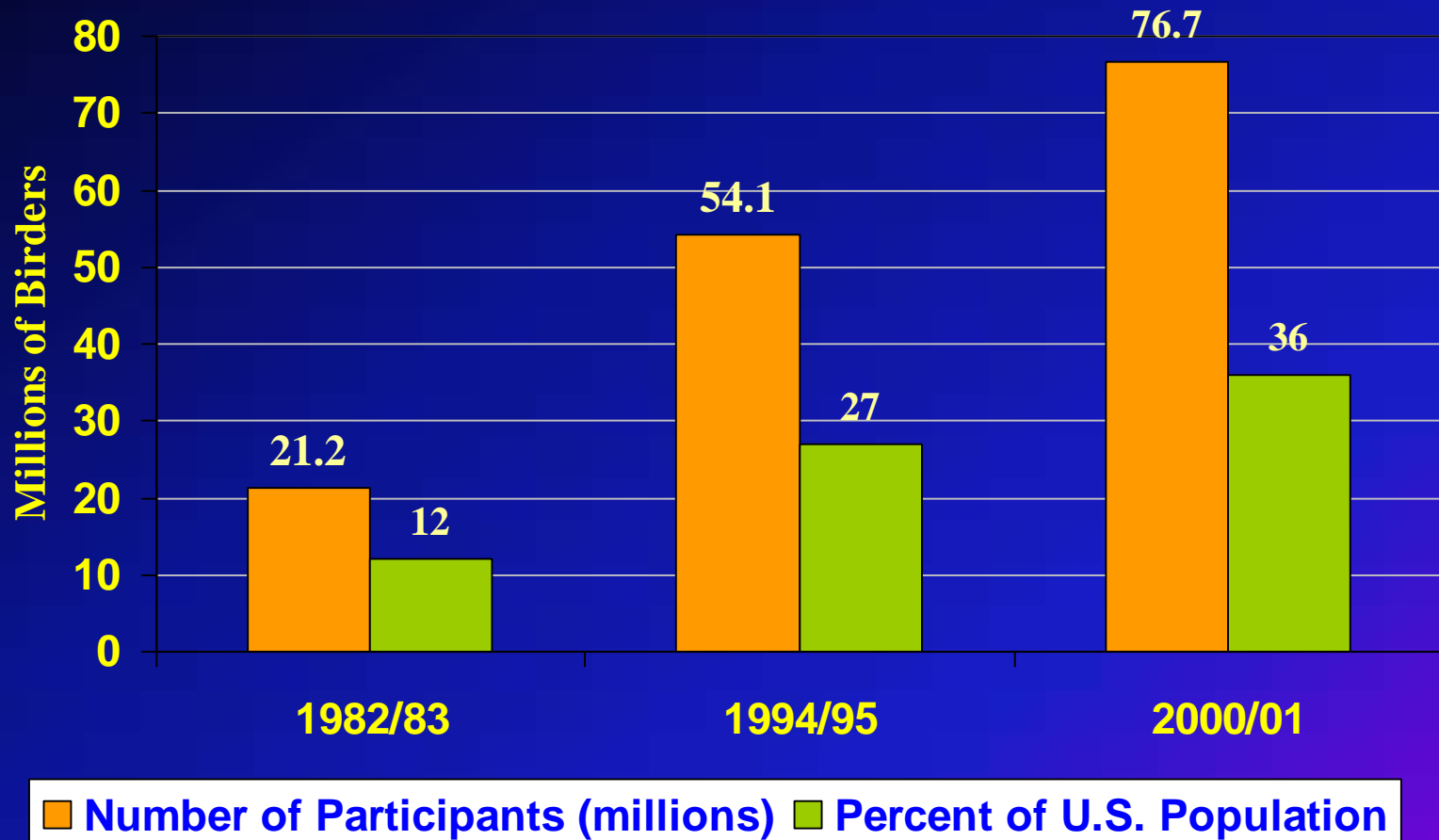


Creating value for wildlife and habitats!

Do Watchable Wildlife Programs Work?



- Wildlife Watching is Growing
 - Birding on the rise...



Participation in the South increased 388% from 1982-2001

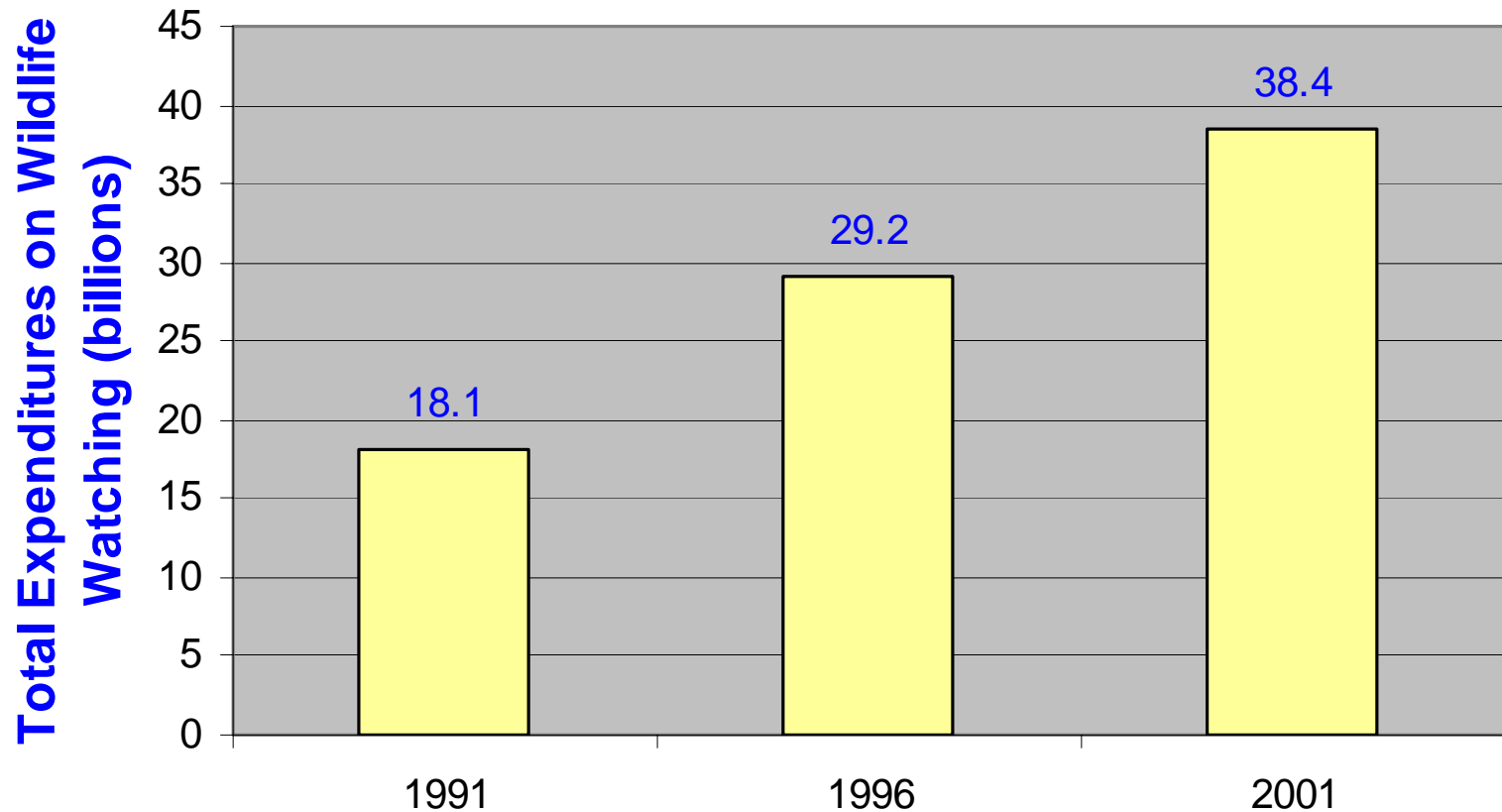


“Although there is a certain irony in people becoming enthusiastic about birds as they disappear, it also presents an opportunity: birders may be the economic and political force that can help save the birds.”

• Wildlife Watching is Growing

- **Festivals:** over 230/year in the U.S.
- **Trails:** 20 major trail projects on-going; numerous smaller local initiatives
- **Programs:** State and Federal agencies developing Watchable Wildlife and related programs
- **Facilities:** being developed by public and private entities
- **Education:** Local, state, national conferences, workshops, consulting firms, publications

• Wildlife Watching is Big Business



If Wildlife Watching were a company, its sales would rank it 33rd in the *Forbes 500* list for 2001.

USFWS 2001 Natl Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation

• Wildlife Watching is Big Business

- Travel and tourism generated **\$541 billion** in direct expenditures in the U.S. in 1999
- These expenditures directly generated **7.8 million jobs** that year
- Travel and tourism also generated **\$86.7 billion in federal, state and local tax revenue**
- Ecotourism is the fastest growing segment of the travel industry

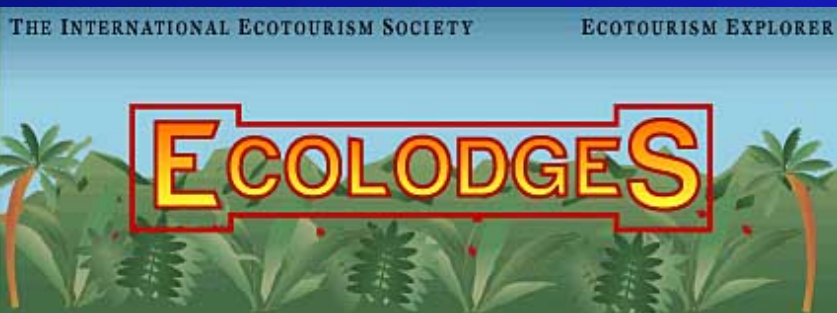
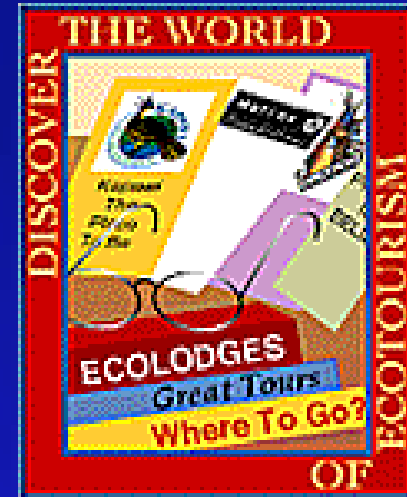


People want to participate/learn more

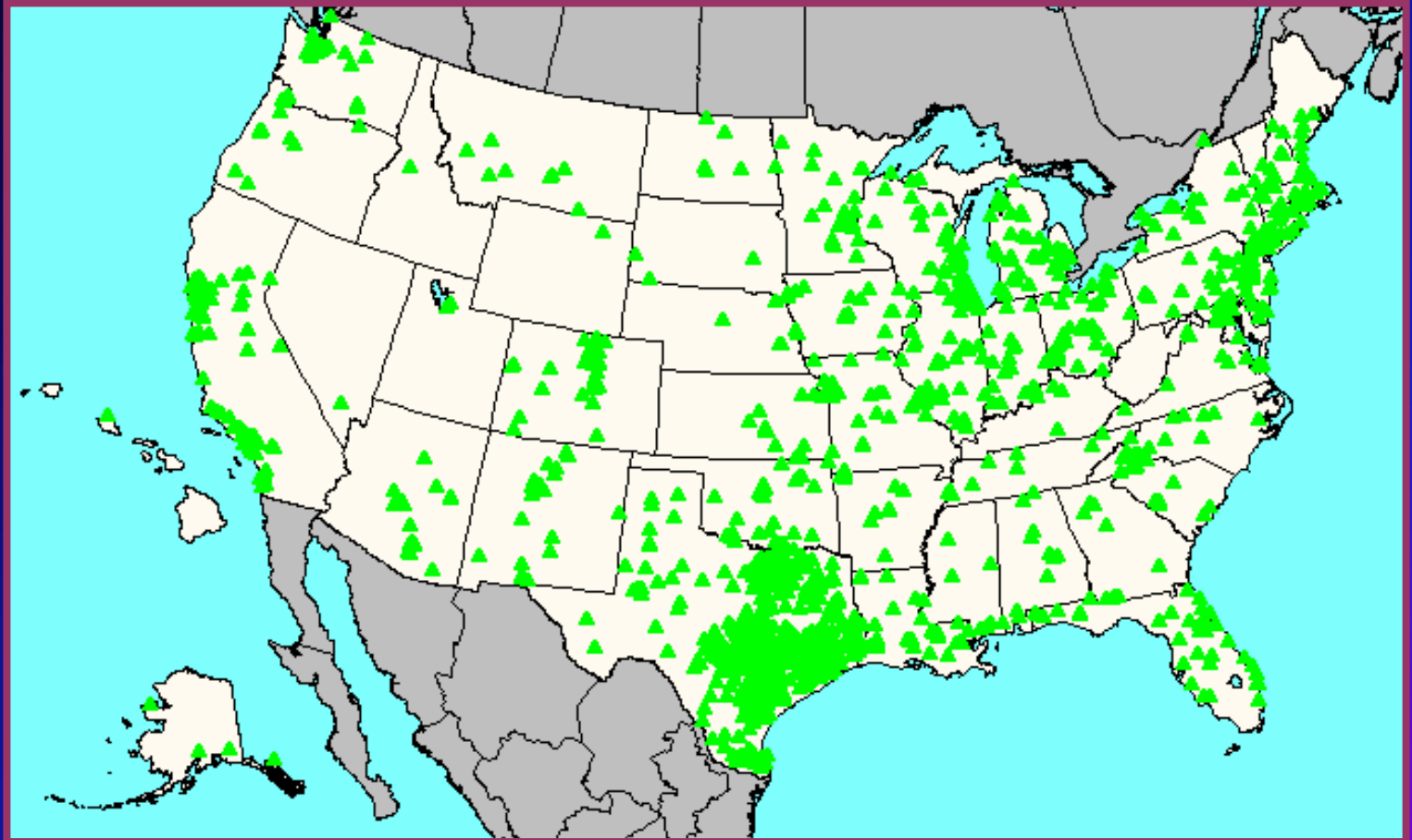
- Texas Master Naturalist Program 
 - 19 local recognized chapters (9 more in development)
 - 1,665 trained volunteers (1998-2002)
- NatureMapping Program
 - > 52,000 volunteers in 6 states; > 250,000 records
- River Watch Program
 - 700 Partner groups; 500,000 volunteers



Does Watchable Wildlife promote ecotourism?



Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail - Origin of Visitors



Connecting People to Nature

- Texas “The Valley”
 - Seven Annual Festivals



Connecting People to Nature

- Texas “The Valley”
 - World Birding Center



- Series of 9 sites throughout the Valley
- Edinburg open; headquarters in Mission open in Spring



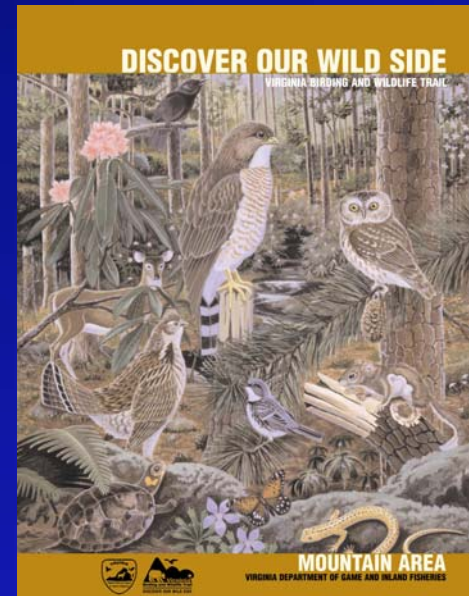
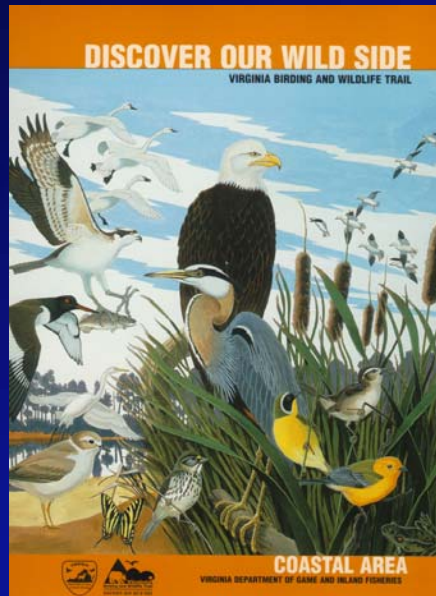
Connecting People to Nature

- Texas “The Valley”
 - McAllen Chamber of Commerce
 - Marketing Valley as nature photography destination
 - Creating annual photo conference with NANPA (North American Nature Photographers’ Association)



Connecting People to Nature

- Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail



- 🦅 First statewide program of its kind in U.S.
- 🦅 43,000 square miles of diverse natural habitats
- 🦅 400 species of birds
- 🦅 150 species of terrestrial and marine mammals
- 🦅 150 species of amphibians and reptiles

Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail

Using existing roads, the VBWT links Virginia's best wildlife viewing sites into 65 drivable trail loops with over 700 individual sites.

In addition to observing a wide variety of wildlife, visitors can partake in the many natural, cultural, and historical resources unique to each area.

Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail

- Measures of Success
 - News Media Coverage
 - Baltimore Sun**
 - Circulation: 466,916; Total Readership: 1.4 Million
 - Equivalent Advertising Cost: 2 pages, \$100,000
 - Picked up by 10 additional papers; Total Readership: > 2 million

www.sunspot.net/travel THE SUN SECTION R

TRAVEL

SUNDAY, MARCH 30, 2003

Virginia

Taking Wing

The state's new Birding and Wildlife Trail — part of a growing trend in 'avitourism' — is enough to set a birder's heart aflutter.

By CAROLY THOMAS, LOS ANGELES WRITER

A bald eagle flies over Land's End Wildlife Management Area in King George County.

An eastern bluebird finds a perch at Belle Isle State Park.

www.sunspot.net/travel THE SUN SECTION R

TRAVEL

SUNDAY, MARCH 30, 2003

Virginia

Taking Wing

The state's new Birding and Wildlife Trail — part of a growing trend in 'avitourism' — is enough to set a birder's heart aflutter.

By CAROLY THOMAS, LOS ANGELES WRITER

A bald eagle flies over Land's End Wildlife Management Area in King George County.

An eastern bluebird finds a perch at Belle Isle State Park.

White Pond, northwest of Warren, Va., is home to birds and largemouth bass, as well as frogs and dragonflies.

I hardly seemed possible a bald eagle tacking (see left) above George Washington's battleground as its way to open water shimmering in the late-day sun.

Heads turned, good things were. The only thing missing was an ornate version of "America the Beautiful."

Not every moment on the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail is a Hollywood moment, but if you're willing to do a little bit of driving, you will still be rewarded with quite a show.

Viewing and marketing "wildlife" opportunities is exciting all across the country. The movement even has a name — "avitourism" — and it's fueled by the knowledge that here, watching is the fastest growing segment of outdoor recreation in the country.

By now, more than 20 states have built or are building birding trails modeled on the original birding trail project in Texas, which has been hailed by conservationists as well as tourism officials.

According to surveys by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Audubon Society, birders are male and female equally, middle-aged, with 17 years of schooling. Many of them are empty-nesters with time on their hands and money in their pockets.

A U.S. Forest Service survey in 2001 put the number of annual birders at 11.5 million, up from 4.1 million in 1982. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates 40 million people are serious birders, who spend average money, as much as \$24 billion annually on travel, guides and gear.

Virginia's birding trail is truly 10 separate loops within the state's coastal plain. None of the shorter ones, such as the Blue Ridge Loop, is the mostly paved route of Washington, so, on most days, 80 percent, the rugged Eastern Shore Loop road may be a three-day weekend.

With a road map and the state's special birding trail guide to hand, adventurous sorts can improve their own loop, starting at the trail and working backward or working from the outside to finish out.

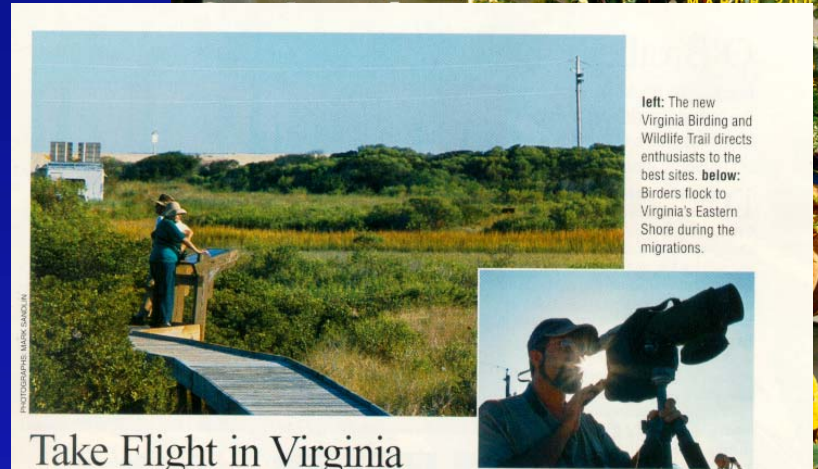
For two-day excursions, (See Travel, 4)

A great blue heron gives a leg to its mate in a rocky overhanging White Pond at Appomattox River Wildlife National Wildlife Refuge. On a recent trip to the pond, visitors crowded its south bank to take photos.

TRAVEL SMARTS: Science in Scotland, Page 2 STRATEGIES: Travel in time of war, Page 2 PERSONAL JOURNEYS: Hivoshing Peace Park, Page 3 BY THE NUMBERS: Airfare bargains, Page 4

Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail

- Measures of Success
 - News Media Coverage
Southern Living Magazine
 - National Coverage
 - Circulation:
2,816,000
 - Total Readership:
13,000,000



left: The new Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail directs enthusiasts to the best sites. below: Birders flock to Virginia's Eastern Shore during the migrations.

Take Flight in Virginia

Follow these trails to the state's best birding and wildlife viewing spots.

I can't believe my eyes. I decided to drive through Virginia's Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge on this brilliant blue morning to refresh my spirit and see the wild ponies. Instead, I spy a lone sand-colored bird with a band of black around its neck.

I roll down the window, cut the engine, and watch for long moments as the little fellow hops to and fro like a windup toy. When at last he takes cover, I flip open my cell phone and call a fellow bird enthusiast back home in Alabama to report the exciting news. I saw a piping plover!

Now you have to understand—I'm not an experienced birder. Yet even as a beginner, I know that this is one of the most endangered species in North America. Posters are plastered throughout the refuge warning visitors to watch where they plant their feet lest they destroy a piping plover nest or injure a chick. Besides, that bird was so darn cute.

This encounter only whets my appetite for seeing more of Virginia's



Visit Virginia, and you may catch a rare glimpse of a black-crowned night heron.

wildlife diversity director with the Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries. "Unfortunately, not very many people know where any of them are, even the dedicated people who do this regularly."

To remedy this problem, David and his co-workers have developed the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail. They've identified 18 loop trails that crisscross the coastal region, linking together refuges, state parks, historic sites, and even private properties

D.C., through Richmond, all the way to the North Carolina state line.

The information comes packaged in a 100-page, spiral-bound guide containing loop maps, driving directions, and site descriptions. "We separated the driving instructions from the site descriptions so that you can lay this book on the seat of your car and navigate from site to site without having to turn any pages," David explains. What's more, the publication is free. All you have to do is pick up a phone or log on to the Internet.

The loops make it much easier for travelers like me to come face-to-face with the 420 species of birds that either live in or travel through the state of Virginia. "By creating a trail like this you increase the number of people who are enjoying wildlife," David muses.

Trails in the state's mountain and piedmont regions are being developed and will open later this year and into 2004.

CASSANDRA M. VANHOESER

Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail

- Measures of Success
 - **Additional Media Coverage**
 - ❖ 2001-2002: 70 Articles in VA papers; >7.7 million impressions
 - ❖ Coastal Phase media preview: 2 TV stations
 - ❖ Northern Neck Tourism Council received > 2,300 inquiries about Trail in following 3 months.
 - **Demand for Trail Guides**
 - ❖ 15, 000 copies of Coastal Trail Guide delivered
 - ❖ 7,500 copies of Mountain Trail Guide delivered

Why Partnerships?

- The problem is too big and too complex to be solved by any other means.
- Partnerships command attention, resources, and new partners.
- Partnerships stimulate and energize win-win solutions. Partnerships create intellectual synergy.
- “Conservation includes, at the least, biology, natural resource management, economics, sociology, and politics” (*PIF*).

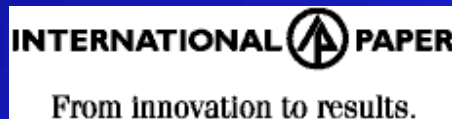
The Power of Partnerships

Example: Integrated Bird Conservation

Implementation Partnerships

Evaluation Partnerships

Interagency, academic, governmental,
non-governmental, industrial, & public



The Power of Partnerships

- Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail



Sponsored By:



Virginia 
is for Lovers[™]

Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail

- Funding/Key Partners



VDGIF – Committed \$4000,000 in staff time, goods and services, 1999-2004



VDOT – Awarded VDGIF 3 *TEA-21* grants totaling \$1.1 million



Virginia Tourism Corporation – Direct support of marketing of VBWT, media events, single-copy fulfillment of trail guide requests



VDEQ – Awarded VDGIF \$100,000 for production of Coastal phase trail guide and map

Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail

Over 500 Partners... and Growing!



Richard Bland College
OF THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY



CHÂTEAU MORRISETTE

Eastern Shore of Virginia
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



Discover Your
REGIONAL PARKS



LEWIS GINTER BOTANICAL GARDEN
COME WATCH US GROW



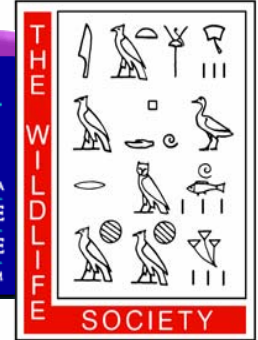
Richmond Audubon Society

Blue Ridge
Travel Association
of Virginia

Shenandoah Valley



THE MARINERS' MUSEUM
NEWPORT NEWS, VIRGINIA



VIRGINIA CHAPTER of the AMERICAN FISHERIES SOCIETY
Inland Fisheries and Aquatic Resources of Virginia

Virginia Beach Convention and Visitor Development



Friends of Dragon Run Virginia Chapter

Can Ecotourism lead to Habitat Conservation?

- Texas “The Valley”

- **Friends of the Wildlife Corridor**

- Volunteer group supporting Santa Ana and LRGV NWR's

- Fundraising/lobbying for land acquisition – complete unbroken Wildlife Corridor along Rio Grande

- Rio reforestation – co-sponsored by USFWS and Valley Proud – volunteer, schoolkid revegetation program

- **Land Preservation** – Many organizations (TNC, USFWS, Friends of Wildlife Corridor, Valley Land Fund) buying up land from willing sellers for conservation efforts.

- **Increased Community Awareness** of the economic value of native habitat. Landowners changing land use practices to benefit wildlife, e.g. Martin Refuge.

Can Ecotourism lead to Habitat Conservation?

- North Dakota and Kansas

- Pembina Gorge/Cheyenne Bottoms** - Hog farm expansion defeated on basis of negative effects on ecotourism

- Virginia

- Loudoun/Charlotte Co.**, – Land conservation efforts associated with benefits of Birding and Wildlife Trail

- Texas

- Prairie Rivers** – Nature tourism strategies lead to landowner protection of critical habitats and Visitor Center. Now recognized as one of 5 Shining Star Communities by Ag Dept.

Conserving Wildlife Habitat

Putting the pieces together

Field Data

Scientific Community

Scientific
Partnerships

Awareness
Education

Public/Corporate
Community

Community
Partnerships

Conserving Wildlife Habitat

Putting the pieces together

Research

Shared Knowledge/Resources
Integrated Plan of Action

Scientific
Partnerships

Awareness
Education

Public Support
Defining Wildlife Value

Community
Partnerships

Conserving Wildlife Habitat

Putting the pieces together

Research	Awareness Education
Scientific Partnerships	Community Partnerships

Conserving Wildlife Habitat

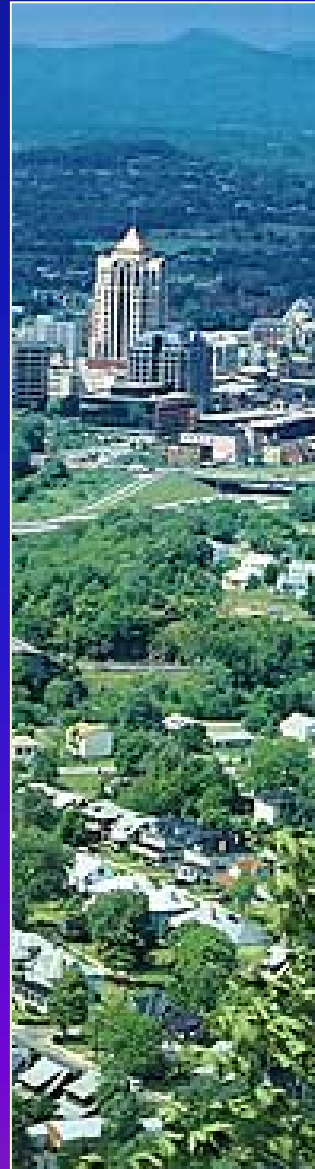
Putting the pieces together



Nature Based Tourism

Community Benefits

- Build unique community identity
- Promote historical significance
- Develop Pride of Place
- Conserving wildlife habitat improve quality of life
- Greenways/trails important criteria for recruitment
- Property adjacent to Green Space maintains 15-30% higher value



Nature Based Tourism Community Benefits

- Provide positive marketing image
- Promote community cultural fabric
- Promote authentic indigenous community characteristics
- Create a story for the community





“Rural communities that otherwise would not have the funds to promote their destinations are profiting from their association with The Trail thereby invigorating the local economy and restoring the community spirit.”

British Airways Tourism for Tomorrow Awards 2001

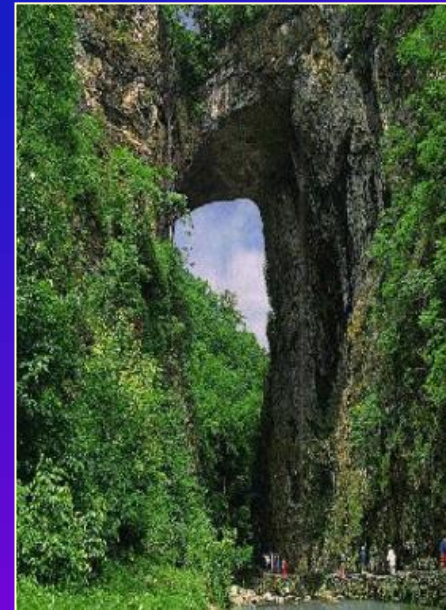
Nature Based Tourism

Natural Resource Benefits

- Heightened awareness among residents and visitors of value of natural resources and need to conserve irreplaceable assets
- **Stewardship of assets and resources**
- Protection of community-determined sacred places



Red cockaded
woodpecker



Natural
tunnel

Nature Based Tourism

Growing a New Industry

- Platform for expansion of existing jewels
- Encourage new business investment
- Tap into natural and human resources
- Attract tourists to spend money on local products and lodging
- Create opportunity for festivals, nature centers, artisan guilds
- Attract new industry to the community
- Doesn't overburden existing infrastructure



- Conservation is the goal.
- Connecting people to nature is the key.
- Creating value for wildlife through partnerships is the solution.

Watchable Wildlife: A Partnership Approach to Elevating the Value of Wildlife



2003 Watchable Wildlife Conference

David K. Whitehurst Director, Wildlife Diversity Division

Louis Verner, Watchable Wildlife Biologist

Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries