Bird-watching Tourists in Australia

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Many thanks also to all the bird-watchers, tour operators and others who participated.

This was a nationwide survey …

…on the practices, needs and attitudes of bird-watching tourists in Australia …

…primarily by **questionnaires** …

I **particularly** like to see birds that are:	Little or no importance to me	Of some importance to me	Very important to me
unique to Australia	☐	☐	☐
unique to the part of Australia I'm visiting	☐	☐	☐
rare	☐	☐	☐
vulnerable or endangered species	☐	☐	☐
species I've never seen before	☐	☐	☐
species my friends/colleagues/family have never seen	☐	☐	☐
brightly-coloured, elegant or attractive in some other way	☐	☐	☐
exhibiting unusual or intriguing behaviour	☐	☐	☐
interacting with me (e.g. approaching for hand-feeding)	☐	☐	☐
readily photographed	☐	☐	☐
big (eagles, cockatoos, herons etc)	☐	☐	☐
predatory (eagles, owls etc)	☐	☐	☐
singing or giving strange, memorable calls	☐	☐	☐
species I've read about or seen on documentaries	☐	☐	☐

… to tourists, guides of bird walks and eco-lodge owners.

256 bird-watching tourists responded

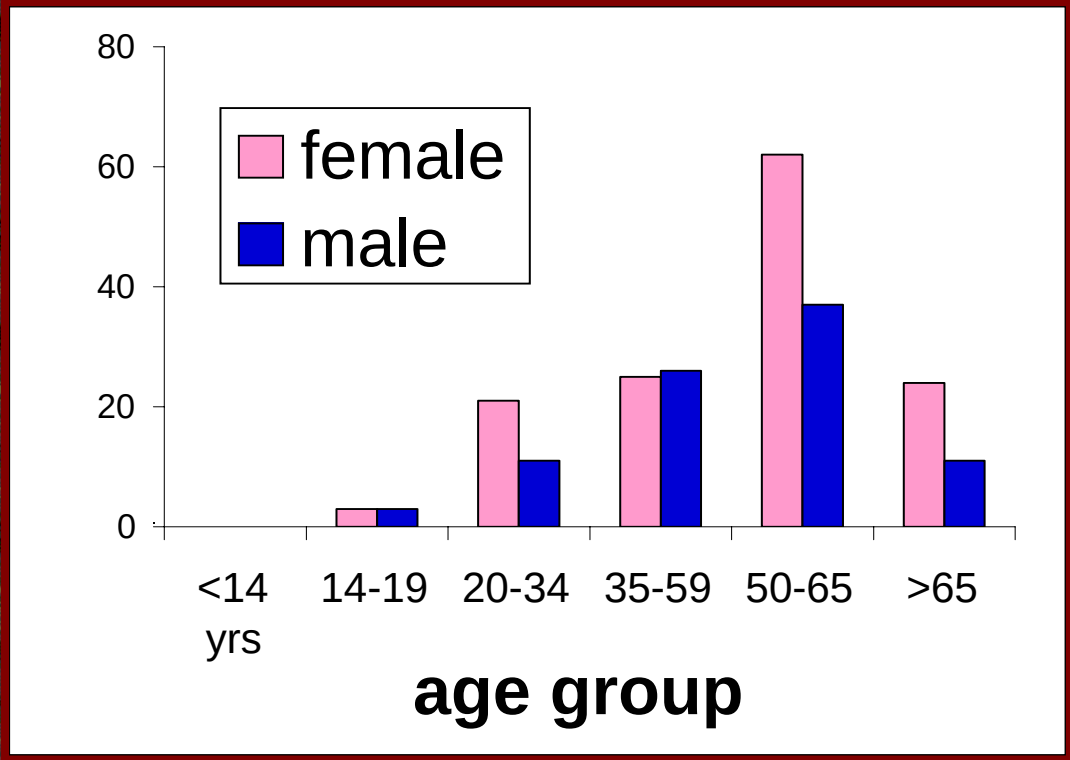
Nationality	No.
Australian	164
Australian & other	17
New Zealand	4
British & Irish	28
European	9
North American	9
South African	3
South American	1
Asian	1
Unanswered	20
Total non-Australian	55

Completed forms were posted from:

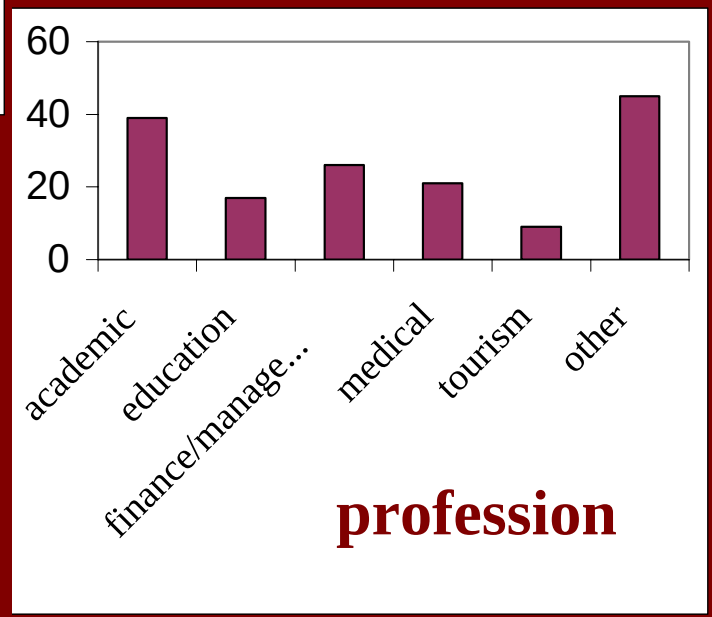
Southeast Queensland	72
Queensland - other	53
New South Wales	34
Victoria	5
South Australia	6
Western Australia	8
Northern Territory	14
New Zealand	1
Unknown	63

Covered (briefly) in this paper:

- Demographics
- Variation amongst bird-watchers
- Preferences
- Birdwatchers and the tourism industry
- Conservation aspects



Most respondents were well-educated and middle-age to elderly



> 95% were **very interested** in seeing **other wildlife**

Most commonly expressed views	%
I [do not] enjoy hunting or wish to try it	96.68
I want to see other wildlife as well as birds	95.51
I [would not] rather disturb a bird from its nest than fail to identify it	94.17
I'll probably be bird-watching on my next travel	93.03
I can identify most birds around home	86.12
I would join a tour to reach difficult places	85.96
I plant bird-attracting species in my garden	81.85
I [do not] mainly join bird-walks because family and friends want me to	81.74

Slightly less than half kept life-lists of birds seen

Most variable views

	%
I like to see birds **doing something interesting**	48.37
I go bird-watching in **places I like for other reasons**	47.33
I **read** about **birds** of my destinations	56.33
Birds are my **favourite animals**	45.30
I would willingly go **camping** to see a **new bird**	54.20
I can **identify females and juveniles** of many	54.62

Attitudes of "life-listers"

	R^2
Bird-watching is my favourite activity	0.403
I can identify many females and juveniles	0.338
I'd like to identify all Australian birds	0.312
I read about birds before visiting	0.301
Birds are my favourite animal	0.293
I often carry binoculars	0.268
I'm interested in bird behaviour	0.252
I'm interested in bird ecology	0.248
I often visit national parks for bird-watching	0.247
I often take notes on birds seen	0.243

Group 1: keen birders

	R^2
Bird-watching is my favourite activity	0.772
I can identify females and juveniles of many Australia birds	0.700
I often record birds I see	0.674
I'd like to be able to identify all Australian birds	0.668
I generally carry binoculars	0.649
I read about birds of my destination	0.627
I'm very interested in bird ecology	0.614
I would willingly camp to see a new bird	0.610
I keep a life-list of all birds seen	0.556
I'm very interested in bird behaviour	0.512
I like to see rare birds	0.501
I'll probably do some bird-watching on my next travels	0.455
I like to see birds unique to the part of Australia visited	0.431
[I mainly go birding because of family or friends]	-0.420

Cumulative variance 18.9

Group 2: ‘thrill-seekers’

Statement	R^2
I like to see big birds	0.780
I like to see predatory birds	0.704
I like to see brightly-coloured birds	0.701
I like to see birds interacting with me	0.672
I like to see birds I’ve read about	0.655
I like to see birds doing something interesting	0.649
I like to see birds that are singing	0.630
I like to see birds my friends have never seen	0.531
I like to see birds that are readily photographed	0.466
I like to see vulnerable birds	0.440
I like to see rare birds	0.429
I like to see birds I’ve never seen before	0.401

Cumulative variance explained 35.283

The most commonly-preferred bird features:

endemism to Australia

and

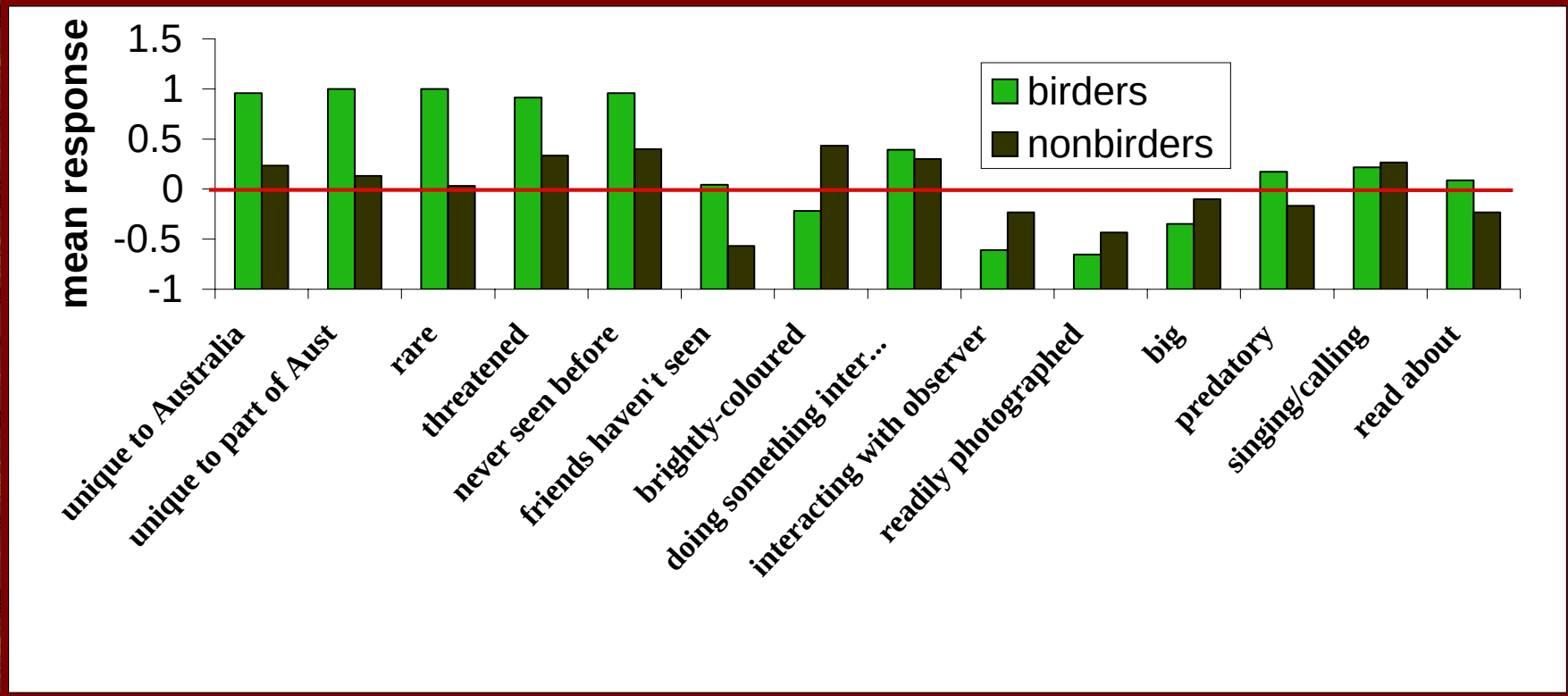
endemism to the part of Australia being visited…

Aussies and others

	Number of respondents in group	% responding 'very important' to see birds unique to Australia
Lived only in Australia	104	76.34
Lived in Australia & elsewhere	102	66.15
Never lived in Australia	35	71.42
Watched birds only in Australia	43	79.06
Watched birds in Australia & elsewhere	207	69.56
Never watched birds in Australia	5	80.00

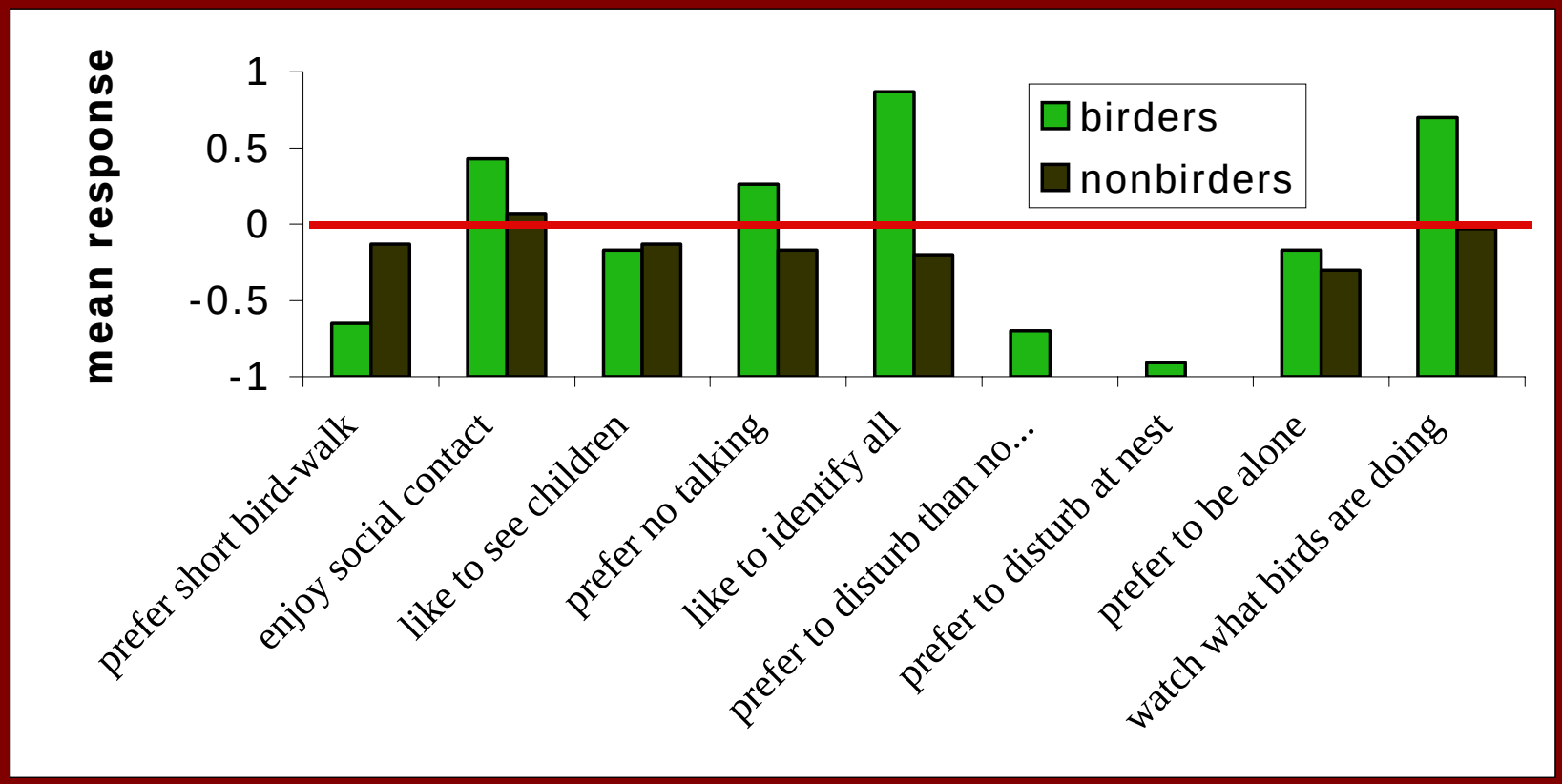
No apparent difference between Australian and visiting bird-watchers in desire to see birds endemic to Australia

“I like to see birds that are….”



The most **common preferences** on bird-walks were **identifying birds** and **social contact.**

Preferences on a bird-walk



Conservation-related responses	%
I want to see vulnerable or endangered species	61.7
During the past 10 years I have:	54.8
belonged to a conservation organization	
attended a meeting related to bird conservation	51.6
attended a meeting related to conservation generally	50.0
Feeding wild birds gives good opportunities for photography	40.7
I have tended injured or orphaned wildlife	37.5
Feeding wild birds is usually okay if the right foods are used	29.0
Feeding wild birds gives a feeling of interaction with nature	28.2
Feeding wild birds is okay in cleared or non-natural areas	18.1
It's okay to flush birds from grass or heathlands for a sighting	16.5
Feeding wild birds should be allowed in some national parks	9.3
I would rather disturb a bird than fail to identify it	7.7
I enjoy hunting for sport or would like to try it	1.61
I would rather disturb it from a nest than fail to identify it	1.6

Observations by tour guides suggest that serious disturbance of birds is a rare event.

Question	No. of responses			
How often do your guests:	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Often
Talk loudly enough to disturb birds?	1	4	4	0
Disturb birds while trying to identify them?	3	4	3	1
[Behave as though they] would have disturbed birds if guide hadn't stopped them?	3	3	4	1

Feeding birds

NP cleared photo interact diet

Comment by a respondent

From an ex-pat Brit's point of view, the opportunities for bird-watching are amazing. Also totally untapped as far as tourism goes. My local catchment area contains >190 spp. Why doesn't Brisbane market itself as the 'city of birds' (rather than 'most liveable', whatever that means!)

Travel agents and travel books were the least-used sources of information on where to go bird-watching.

How I decide where to watch birds	%
I visit places I like for other reasons	47.33
books (not travel)	44.31
I do it at places I'm going to anyway	42.21
national parks info	38.11
friends/family	37.86
natural history organizations	30.99
internet	19.57
documentaries	16.12
travel book	7.98
travel agent	2.11

Most likely to join commercial tours:

‘Keen birders’

(bird-watching named as favourite activity, often record what is seen etc)

and

‘Thrill-seekers’

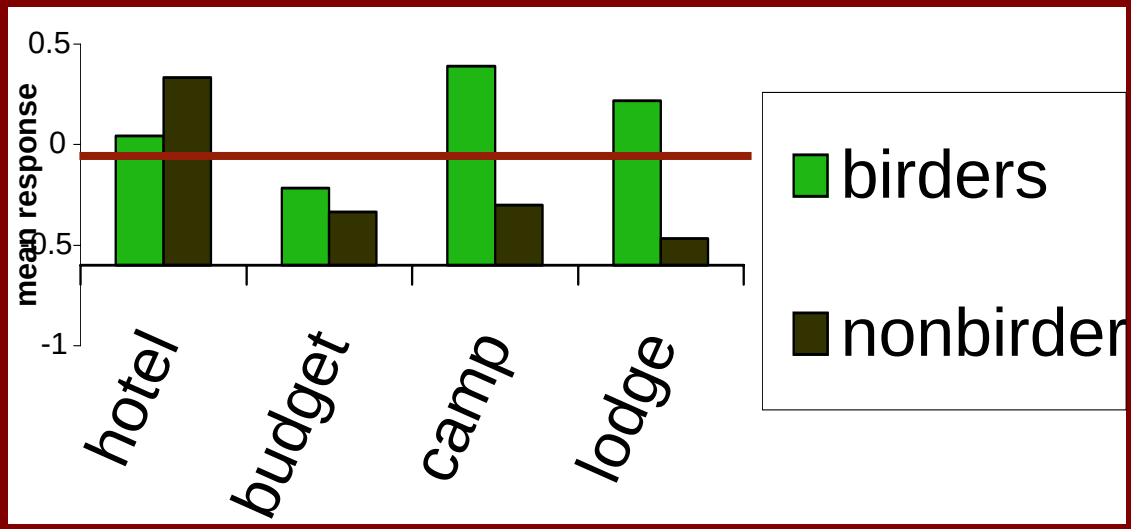
(wanting to see big and colourful birds etc)

Respondents would go by self or small group in:	no.
Australia only	22
all regions	40
most regions (including Australia)	26
Australia (whether or not elsewhere)	136
western countries & Asia, not Africa or Latin America	62

total who would go by self but never on a tour	51
total who would tour but never go by self	24

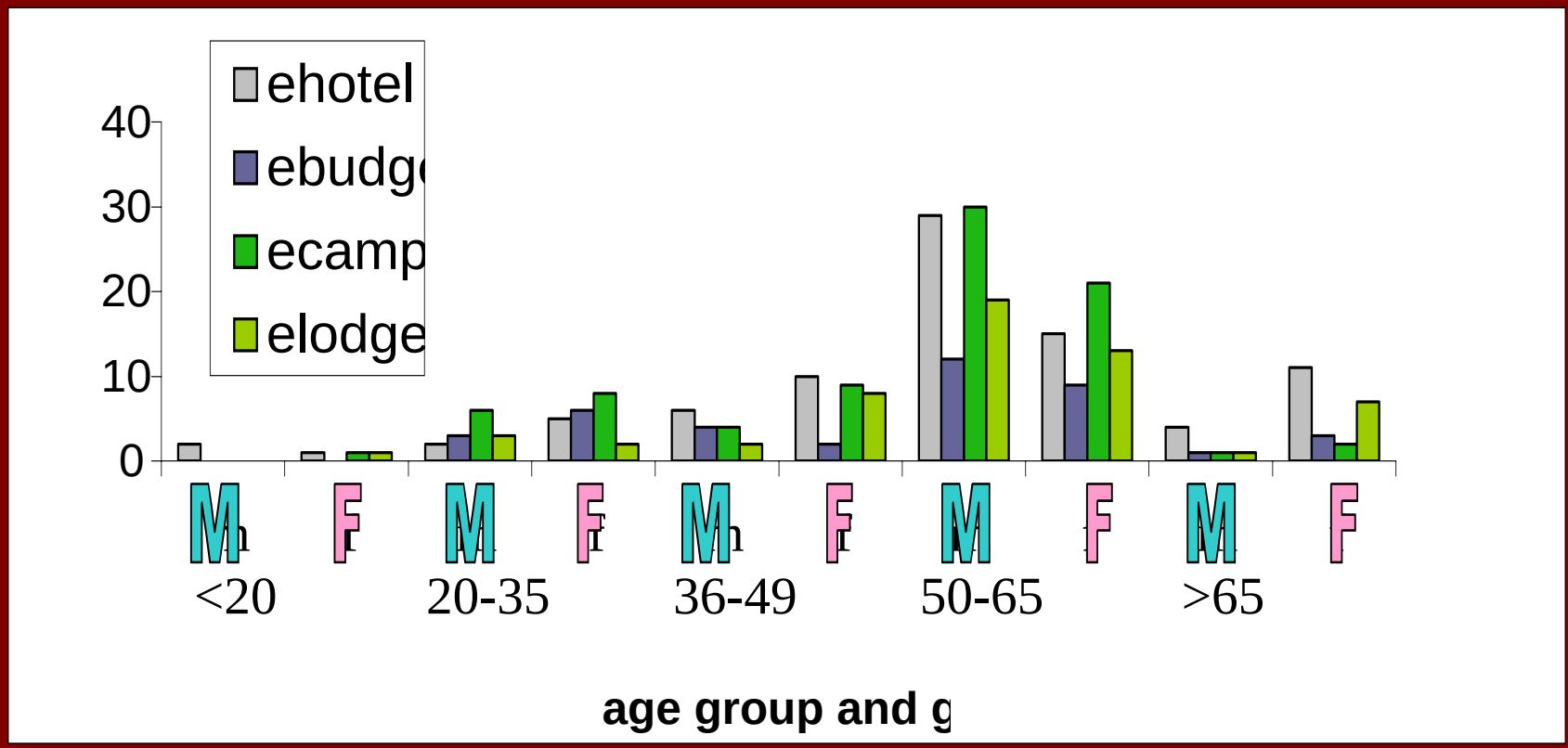
Most common attitudes of bird-watchers who would join tours

I like to see birds I've read about
I get info on bird-watching localities from natural history organization
I enjoy social contact while birding
Bird-watching is my favourite activity
[I **don't** often photograph birds]



‘Keen birders’ were more likely than others to choose camping or lodges over hotels…

…but frequency of camping declined after the age of 65



The most common suggestions for improving the enjoyment of bird-watching in Australia were :

…provide better information on where to see birds…

… and conserve bird habitat