

# Twitch or connection

What do birdwatchers want?



Chestnut Rail

Partridge Pigeon

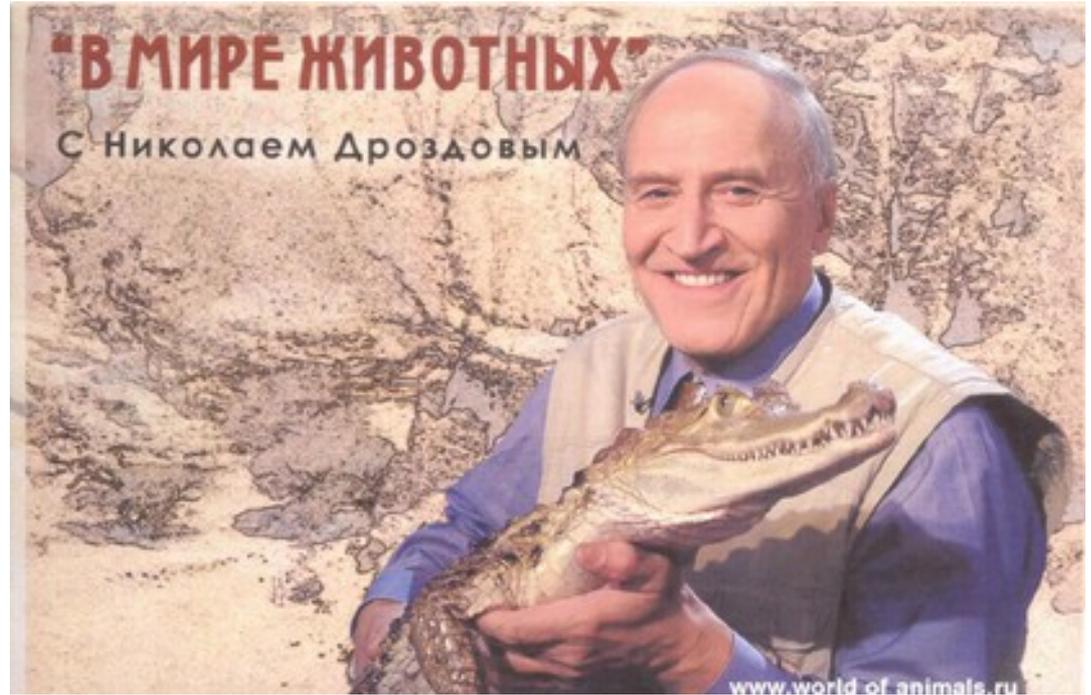


Rainbow Pitta

*Denise Lawungkurr Goodfellow*

Birdwatching/natural history guide; biological consultant; author/wildlife consultant - 30 years.

Dr. Nikolas Drozdov,  
Russia's David Attenborough



Deadly 60

*PhD research is on US couples who travel internationally and watch birds*

Birdwatching is the largest sector of wildlife tourism.

Americans (USA) constitute the largest market - 50 to 80 million, about 20 million of whom travel to watch birds.

Larry Wan, past mayor of Miami (below), and Sarah Wan, environmentalist (right)



These people are mostly:

- seniors;
- well-travelled;
- well-educated: (89 of 359 in PhD study had doctorates, and 124 a Master's);
- well-connected;
- women;
- married or in a similar long-term relationship

## Birders or birdwatchers

### Birders:

- want to see and list new birds;
- travel mostly to see birds;
- like to see birds that are hard to find or identify (lbjs)



*continuum*

### Birdwatchers:

- want to know and understand birds
- like big, showy or colorful birds
- may have other interests
- Travel for reasons other than just birds

# Two different markets

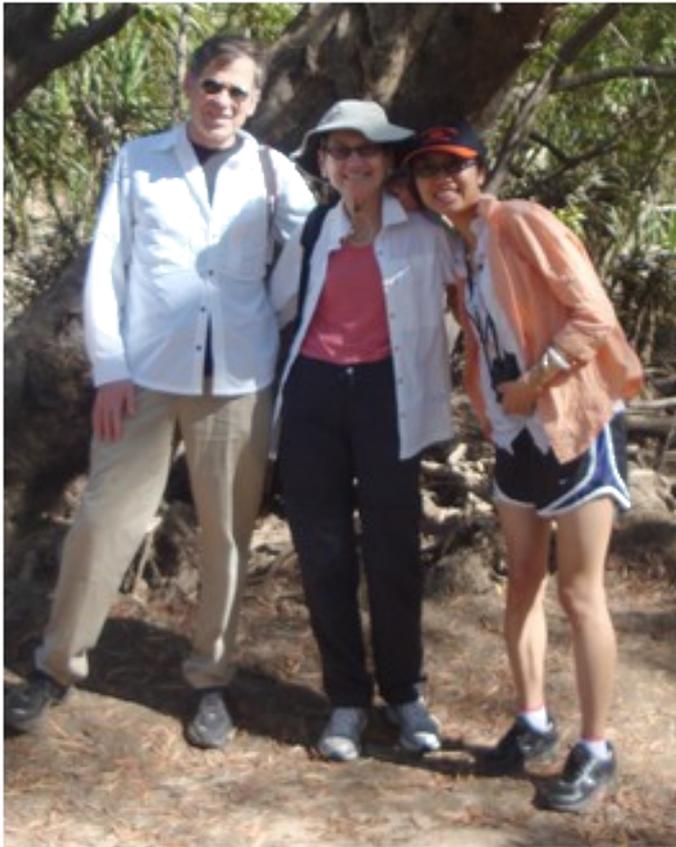
*Men are generally “birders”*



Women are more likely  
to call themselves “birdwatchers”

QuickTime™ and a  
decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

## Most appear to travel internationally with their spouse ...



Prof. S. Wofsy, HIPPO\* Project,  
C. Farrell and PhD student, Minghui  
from Beijing

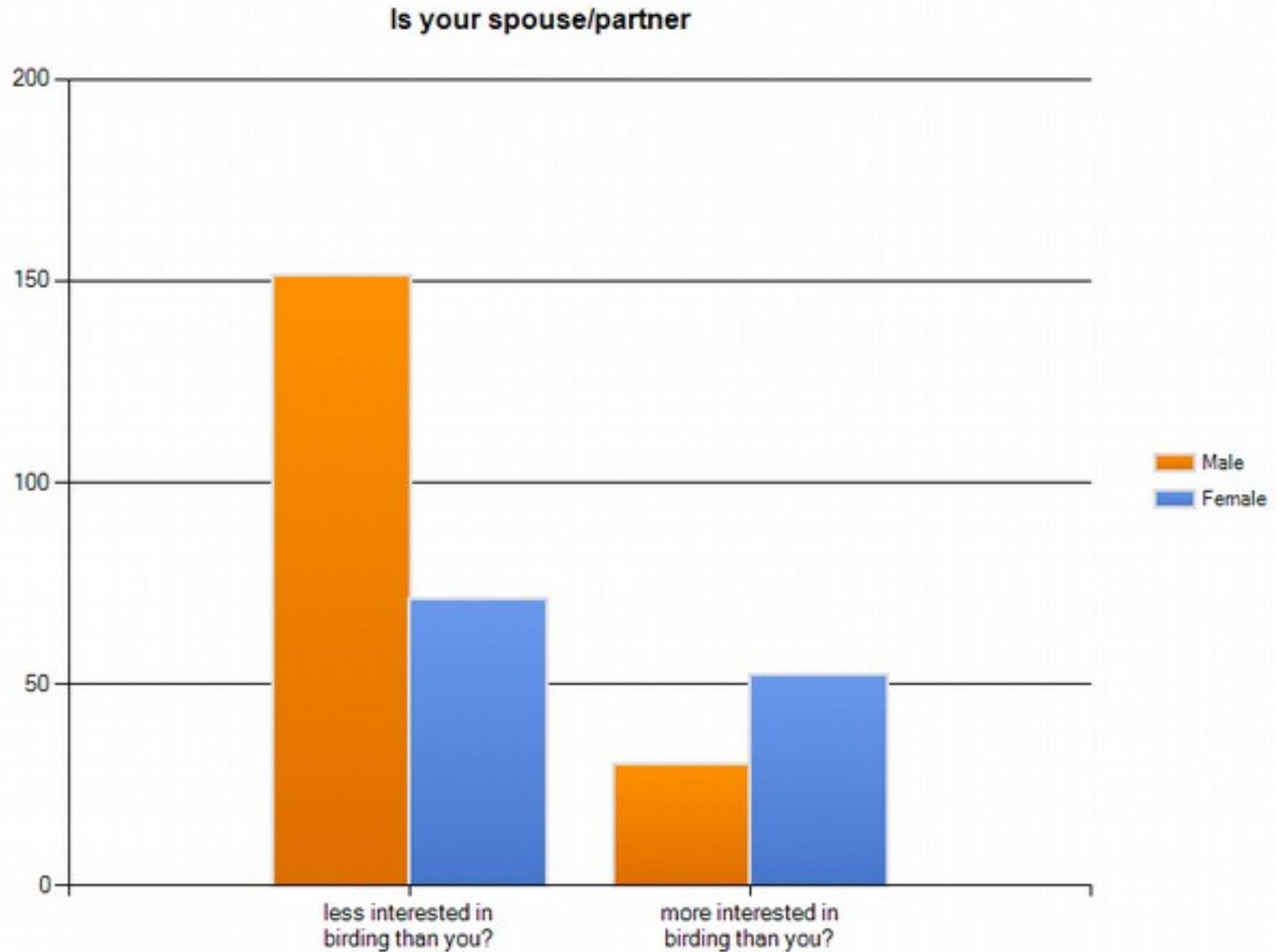
\*HIAPER Pole-to-Pole Observations -  
establishing base line data for climate  
change

Drs. Cheetham, bear expert and Prof  
of Psychology, University of Montana



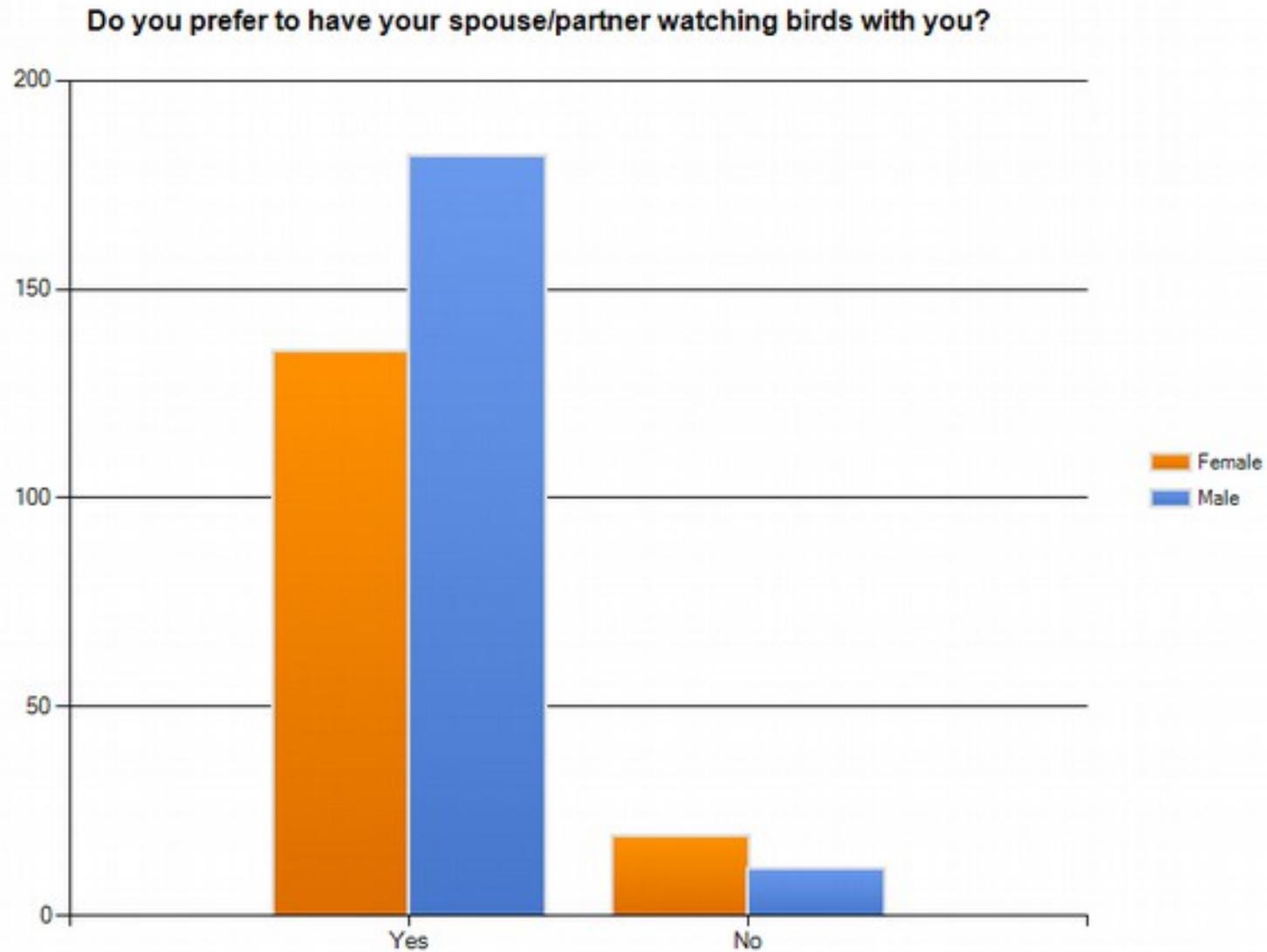
Dr. Fred and Anne Weinmann. Fred is  
an ecologist, adviser on President  
Clinton's forest policy and ex-president  
Washington Native Plant Society

# Even when that spouse is less interested in birds!



\*from PhD questionnaire

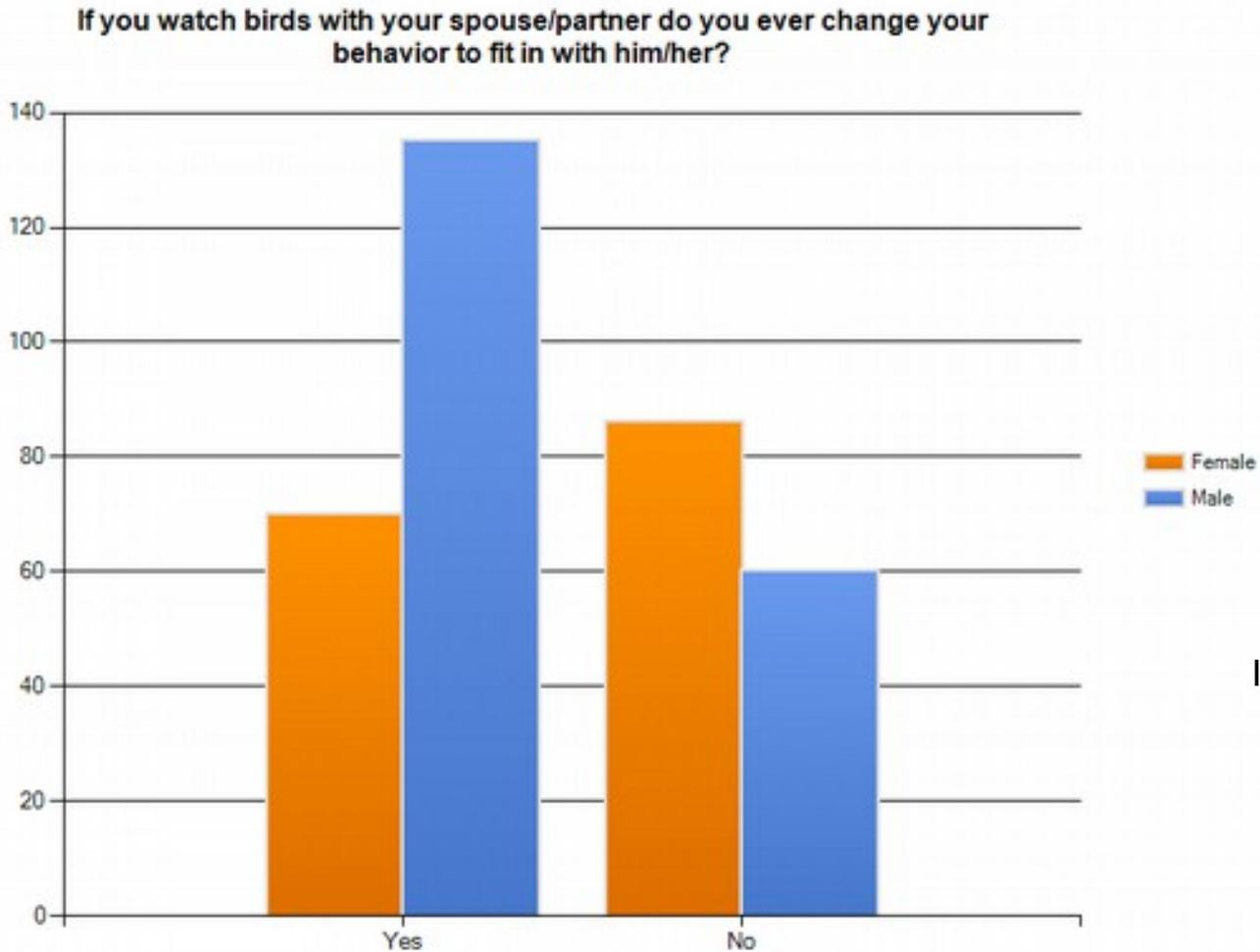
## Yet they prefer to be together - so ...



\*PhD questionnaire

# Spouses compromise

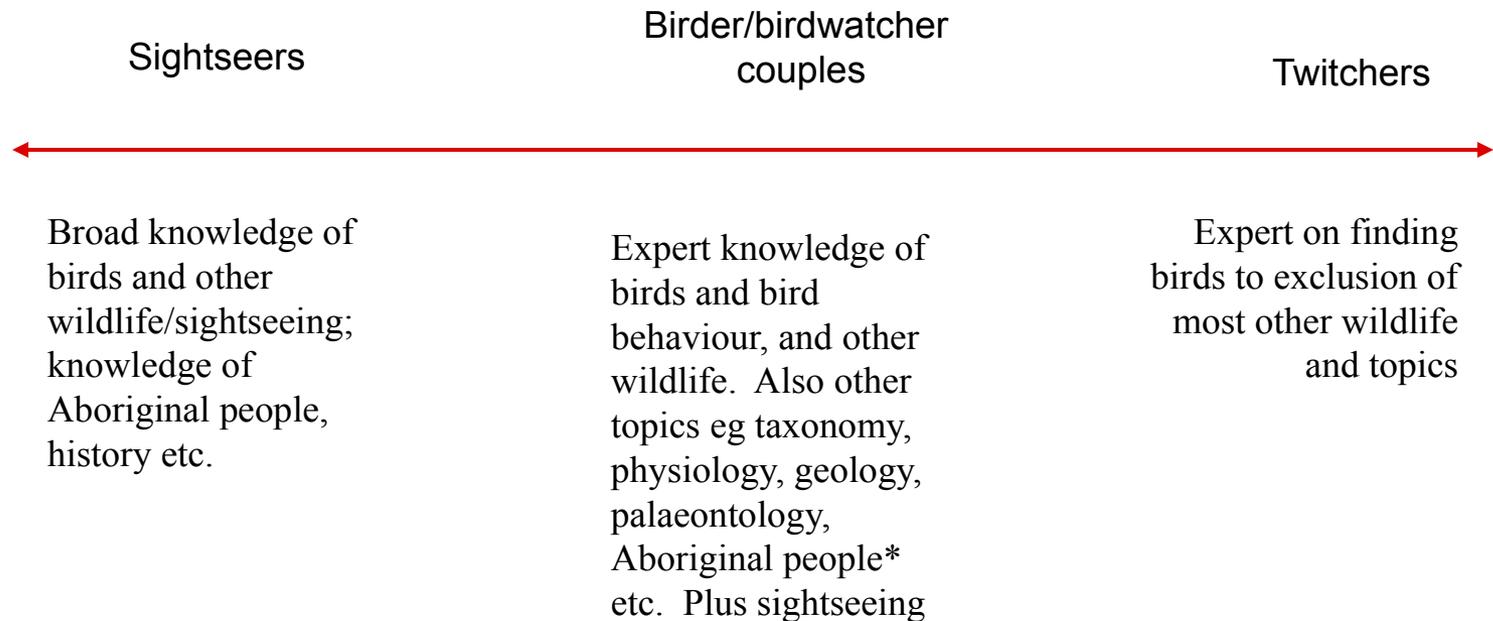
Men, more  
so than  
women



I get up earlier;  
I concentrate less on LBJ's.

*PhD interviewees*

# What is wanted in a guide (couples and individuals)



\* Not Aboriginal people as "cultural curiosities"!

# Twitchers\*



Mildly obsessive  
lister of birds

*will do anything to add  
new birds to their list*

...

- Generally younger men
- Often divorced or single
- birding is central to status/lifestyle
- Less caring about the environment

Twitchers -  
trainspotting  
mentality!\*

\* Also known as hardcore, combat, gonzo birders

\*PhD interviewee

## As will the twitcher guides of serious birding tours

Tour leaders ran off ahead with the two or three hardcore birders in the group and left everyone else standing by themselves in the bush. *Personal experience with international operator.*

(twitching guide) is a good birder but is very selfish and really was more interested in doing his own bird list than helping us to see them.

*Senior British lady who was badly injured trying to keep up with Australian guide - he raced off with other clients and left her.*

sometimes with less than favourable outcomes!!

About 2000: Boat overturned on trip in Peru. Tour leaders saved their equipment while clients floated away! A friend on the trip who was a champion swimmer, saved one. ...

**2010: (Same company) In Thailand tour leader ignored pleas of local guide and a ranger to leave as there were elephants nearby. One of his party was trampled to death.**

**We knew the local guide personally. This company threatened to sue any client that made these events public.**

*Canadian birding couple commenting on one of the US' most prominent bird tour operators.*

***Guide killed by tiger (David Hunt, 1985).***

... kidnapped (Colombia, Mexico)\*

DES CAMPBELL



got lost in the Arctic Circle, in fog, in a rubber duckie\*

\*from PhD study

Such birding tours did not accommodate “difference”!

Mrs. Loon: The (guide) ... was quite tall and ... he'd say “it's right in front of you”, and I'd say, “I can't see it. Where is it?”  
He was looking ... down on it and I was looking straight ahead into this dense foliage, and he'd say “just look, don't think! Put your binoculars up and look!” which I found irritating.  
*PhD interviewee*

They should not be on this tour if they're interested in anything besides birds  
International tour lead who ran off ahead after new birds leaving 2/3 of her group.

Do not talk about anything but birds.  
Do not show them anything but birds.  
*International tour leader issuing orders on how I should treat his group. 2/3 had other interests.*

QuickTime™ and a  
decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

## What the academics say

Twitchers (can be) compared to men who re-enact the American Civil War - they starve themselves to ‘achieve the gaunt, hollow-eyed look of underfed confederates’ (Scott\*, Cavin, Cronan, and Kerins, 2005).

\*David Scott, world authority on  
avitoirism

## Word spread, change occurred



Birding Leanyer Sewage Ponds by motor-home!



PhD interviewees, with Larry Balsch, ex-president, American Birding Association

clients ... switched from going on tours which are 'hard work', 'dawn until dusk' to those with a far more 'relaxed and enjoyable feel'...

Even stoic bird tour operators are beginning to embrace more general interest tours within their brochures so as to retain customers who require a different focus (Curtin and Wilkes, 2005:469)

## SHORT HISTORY of AVITOURISM in TOP END

1970s-80s: sightseeing tourism  
focused on beautiful scenery, rock  
art, crocodiles and big,  
unmistakeable birds. Diverse, small  
markets not wanted.

Knowledge of wildlife abysmal.

*The dingo is a marsupial.*

Tour operator's text in NT  
Tourism publication\*



"I'M SORRY. KYLIE MINOGUE IS THE  
INCORRECT ANSWER. IT IS, IN FACT, AN  
ORANGE FOOTED SCRUBFOWL."

1990s: operators began to include “eco” in their advertising. Yet ramming of crocodiles with boats was “common practice” as was the catching of snakes and goannas, to “give visitors a thrill”\*.

Operators advertised birdwatching, but ignorance of birds still widespread.

**\*Comment from guide/driver who rammed crocodile with a boat**

## 2000 -

*I don't do small birds*

Kakadu “birding” guide to client  
of international tour operator

*He was a con artist. I knew more than he did.*

Bo Beolens on “specialist bird guide” Top End.

*I don't need to know anything about  
birds. I've got your book.*

Woman on NT stall at the Rutland Bird Fair

*She couldn't tell a jabiru from a cormorant*

International cardiologist and birder, visiting with colleagues and their  
wives, on guide supplied by Top End “birding” lodge.

To improve quality the NT  
insisted on accreditation

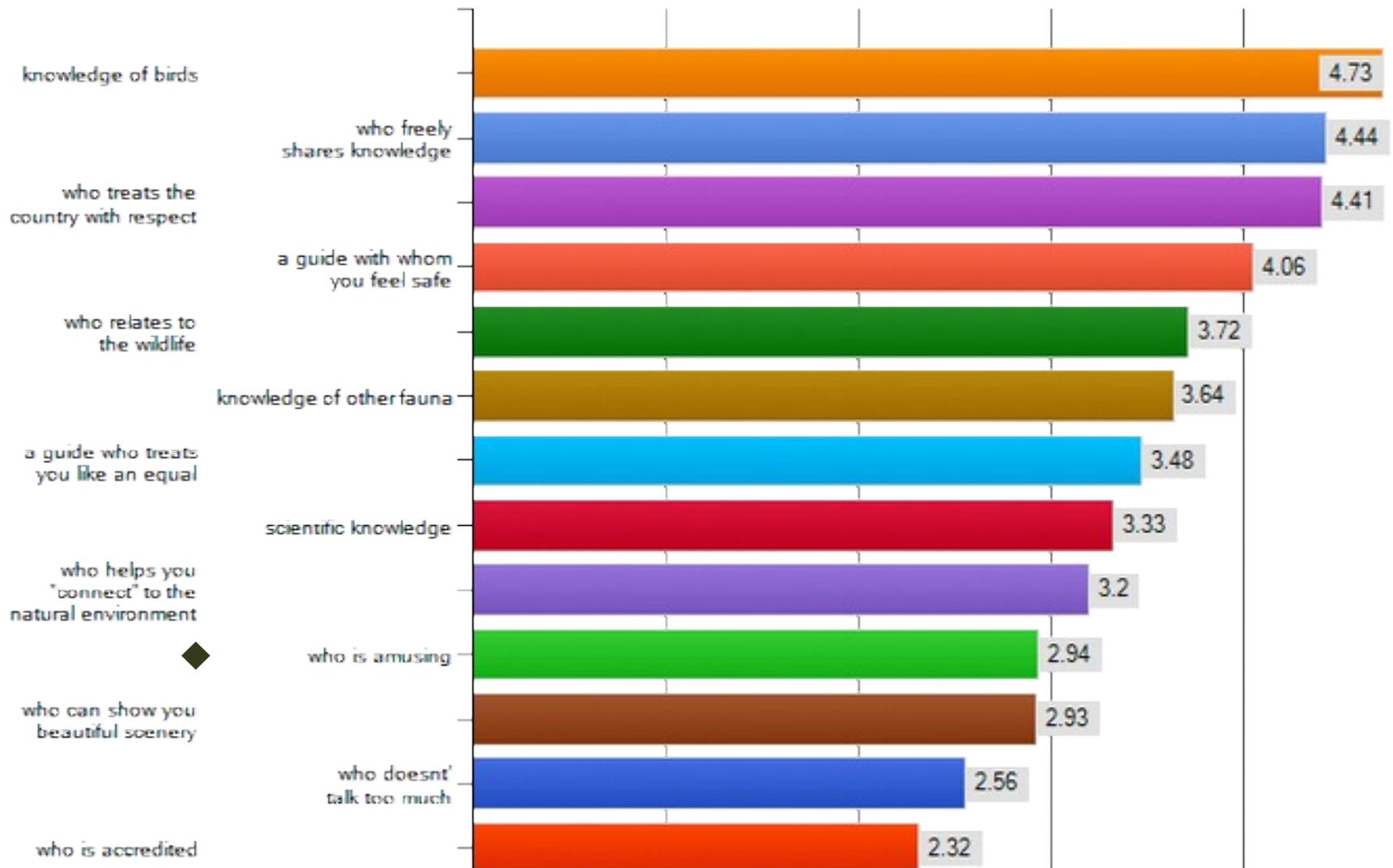
*Accreditation didn't tackle the  
problem of guides with unsafe  
practices!*

Nor did it remove ignorance

*Accreditation not important to avitourists*



## How important to you are the following qualities in a guide? (circle all that apply)



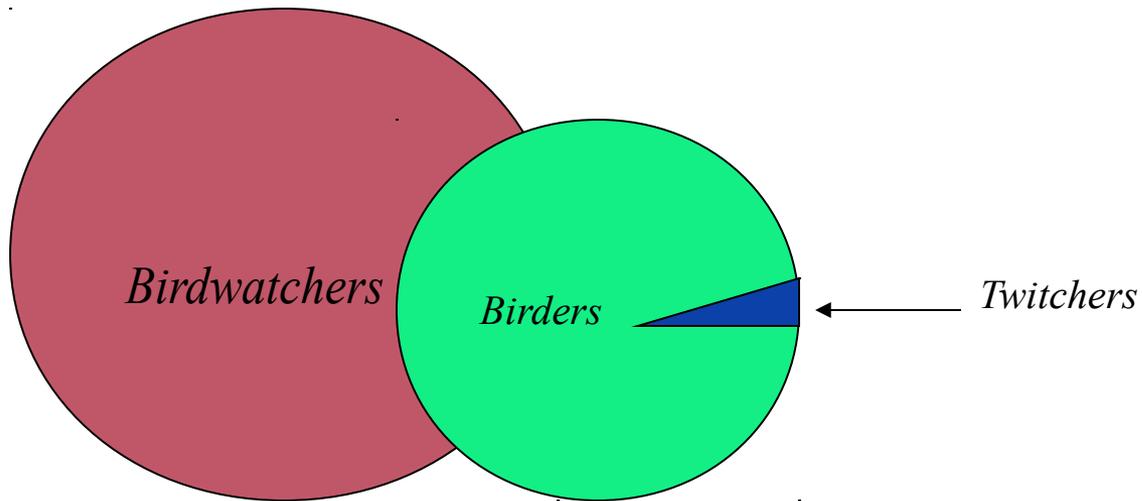
2000s: Tourism NT targetted “twitchers”.

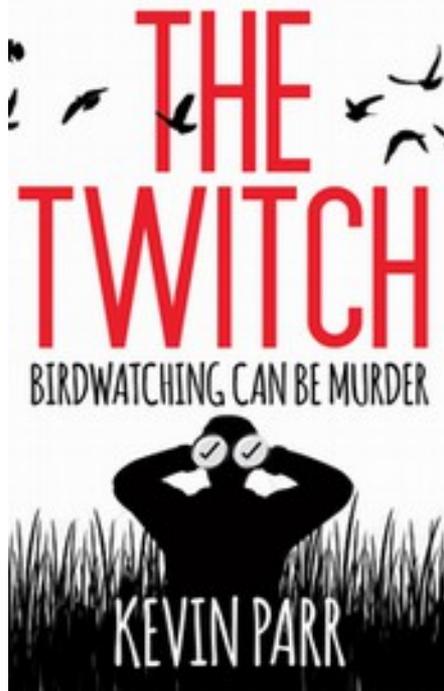


Swedish group in mangroves

# Why target twitchers?

Relative size of US markets





Twitchers win the publicity stakes with films like *The Big Year* and books ...

*Edward J Banger is a man obsessed. The drudgery of a nine to five job and the pressures of maintaining a healthy marriage and raising teenage girls are unwelcome inconveniences. The real challenge is ticking boxes.*

*He is determined to win the annual bird race, a competition steeped in history and glory. All he has to do is see more species of birds in the British Isles than anyone else, all within a single calendar year – and he is willing to do anything to win.*

# Twitch or connection?



Woollybut,  
*Eucalyptus miniata*

## Both!



Rainbow Skink,  
*Carlia* sp.



Dusky Honeyeater  
*Myzomela obscura*



## Birders want:

- birds;
- knowledgeable guides
- to see and learn about a diversity of wildlife
- to be treated like fellow human beings, and for their partners to be treated equally
- to be relatively safe

Bruce and Una

*Many birders began to avoid the formal tourism industry*

They sought local expertise through Internet (eg Birding Pal, Trip Advisor), and personal connections



Crystal and birders

## The Future

**Continued  
growth of  
informal industry**

*Web-based micro-businesses are  
outcompeting major  
corporations*

**The End of Big**

Niccolo Mele

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold*

**The Second Coming**

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939)

# The End

Curtain, S. and Wilkes, K. (2005). 'British Wildlife Tourism Operators: Current Issues and Typologies'. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 8:455-78.

Goodfellow, DL (2013). Birders and Biniinj in the Top End, *Journal of Ecotourism*.

Horwitz, T (1998). *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War*, New York: Pantheon Books, cited in D. Scott, Cavin, D. Cronan, M., and Kerins, (2005) 'Hardcore Leisure: A Source of Division Within Leisure Social Worlds', presented at the Eleventh Canadian Congress on Leisure Research, May 17-20. Nanaimo, B.C.