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## Characterization of birdwatching as specialized and resultant tourism on the Costa del Sol (southern Spain)

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Between 2002 and 2006 a company based in Málaga offering tours to nature parks was monitored via a well-established quality system. Monitorization consisted in assessment forms filled in after activities by customers and guides. During this period the company made 516 excursions to nature parks. Only 8.6% were birdwatching tours (30.23% of them specialized birding tours) all of which were 1-day tours only. Customers requesting birdwatching were always accommodated in Costa del Sol hotels with the following features: average number of persons per tour =  $2.90 \pm 1.91$ ; average age =  $57 \pm 10.98$ ; 40% of customers retired and with high-level incomes; 60% employed, with high-level education, well-paid jobs and high incomes; 62.79% of customers came from the UK; 16.28% from the USA; 9.3% from Germany; 6.97% from the Netherlands; and 2.32% from both New Zealand-Australia and Spain each.

Of the birding tours, 27.9% were requested in winter; 48.83% in spring; 18.6% in summer; and 4.65% in autumn. The most-requested nature parks and bird species in Málaga and Cádiz were Grazalema, 13.95% (griffon vulture colony); Sierra Crestellina-Casares, 6.97% (Bonelli's eagle, kestrel colony and bee-eaters); Alcornocales-Estrecho, 6.97% (storks and bird migration); and Fuente de Piedra-Guadalhorca, 72.09% (great flamingoes and waterfowl). The company directly received requests for Birdwatching tours in 9.3% of cases and 90.69% through a local agency or hotel. All the customers booked the tour in the destination and without the intermediation of a tour operator. The mean expenditure for a birding tour and person was  $73.86 \pm 20.76$  Euros. The mean sustainable expenditure (part of the total expenditure that reverted as income to people living in nature parks) per person was  $12.12 \pm 10.48$  Euros (i.e. 16.4% of the total). Birdwatching can also be offered and sold in the destination and not only in the country of origin, and without the assistance of foreign tour operators. Although birdwatching is still a low-level business in Spain, there is a resultant interest on it in traditional tourist destinations.

