

Offers and marketing of touristic bird watching in the Wadden Sea World Heritage Destination



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1 Abstract

The popularity of bird watching increases and the Wadden Sea is one of the hot spots for bird watching in Europe. Not only enthusiastic ornithologists but also general tourists take notice of the typical bird species in the Wadden Sea and enjoy their presence.

Although bird watching tours are a niche product, there is a great potential of bird watching offers within the area of the Wadden Sea not only with regard to economic interests but especially in order to reveal the uniqueness of the World Heritage Site Wadden Sea.

Within the Wadden Sea area, a lot of different high quality bird watching offers do already exist, from packages including accommodation, bird watching and further details to short bird watching excursions of 1–2 hours. While most of the offers are highly professional, the promotion of the offers can be improved. Thus, besides creating more observation facilities, a better and professional marketing of the offered tours is recommended.

The study induced by PROWAD analyses available bird watching offers and gives some good practice examples as well as further recommendations for tour providers, regions and destinations concerning among others marketing, communication, partnerships, accessibility, sustainability and arrangements in order to help to tap the potential of bird watching tours.

2 Introduction

Bird watching is getting more and more popular, not only among (semi-) professional ornithologists and among nature conservationists, but among nature loving amateurs also. No wonder, bird watchers do not form a closed entity, but reflect different expectations and motivations – from the keen “twitcher” to the bird lover who simply enjoys observing all kind of animals and the presence of nature.

The Wadden Sea is one of the hot spots for bird watchers in Europe. Twitchers find perfect spots for rarity hunting, while almost all tourists notice and enjoy the flocks of birds especially in wintertime and during migration in autumn and spring. This is why bird watching may serve as a helpful topic to reach many guests – and of course locals – in order to inspire and enthuse them about the World Heritage Site Wadden Sea.

PROWAD induced the study “Offers and marketing of touristic bird watching in the Wadden Sea World Heritage Destination” in order to reach bird watching providers in the broader sense of meaning including National Park administrations, visitor centres, National Park partners, green NGOs, private tour operators, travel businesses and stakeholders in tourism like marketing organizations.

3 Methodology

3.1 Investigation of status quo

We conducted a survey of the bird watching offers that exist in the Wadden Sea regions of the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark. We carried out a **desktop research** from the point of view of the (interested) guest, following the so called “customers journey” from the initial interest to the final booking. This allows us to find out the most important offers, for we are aware that it is impossible to supply a complete list of bird watching services. The output of the task answers the questions:

- Which information on bird watching services are available on the internet?
- Are they easy to find?
- How are they promoted and where? E.g. only on the website of the service provider, or on further marketing sites (on regional or federal level, say)?
- Which kind of professional offers are available, are they bookable and transparent?
- What are the target groups? We defined a “typology of bird watchers” and surveyed the matching of the offers with the target groups.
- If possible, we try to judge the overall quality of the offer. The offer’s sustainability (including accessibility) has been estimated by the use of certifications like “Viabono” or “God adgang” etc.

In a second step, we performed a **mystery shopping**. Basing on the results of the desktop research, we selected 18 offers and asked by E-mail for additional information.

Finally, we conducted **in-depth-interviews (IDI)** with bird watchers, service providers, tour operators in the broader sense of meaning and marketing organisations. We tried to find out

- the motivation and interests of bird watchers,
- the economic success of the offers,
- the marketing activities,
- the success factors for offers, events, destinations.

We made the results anonymous, in order to obtain better and reliable results (however, the results may not be generalised due to the sample size and the delicate subject).

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- Schutzstation Wattenmeer
- Sort Safari (Ivar Gram)
- St. Martins Therme & Lodge
- Vogelbescherming NL
- Zugvogeltage im Nationalpark Niedersächsisches Wattenmeer (Petra Potel)

3.2 Analysis of status quo

We divided the analysis of the status quo in two parts, the supply and the demand:

Supply part

Resulting from the investigation of the status quo (see chapter 3.1), we selected 4 best-practice cases of (professional) bird watching offers in the categories tour operator, bird watching arrangement, series of events and birding destination. For each of the 4 cases, we analysed the strengths and weaknesses in order to show the potentials of development and/or possible conflicts and gaps.

Demand part

The extent of the study does not allow to provide significant primary data like census of guests etc. However, we evaluated relevant studies that are indicated in chapter 11.

The evaluation of the studies provides general data on the demand and interest of tourists, but does not allow to line out a “typology of bird watchers” (see chapter 5). This is why we conducted 3 **focus groups** with different kind of bird watchers in order to learn

more about their motivations and demands. The results of the focus groups are part of the basis for our “target groups” (chapter 5) and the search words for the findability analysis (chapter 6.2).

3.3 Workshop

Part of this study was also the trilateral PROWAD workshop “Offers and marketing of touristic bird watching in the Wadden Sea World Heritage Destination”, with relevant stakeholders from service providers in bird watching, marketing organisations and “Wadden Sea authorities”, which took place on June 11th, 2015, in Tönning (Schleswig-Holstein). The list of workshop participants can be found in the appendix.

During the workshop the results of this study were presented and discussed with the participants. The outcomes of the discussions and further suggestions of participants are included in this study.



Figure 1: Workshop participants in front of the National Park visitor center Multimar Wattforum in Tönning, June 11th, 2015. Foto: Busch/LKN-SH

4 Bird watching: a contribution to sustainable tourism?

Experiencing nature is one of the most important factors for tourists to decide about their destination. More than 50 % of the German tourists state that they want to experience nature in their holidays (FUR 2014). It holds rank no. 6 among the most popular reasons for travelling in Germany (Grimm 2014).

Especially for the guests who are visiting the North Sea, intact nature and nature conservation in their destination is an important aspect of their holiday. Not less than 90 % of the guests would subscribe to this statement (NIT 2014). About 30 % of the guests even claim to make a “nature holiday”.

Though recreation is still the most important reasons to visit the North Sea (LKN-SH 2014a), 76 % of the guests desire to learn about the nature in their holiday. 25 % of the visitors of the German part of the North Sea take part in a mudflat hiking tour; in addition, more than 10 % are visiting information centres or other offers to experience nature. For example, the Nature NGOs, the National Park Guides and the National Park Rangers in Schleswig-Holstein carried out 5 000 guided tours with about 100 000 participants (LKN-SH 2014a). In fact, the potentials are much higher: 80 % of the guests are interested in nature experience offers, and even more than 20 % would like to join guided bird watching tours or similar offers (NIT 2014).

“Nature tourism” in the broader sense of the meaning is obviously no longer a niche product. It is an important factor in tourism business. Furthermore, guests are demanding more and sustainable products. More than 30 % of the German tourists want to spend a holiday that is compatible with ecological values. An important driving group for a change in the mainstream demand are the so-called LOHAS (Lifestyle of health and sustainability).

However, for only 2 % of the guests sustainability is the key criterion for the travel decision, while 22 % at least take care for sustainable offers. Though the general acceptance of sustainable travelling is rather high, many guests fear additional costs (55 %). 43 % ask for additional information and 32 % for more sustainable offers (Grimm 2014).

In general, service providers and destinations understood the changing demand of the market. 86 % of the destinations do believe that sustainable tourism will gain importance in the near future. However, only 17 % are engaged in certificating of service providers, while only 10 % are engaged in enhancing environmental and social standards (mascontour 2015).

The role of bird watching trips as a reason to travel to the Wadden Sea is difficult to estimate. Concrete figures for Europe are not at hand. In the United States, 46.7 million people go bird watching (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Census Bureau 2014), that is about 15 % of the total U. S. population. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (2009) even provides figures on the economic impact of bird watching: “Trip-related and

equipment-related expenditures associated with birding generated over \$82 billion in total industry output, 671,000 jobs, and \$11 billion in local, state, and federal tax revenue” (p. 14).

We may not transfer those findings to the European or German market. “Birders” are for sure only a minority among the tourists, and even most of the guests with a strong interest in nature do not focus on bird watching. However, the number of birders is growing, and in some European countries – especially in the UK, but also in the Netherlands and in Scandinavia – bird watching is a popular leisure time occupation. (The number of registered users of the two observation platforms “Waarnemingen.nl” in the Netherlands and “ornitho.de” in Germany may reflect the country-specific differences: while 63,850 persons use the Dutch platform, 14,615 persons are registered on the German one).

Despite of the rather small numbers of real “birders”, bird watching offers may play a role in tourism in the Wadden Sea:

- Birds are an important part of the Wadden Sea’s nature and, thus, amazing for all nature-loving tourists. Especially during bird migration in spring and autumn, the pure observation of large flocks is an exciting experience. The same goes for the large flocks of geese in wintertime and the concert of breeding birds in summer.
- Birds are present all year, but maybe most impressive to observe in spring and autumn during migration time. Not just for keen birders, roosting and migrating birds are an important reason to visit the Wadden Sea outside the main season. Therefore, bird watching can be an important factor in a season-prolonging strategy.
- Birds attract guests from abroad and (in Germany) from the southern federal states. Experiences from tour operators show, that bird watching offers in the Wadden Sea are popular among people from e. g. Switzerland or Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria. For them, the Wadden Sea is the nearest possibility to see large flocks of waders and other maritime bird species.
- The target group of “birders” (see 5) may be small compared to the main target groups of the North Sea shore and the Wadden Sea. However, birders are a relevant niche group. For specialised service providers, it may be profitable to focus on them (Trimborn 2006). Thanks to the special interest, it is easy to find advertising vehicles with rather low wastage.
- Beside of the economic benefit, bird watching offers are an important tool to transport the messages of nature conservation and sustainability. Guests are immediately impressed by the large numbers and diversity of birds and can easily understand why the Wadden Sea is unique place on earth and was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List.
- Bird watching excursions can be used for public relations and therefore reduce conflicts between nature conservation and tourism.
- Guided bird watching tours as well as observation platforms can reduce disturbances of breeding or resting birds through sensitization of tourists and reassurance of particularly sensitive areas through visitor guidance, control of visitor movements and influence on visitor behaviour.

5 Target groups for bird watching

Many types of people are interested in bird watching. The span ranges from the so-called “twitcher”, who is interested in observing as many (rare) species as possible, to the unexperienced beginner, who just takes the chance to book a typical holiday event in his holiday destination.

We divided the different types of “bird watchers” into target groups. The target groups are not always distinctive, and the classification of the offers is surely subjective. However, the target groups help to distinguish the special features of the different bird watching offers:

Twitcher: Keen and experienced. Though most of them are interested in nature and nature conservation, they focus on obtaining long species list and adding new species to their life list. Due to their special interest, they have very individual demands and tend to be individual travellers who rarely join bird watching groups (exceptions are guided tours to species that cannot be found by themselves. A good example are boat trips to the Fish Owl at the Oymapinar Reservoir in Turkey). The occurrence of species interested for twitcher is restricted to migration and thus not predictable. Furthermore, twitchers act in elaborated networks (mailing lists, whats-app-groups and so on), so they do not depend on personal information on-site.

As a result, real twitchers are not the main target group for bird watching trips with an educational approach.

Advanced birders: Keen and experienced, too, and often interested in long species lists, but with a focus on observing the behaviour of birds and enjoying the surrounding nature. This group is overlapping with the “twitchers” and the “nature lovers”. Advanced birders behave often individually, but do join groups more often, especially when they are new to the Wadden Sea. Guided tours allow them to get a quick orientation on the set of species that are present and on good spots for bird watching. In addition “advanced, birders” often participate in guided tours to get information about nature conservation activities and other detailed information about the area. After getting acquainted with a certain spot by joining a guided tour, they continue to survey the region individually.

Nature lovers: From skilful to unexperienced in bird watching, with a strong focus on nature experience. It does not matter so much if they observe plants or birds, the outdoor activity and the chance of learning about nature and nature conservation are the main drivers for them. In addition, this group involves people who just started with bird watching and are therefore unexperienced but very interested in getting to know species and learning as much as possible.

Nature lovers are a very important target group for bird watching offers. They are keen on getting reliable information and experiencing unique trips.

Beginners: For many local guides, this is the most important target group on the spot, simply because of its size. It consists of all guests, who are not especially interested in bird watching or nature in general, but simply using bird watching offers among other offers they find in their holiday destination – no matter, if they have a focus on culture, nature,

or, say sports. Most of the participants of mudflat hiking tour consist of what we call beginners.

Pupils, Students: This is a special group, because pupils and students do not take part in bird watching offers on their own will, but because it is a part of the program, worked out by the teacher or given in the curriculum. In fact, pupils and students are only a target group in terms of contents and didactic approach, but not in marketing. The target group in terms of marketing are the teachers. In some regions, e.g. on the wadden islands, this is a very important group, especially for local guides and outside the main season. Excursions for pupils do not take place in the holidays, usually.

Finally yet importantly, another group of bird watching people are **photographers**. They can be assigned to one of the above-mentioned target groups in general, but their interest and behaviour may differ. There are no exact figures, but the experience of the interview partners for this study suggest that photographers are more often the cause for disturbances than bird watchers without camera (not all photographers ignore the rules of behaviour in the field, of course). This is because the photographer has to get closer to the birds in order to take good pictures than the bird watcher who just want to observe the animals. On the other hand, photographers form a distinct target group to a certain degree, especially when they attend special photograph lectures or digiscoping courses (digiscoping = taking pictures with a digital camera through a spotting scope).



Figure 2: Rare birds are sometimes a reason to travel: Black-browed Albatross on Heligoland in May 2015 (Source: A. Lorenz)

6 Analysis of offers

The **internet** is the main information source for tourists (FUR 2014). Information is available all over the world, almost free of costs and in real time. Furthermore, the internet allows dealing with additional information that is relevant for travellers, such as accommodation, transport, services and so on, just by linking external content.

The importance in promoting offers and the overall availability of information is the main reason why we focused on the internet when analysing the bird watching offers in the Wadden Sea. However, we took some printed information like flyers and leaflets into account as well. Some people rely on printed information or simply have no access to the internet, so one should not neglect the classical information media.

We surveyed a widespread range of different offers – from bird watching holidays of several days duration up to printed or electronic information for birders.

Table 1: Type of analysed service provider (in case of co-operations, only the main organizer is mentioned)

Type	Number
Tour operator (offers birdwatching holidays)	19
Local guide	15
NGO	7
National Park	6
Hotel/Accommodation with birdwatching service (co-operation with local guide)	5
Total	52

All but one offers are guided tours, and all but one are suitable for groups. 12 offers can be booked by individuals, and another 12 providers offer lectures in addition to the excursions.

Overall, we surveyed **52 bird watching offers**, all present on the internet. 10 of them are companies or institutes situated in the Netherlands, 33 in Germany, 3 in Denmark, 3 in the United Kingdom and 1 in Swiss, United States of America and Canada respectively (Table 2).

Table 2: Origin of analysed company or institution

Bird watching offers from:	Number
The Netherlands	10
Germany	33

Bird watching offers from:	Number
Denmark	3
Switzerland	1
United Kingdom	3
United States of America	1
Canada	1

The destination, in which the offers take place, is not always situated in the Wadden Sea, because we surveyed some examples with a broader geographical target in order to compare at least some good practices from all over Europe. 10 service providers act on a much broader scale and offer trips to many places worldwide.

The offers in the Wadden Sea mostly take place in Germany, followed by the Netherlands and Denmark (Table 3). The big difference in numbers between the countries is not only the result of a stronger focus on the German offers (search languages on the internet were German and English, not Dutch and Danish) from our side. An important role may play that the desktop research was performed with a German IP-address which might influence the results. Google incorporates different information about the user to select search results. Therefore, besides other aspects, the country where the research is conducted can influence the results.

According to the expert interviews, the number of professional bird watching operators and service providers in Denmark is rather small, although there are also a lot of bird watchers. This could be another reason why we found only five tours which take place in Denmark. In addition, we have to take into account that the German part of the Wadden Sea is much bigger than the Danish or Dutch part. This is why we can expect more offers in Germany compared to the adjacent countries.

Table 3: Country or federal state in which analysed bird watching offers take place (multiple nominations possible)

Bird watching offers in:	Number
The Netherlands (Wadden Sea)	19
Germany (Wadden Sea)	35
– Lower Saxony	14
– Hamburg	1
– Schleswig-Holstein	16
Denmark (Wadden Sea)	5

The **duration of trips** varies depending on the concept of the service provider, though some service providers offer trips of different length. 26 trips take longer than one day, 25 offers

are day trips, while 29 trips are short excursions of not more than few hours (mainly one to two hours) (Table 4).

A special category are the series of events. 3 of them (“Zugvogeltage” in Lower Saxony, “Ringelganstage” and “Westküsten-Vogelkiek” both in Schleswig Holstein) take place in the Wadden Sea.

Table 4: Duration of analysed trips

Duration of trip	Number
> One day	26
Day trip	25
Short excursions (few ours)	29
Series of events	3

As shown in chapter 5, the target group for bird watching offers is rather diverse. Neither the subgroups nor the offers can be distinguished easily or in an objective way. The advertisement or the description of the offers is not always straightforward in terms of the target group. Therefore, Table 5 is merely an approach to quantify the offers (please note that one offer may appear in more than one category). Most of them address to nature lovers and beginners. No wonder, they form by far the largest group of guests, presumably. Nonetheless, a good deal of offers is interesting for advanced birders or even twitchers.

Table 5: Target groups of analysed offers (multiple nominations possible)

Target group	Number
Twitcher	15
Advanced birders	28
Nature lovers	48
Beginners	37
Pupils, Students (only 1 offer addresses to pupils exclusively)	26

6.1 Sustainability

Though many guests of the Wadden Sea are interested in “sustainable” offers, very few information on this feature is given in the description of the tours. It remains unclear, if this is only a lack in communication, or reflects the actual state. We may presume that both is true:

An easy and striking tool to communicate sustainable offers in a broad sense of the meaning are labels or certifications. In fact, only 12 out of 52 offers have some kind of certification (Table 6). Interesting enough, not all of them communicate them on their website. Some National Park partners are listed on the partner’s website, but do not mention their partnership on their own website.

Table 6: Indicated sustainability of analysed offers (multiple nominations possible)

Labelling of sustainability	Number
UNESCO Bildung für Nachhaltige Entwicklung	2
National park partner or National parks	11
Viabono (and also National Park partner)	2

Accessibility of tour

Information about accessible tours is very rare. Only one provider asks clients to ask for accessible services. Apart from that no information is given at all.

For the Wadden Sea National Park Schleswig-Holstein there exists a detailed brochure named “Wattenmeer für Alle. Barrierefreie Naturerlebnisangebote im Nationalpark” which covers among others guided bird watching tours (LKN-SH 2014b). For the Wadden Sea National Park Lower Saxony accessible offers are listed on a homepage (www.barrierefreie-nordsee.de), where offers can be searched by region. However, there are no offers of natural history or bird watching tours.

Specifically searching resulted in several offers like www.erlebnistouren-nordfriesland.de where information about accessibility is given for every single tour but this remains exceptional. Overall information about accessible tours seem to be hard to find and scarce.

6.2 Communication and marketing of the offers

Most information, especially on the German offers, is only available in the national language. Only 12 Websites provide information in an additional language beside the national one. However, that does not mean, that the guide of the tour speaks more than one language. Information on the availability of different languages during the tour is hardly given. Experience shows that guide from Denmark and the Netherlands speak at least sufficiently English. This is not always the case in Germany.

Are the offers easy to find on the internet?

As a result of our focus groups (see chapter 3.2), we figured out a set of search words that could be used by interested guests in order to find bird watching offers on the internet. Table 7 shows the number of hits among the first 10 pages of Google search engine (how many offers were found by the given search words). Note that we performed the search only in English and German.

Table 7: Used search words and number of hits on the internet

Search word	Hits
exkursion vögel wattenmeer	15
vogelbeobachtung wattenmeer tour	11
birdwatching netherlands	11
birding tour wadden sea	7
Bird watching wadden sea	7
birdwatching germany	7
Birding tours	3
birdwatching denmark	3
führung nationalparkführer vögel wattenmeer	3
birding tour nationalpark wadden sea	2
birds tour denmark wadden sea	1

The majority of bird watching offers on the internet is hard to find (Table 8). 23 out of 52 offers were found only with 1 of the 11 used search word combinations. Actually 12 offers have not been found with any of the search words but were already known from other sources and therefore included on the inventory list. 11 offers could be found by 2 or 3 different search word combinations while only 6 out of 52 offers were found by 4 different search word combinations.

Table 8: Finding information on the internet

Findability	Number
easy to find (4 hits)	6
fairly easy to find (2 & 3 hits)	11
hard to find (1 hit)	23
Very hard to find (0 hits)	12

In addition, many offers were found only when browsing many pages of search results. This is another strong indicator how difficult it is to find proper offers on the internet.

Appearance of the websites

Most of the offers are present on the internet, only 3 providers have no own website. More than 60 % of the homepages appealed to be more or less professional and attractive (Table 9). Although this impression is only subjective and not measurable objectively, it shows that most providers appreciate their appearance on the internet. However, the homepage of 16 providers made an unprofessional impression. Among them were many old and very simple “do-it-yourself” websites that looked uninspired and less attractive.

Irrespective of the appearance, almost all websites provide detailed information about tours and seem to be helpful for interested guests.

Table 9: Appearance of websites

Appearance	Number
Professional (more or less), attractive	33
Unprofessional, less attractive	16
No own homepage (depending on design of marketing organisation)	3

16 offers are also available on external websites, such as marketing organisations and/or accommodation facilities.

Awareness of Tourist Information Centres (TI)

The mystery shopping shows, that Tourist Information Centres (TI) on local scale are aware of bird watching offers on the spot. At least, they know to whom they may refer. We asked 8 TIs (1 in the Netherlands, 6 in Germany, 1 in Denmark) for information on bird watching offers by E-mail. All but one recommended the local National Park centre to ask for further information, only 1 made a concrete proposal for a bird watching walk on a loop road on the spot.

Printed information

Printed catalogues are offered very rarely and only by tour operators. Only four providers offered printed catalogues. One of them sent a printed version, the other 3 sent digital pdf-files and explained that only digital documents are conveyed (abroad from Netherlands and United Kingdom). 6 providers allocate digital versions of catalogues on their homepages.

A great number of providers supply information for single tours in pdf-format instead of catalogues with all offered tours. Furthermore, many providers allocate pdf-files with all dates for tours and excursions.

For providers offering short excursions, flyers instead of catalogues play an important role. Many offers are presented in flyers which are only available on the spot. Particularly for the target group which we call “beginners” without special interest in birds, flyers seem to be a very important tool to attract attention and to inform about offered trips. The same goes for placards and billboards on the spot.

7 Good examples

On the basis of our inventory and supported by many in-depth-interviews with stakeholders, we selected four good practice examples in the categories tour operator, bird watching arrangement, series of event and birding destination. Again, we made a subjective choice, but the guideline were the following criteria:

- Attractiveness for bird watchers
- Transfer of World Heritage values
- Ecological sustainability
- Economic success

7.1 Good example for a tour operator: Regenpfeifer Touren on the island Langeoog

Birte Weinbecker, the owner of Regenpfeifer Touren is an environmental educationalist with a deep insight to the ecosystems on Langeoog and their birds. Langeoog, one of the islands in the National Park Wadden Sea of Lower Saxony, offers excellent birding spots and, like all islands in the Wadden Sea, a large choice of tourism facilities.



Figure 3: Logo of Regenpfeifer Touren



Figure 4: Birte Weinbecker explains the flyways of migrating birds
(Source: G. Steiner)

Regenpfeifer Touren offers guided excursions and lectures on different environmental topics and bird watching is among the most important offers. One of the main target groups are children with their parents. Children are often more open to information, and is a crucial task to teach them as soon as possible the uniqueness of the Wadden Sea and its threats. The playful way of knowledge transfer is not only attractive for the kids, but also for their parents (Figure 4).

Teaching sustainable development and stressing the consequences of acting on a global scale is an important component of all offers. Consequently, catering on the excursions comes from ecological production and regional origin. Cars are forbidden on Langeoog, and locomotion takes place by feet or by bike.

Regenpfeifer Touren has its own website and promotes the excursions and lectures in co-operation with the tourism-marketing organisation on Langeoog. In addition, there are further co-operations with different service providers on the island that promote the excursions of Regenpfeifer Touren and/or recommend them to their guests.

Not purely a marketing tool, but surely helpful in the field of public relation is the new book on the birds of Langeoog, which does not address to scientists or other specialists, but to the broader public (Figure 5).



Figure 5: New book on the birds of Langeoog (Weinbecker & Weinbecker 2015)

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experienced guide • Skilful didactic approach • Co-operation with marketing organisation • Co-operation with service providers in tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restricted regional scale

Besides the example of Regenpfeifer Touren, there are many other providers with innovative ideas. “**Sort Safari**” in Denmark follows an interesting approach to communicate the worth of protection. This provider emphasizes the experience of nature and impressing scenarios instead of detailed information about different bird species. Hereby guests are supposed to discover the beauty of the unique nature in the Wadden Sea of their own volition and thereby increase their awareness for the protection of this area.

In Austria, “St. Martins Therme & Lodge” in the area Seewinkel, also promotes the “safari-concept” in a very professional way. All year round, they offer Landrover- and walking Safaris at the National Park Neusiedler See with different focuses and topics for many target groups like experts, beginners and families. The marketing of the safaris and the company is highly professional.

7.2 Good example for a bird watching arrangement: “Vogelkiek auf Hallig Langeness”

The “Vogelkiek auf Hallig Langeness” is a four-day excursion package in spring within the series of events “Ringelganstage” (Figure 6) in the “Biosphere Reserve Schleswig-Holstein Wadden Sea and Halligen”. The “Ringelganstage” take place every year in April/May since 1998 (a success story on its own). The aim was to raise the – in former times – rather poor image of the eponymous Brant Geese (*Branta bernicla*) that were unpopular especially among farmers.



Figure 6: Advertisement for the "Ringelganstage 2015"

Bird watching is the main activity during the “Vogelkiek”. An important success factor is an excellent care for the group. The group consists of not more than 30 persons, because there are no more accommodations available on the small island Langeness. Several guides accompany the participants. The guides are able to react on the different demands of the people and can meet the varying levels of experience. The guides need professional

knowledge on bird watching and the nature of the Wadden Sea in general, but they also have to be skillful in communication and social behavior.

Although there is a strong focus on bird watching, other activities are part of the offer as well. Many guests want to learn about the unique living conditions on the Hallig Langeness. Barbecue, church service, performances and many further details are part of the arrangement.



30. APRIL BIS 03. MAI 2015

Vogelkiek auf Hallig Langeness

Ein langes Wochenende intensiv Vögel beobachten und die Hallig Langeness per Fahrrad erkunden? Mit Fachleuten des Nationalparks die Vogelwelt im Wattenmeer entdecken und sich in der frischen Nordseebrise erholen? Das hört sich gut für Sie an? Dann haben wir etwas für Sie!

Programm für das Vogelkiek-Wochenende auf Hallig Langeness:		Termin: Donnerstag, 30. April bis Sonntag, 03. Mai 2015	
Donnerstag:	Ausreise mit der Fähre Ankommen und Einführung	Kosten:	Vermiet je nach Unterkunft: 229,- € (Mehrwortzimmer Seminarhaus) 219,- € (DZ Seminarhaus) 309,- € (DZ Gasthaus Halligenley)
Freitag:	Vortrag zur Vogelwelt im Wattenmeer Vogelkiek zur Einsegnung Wattenwanderung	Der Preis beinhaltet die Fahrtkosten & Transfers, die Unterbringung in der gebuchten Unterkunft, regionale/ökologische Verpflegung, Fahrradverleih, das komplette Programm, Informations- und Sachkundige Betreuung sowie die Bereitstellung der Optik.	
Samstag:	Vogelkiek für Frühhafter Ganztagige Beobachtungen mit Halligenkennung Grillen und Halligtheater	Das Vogelkiek-Wochenende startet und endet am Fahrradlager in Schüttstiel.	
Sonntag:	Gottesdienst in Halligische Feden- und Flügelbestimmung Weitere Vogelbeobachtungen Abschied mit der Fähre	Programmminderungen vorbehalten.	

Informationen und Buchung: Tel. 04861-96200
(Mo-Do: 9-16 Uhr, Fr: 9-14 Uhr)

Eine Veranstaltung im Rahmen der Ringelganstage in der Biosphäre Halligen.







Figure 7: Advertisement for the "Vogelkiek auf Hallig Langeness"

The organisers advertise the arrangement reserved, because the small capacity of accommodation on the island allows only 30 persons to take part. Some posts on the internet are enough to fill the open places (Figure 7); a clear sign for the popularity of the offer. Many participants are regular guests and join the trip several times which strengthen a feeling of togetherness and allows participants to meet familiar faces every year. One can expect them to make word of mouth advertisement for the arrangement and attract new guests this way.

Regional and sustainable catering is part of the arrangement, but it is getting more and more difficult to ensure the provision with such kind of food. The demand is higher than the supply.

There are no cars on Langeness, bikes are the main mean of transport for the participants and part of the package. Though the arrangement starts and stops at the ferry to Langeness and the organisers have no direct influence on the arrival of the participants, they strongly recommend the train instead of private cars.

Another positive effect of the arrangement is the coincidence of bird watchers and locals which allows the reduction of mutual prejudices.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experienced guides • High popularity and satisfaction among guests • Sustainable catering • Sustainable transport on the spot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restricted number of participants reduces earnings • Offered only once a year • Supply of sustainable food is difficult to guarantee

7.3 Good example for a series of events: “Zugvogeltage im Nationalpark Niedersächsisches Wattenmeer”

The series of events “Zugvogeltage im Nationalpark Niedersächsisches Wattenmeer” is an annual event in autumn during migration time (Figure 8). Within an interval of nine days, different events with a strong focus on bird migration take place all over the Wadden Sea National Park in Lower Saxony on both, the mainland and the islands.



Figure 8: Advertisement for the "Zugvogeltage" in 2015

Since the first „Zugvogeltage“ in 2009 took place, the number of single events raised up to 250. 12.500 people visited the offers of the „Zugvogeltage“ in 2014.

Regional and national media take notice of the event every year. The “Zugvogeltage” are well known along the Wadden Sea shore of Lower Saxony and widely accepted among service providers in tourism and tourism marketing organisations. It was a main objective of the “Zugvogeltage” to strengthen the co-operation between professional and voluntary nature conservation on one hand and the tourism business on the other hand. Tourism is one of

the most important economic branches along the North Sea and an indispensable partner for sustainable development of the Wadden Sea and the World Heritage region.

Service providers are invited to promote their offers within the “Zugvogeltage”, but they have to meet certain standards of quality and sustainability. The offer should

- underline the global importance of the Wadden Sea for migrating birds (as an important criterion for the World Heritage Site),
- be an exclusive offer for the “Zugvogeltage” and not take place in the same way during the rest of the year,
- have a clear focus on bird migration,
- be of high quality in both, tourism and sustainability and
- enhancing the co-operation between National Park centres, National Park partners and service providers in tourism.

The focus on bird migration does not mean that only guided tours or lectures on bird migration will be selected for the “Zugvogeltage”. Though both types of offers play an important role, many other events with different approach take place. The range varies from excursions, lectures and seminars, exhibitions, concerts and special offers for children up to culinary highlights (Figure 9, Figure 10). A new approach to reach ambitious bird watchers is the so-called “Aviathlon”; a bird watching competition between the regions for the longest species list during the series of events in autumn.



Figure 9: Bird watching excursion during “Zugvogeltage”



Figure 10: “Zugvogeltage-cake” with products from regional origin

The strict selection process under control of the National Park administration guarantees the constant high quality of the offers. Service providers in tourism propose their “Zugvogeltage-offers” to the local National Park centre (or, even better, both develop the offers together), where the pre-selection takes place. The National Park administration is in charge for the final selection. The National Park administration gives a helping hand during all the process, from the first idea for an offer to the final approval.

Only selected offers are official “Zugvogeltage-offers”. They are allowed to wear the “Zugvogeltage-label”, which is valid for one year only (Figure 11).



7. Zugvogeltage im Nationalpark Niedersächsisches Wattenmeer

Figure 11: Official label of the 7. Zugvogeltage 2015

The national Park collects all offers for the “Zugvogeltage” in a searchable database on the website www.zugvogeltage.de. In addition, flyers with a regional focus are available and disseminated by local tourist information centres and National Park centres (Figure 12, Figure 13).



Figure 12: Website www.zugvogeltage.de



Figure 13: Example of a regional flyer

Another channel for advertising the “Zugvogeltage” are the social media platforms on the internet like Facebook and Youtube (Figure 14, Figure 15). The Facebook-site is active all year round, but most entries take places before and during the event in autumn. The contribution of the visitors is rather low, so far, and most postings stem from stakeholders, guides or from the National Park administration. Several videos on Youtube are available; all of them were produced by Zugvogeltage-organisers.



Figure 14: "Zugvogeltage" on Facebook



Figure 15: "Zugvogeltage" on Youtube

As mentioned above, the co-operation with the tourism business is one of the main objectives. Many service providers contribute by creating offers for the "Zugvogeltage" and the destination marketing organisations "Die Nordsee GmbH" and "Ostfriesland Tourismus GmbH" are important and active partners in promoting the events (Figure 12, Figure 13).



Figure 16: "Zugvogeltage" on the website of „Die Nordsee GmbH – www.die-nordsee.de“



Figure 17: "Zugvogeltage" on the website of „Ostfriesland Tourismus GmbH – www.ostfriesland.de“

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide range of offers for different target groups • Co-operation with service providers and marketing organisations • Possibility for providers to canvass for customers • Generates extensive media coverage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High expenditure of human labour • Information only available in German

7.4 Good example for a birding destination: Texel

The Dutch island Texel is the westernmost wadden island in the North Sea. The western part of the island with dunes and forests belongs to the National Park “Duinen van Texel”. Thanks to excellent observation sites and an extraordinary geographical position, the island is a well-known hot spot for bird watchers. Many important breeding areas and colonies, e. g. of Terns or Avocets, are artificial and under constant management. A lot of them are easily accessible; birds can be observed even from the car. Those spots are popular for bird watchers and photographers (Figure 18), but also many tourists, who are not interested in bird watching in general, make a stop and enjoy the large numbers of noisy, breeding birds.



Figure 18: Photographers at the observation site Ottersaat

Both, the regional tourist marketing organization and the National Park, communicate the birding hot spots actively (Figure 19). Maps and descriptions can be found in a large number of leaflets and brochures. This information addresses to the broad public and is intended to reach all tourists on Texel (Figure 20), this is why many of them are available in more than one language (usually Dutch and German, but you can easily find information in English as well). However, there are some tools and publications especially for bird watchers as well.

An important source of information for the bird watcher and those who are interested in nature conservation is the annual “Ornithological jaarverslag”, a report on all bird species that have been observed within a year (Figure 21). The report deals with splendid photos and detailed information on rare birds and vagrants, but as well with comprehensive information on population development of many breeding species of the island. The report is available in the National Park centre “Ecomare” and in some Tourist Information Centres.

While being on the spot, the most important medium for getting current information is the website of the “Vogelwerkgroep Texel” with a link to the Texel-related page of “waarneming.nl”. Many birders report their sightings immediately to the observation portal “waarneming.nl” (it is possible to use a comfortable observation mobile app), and a few minutes later, the most recent sightings are available for everybody on the internet (Figure 22).

Natuurgebieden op Texel



Figure 19: Map of observation sites on Texel (Nationaal Park Duinen van Texel 2015)



Figure 20: Brochure "Natureiland Texel" in two languages (Dutch and German), edited by the Nationaal Park Duinen van Texel

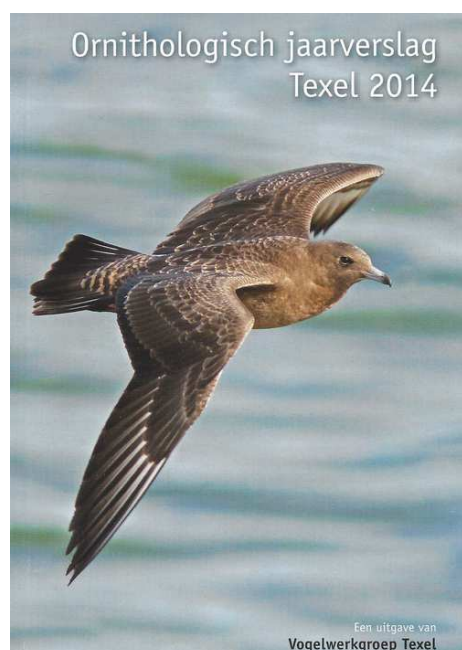


Figure 21: The "Ornithologisch jaarverslag 2014"

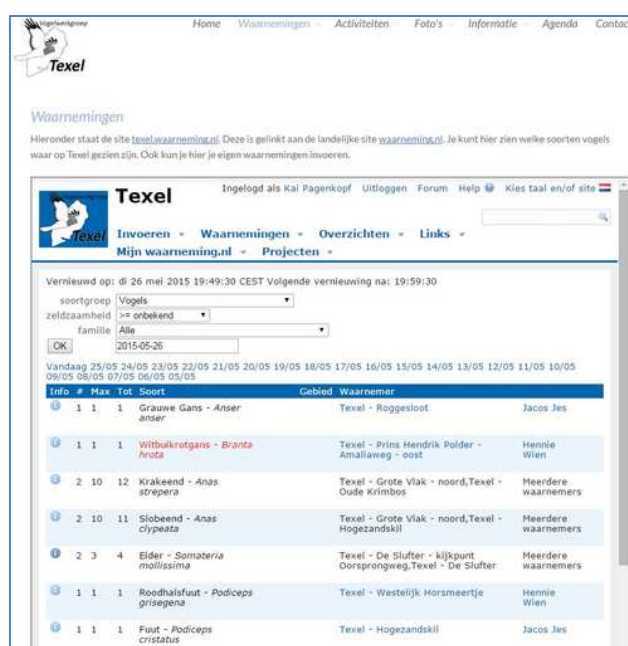


Figure 22: Website "www.vwgtextel.nl/waarnemingen" with recent information on bird sightings

In addition to the written information (printed or electronic), Texel has a big visitor centre close to the main touristic spots. "Ecomare" is an in- and outdoor museum and aquarium. Its objective is to enlarge "the public interest for the preservation and recovery of nature and cultural values (landscapes, ecosystem, species) in the wadden region and the North

Sea, with an emphasis on Texel” as it is claimed on www.ecomare.nl. Ecomare offers many guided tours, including bird watching tours. A private addition with a closer focus on bird watching is the “Vogel Informatie Centrum” in De Cocksdorp, partly shop for bird watching equipment, partly information centre with guided tours for keen birdwatchers.

The “Dutch Birding–vogelkijkweekend” in autumns underlines the outstanding importance of Texel in the bird watcher community not only in the Netherlands. Starting 30 years ago, the bird watching weekend is a fix date in the calendar of many a bird watcher. Hundreds of twitchers and keen birders invade the island in order to look for vagrants.

The large numbers of tourists in general and bird watchers in particular lead to a strong pressure on the island. Most recreational venues are situated in the western part of the island (close to the National Park “Dunes of Texel”), and some remote parts are still quiet places. Nonetheless, some “hot spots” for birders are sometimes overcrowded with dozens of people with binoculars, spotting scopes and cameras. Actually, not all of them behave in the way they should do. Therefore, the accessibility of the spots and the dense net of information on where to observe interesting species can be a mixed blessing for nature conservation.

However, some of the most important and vulnerable areas are not open to the public or only in a restricted way. Though most bird watchers are individualists and not interested in joining guided tours, a restricted entrance to a “hot spot” can be a tool to force them into a group. A good example are the guided tours to the wadden area “De Schorren” in the Northeast of Texel. Being a very interesting spot all time of the year, the entrance is closed, but guided tours are allowed to a certain extent (the most vulnerable parts remain taboo, of course). The simple fact that it is forbidden to penetrate the area raises the curiosity, and the feeling of being part of an exclusive group let people take part in a guided tour and allows the guide to disseminate relevant facts about the Wadden Sea, the World Heritage and its conservation (Figure 23).



Figure 23: "De Schorren" is only accessible with guided tours

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top birding sites • Plenty of guided tours • Experienced guides • Good guidance system • Extraordinary depth of information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large amount of visitors • Risk of disturbance

8 Short overview of important findings

A lot of different bird watching offers within the World Heritage Side Wadden Sea do exist. The offered tours address to all kinds of different target groups. Besides short excursions with durations of several hours, there are also arrangements including not only bird watching but other culinary or cultural topics. Especially the described good practice examples show that there are diverse and very innovative and successful offers. Most of the analysed offers seem to be very professional and well organized. However the promotion of the tours and their findability on the internet are mostly unprofessional and improvable.

Although a lot of potential guests seem to be interested in sustainable tours only very few offers are certified as sustainable. Another lack of information insists on the accessibility of bird watching tours.

Furthermore, offers for foreign guests are very scarce and guided tours in English are hardly offered, although there seems to be a demand of these tours as indicated by worldwide operating providers who also offer tours to the Wadden Sea.

9 Recommendations

9.1 Recommendations for service providers

Get good guides

According to the opinion of all interview partners, the quality of the guide is the main success factor for a guided tour. As a matter of course, the guide must be an **excellent bird watcher**. But the professional skill is not enough. The guide must be trained in communication and should follow a didactic concept that can raise the interest of the participants and maintain it on a high level during the whole excursion. Especially on holidays of more than one day, the guide must have **social competences**. Very often, he or she has to act as a troubleshooter, so it is helpful to be familiar with tour operating as well.

Good guides are a “limited resource”. This goes in particular for series of events with a need for several guides on different places. The co-operation with universities and NGOs is an option, but make sure that the potential guides are able to fulfil the demands mentioned above. A good source of qualified and motivated guides can be ex-volunteers from NGOs or public institutions, who already guided bird watching or at least natural history tours during their voluntary service and who know the area well. Therefore it could be useful to stay in contact with ex-volunteers. **Trainings for guides** are helpful. In Germany, “Ländliche Erwachsenenbildung e. V. (LEB)” (www.leb-niedersachsen.de) developed special courses.

Bird watching tours can be and should be an important contribution to the objectives of the Wadden Sea World Heritage. All guides should be trained in sustainable regional development, and promote the ideas of sustainability both, in practice and in their didactic concept. In order to communicate this approach, it is helpful to apply for the National Park guide certification.

Create good offers

Getting good guides and creating good offers are closely related topics. The guide is the key factor for a good offer, and especially in small enterprises (which clearly predominate at the Wadden Sea), they are often responsible for the design of the offer in general.

A strict focus on the target groups and a concise concept of communication is very important. However, even in groups with mixed skills (say, from the advanced birder to the nature lover), great nature experiences can emerge. Bird watching often needs a bit of good luck, and exciting observations make life easier for the guides. Nonetheless, even days with low bird density and no special observations, it is possible to create **fun and emotions** in the group. Though the transfer of knowledge is important and relevant for most of the guest, they all are looking for holiday experiences. Having fun and sharing emotions within the group is a main driver for a successful bird watching trip.

Guests expect more than just learning how to distinguish a lapwing from a godwit. Especially on longer trips, several interview partners suggest the **combination of different topics** like bird watching and culinary or bird watching and cultural life. Guests are usually interested in the special living conditions at the seashore and the tradition of the locals. Often, birds played or play an important role in the daily life (as a source of food, as a contribution to local arts and so on). Therefore, birds can be a subject for the so-called “**story telling**”, a combination of transfer of facts, embedded in funny or exiting stories to entertain the guest.

Another suitable combination is bird watching with **culinary events**. Food of regional production and prepared in a regional style is an important reason to visit a destination for many guests. An interesting suggestion to combine both is the offer of a dinner with different dishes from different countries along the migration flyway. You can start with a typical Russian appetiser (representing the breeding ground), continue with a North Sea main plate (representing the roosting ground) and finish with a dessert from Africa (wintering ground). It is a matter of course that all products should be from regional and/or sustainable origin. The dinner can be accompanied by an interesting lecture on, say, bird migration.



Figure 24: Dinner with lecture after a bird watching tour

Enhance accessibility for older guests, disabled guests or families with children

25 % of the guests claim to have special demands or travel with companions who have special demands (NIT 2014). In fact, the number of people who benefit from accessible offers is much higher. Not only disabled people benefit from accessible offers, accessibility is helpful and comfortable for a wide range of guests.

The amount of older people among bird watching holiday that take several days is very high. According to the bit tour operators among our interview partners, 50+ or even 60+ guests make up the majority of participants, often up to 90 %¹. Most of them are not

¹ This does not mean that bird watchers are mostly old, in general. Twitching as a leisure time occupation emerged not long ago, so especially among twitchers and advanced birders, the amount of younger people seems to be rather high. As shown above, they tend to make individualistic trips, while the major group of nature lovers prefers guided tours. This group consists mainly of older people.

disabled and would call themselves active and fit. Nonetheless, they appreciate accessible, comfortable offers in both, infrastructure and services.

During the main season, families with small children are an important group, especially for short excursions. They need short walks, suitable for small children, and sometimes comfortable paths for pushing prams. When biking, the bicycle lanes should be suitable for trailer.

Observation huts, shelters or scopes on tripods should be adaptable for people of different sizes. On bird song tours, be aware that older people cannot hear high bird sounds anymore (Locustella-warblers, Goldcrests and so on).



Figure 25: Observation hut with seating-accommodation and observation vents in different heights



Figure 26: Different heights of tripods for smaller and taller participants

Obviously, accessible standards become more and more important. Many guests, especially those of older age, expect accessibility without demanding it. At least ask the guests about their needs and demands. If possible, use a label for your own tour to make your accessibility standards visible and/or co-operate with partners (restaurants, museums and so on) that are accessible and show it. In Denmark, a good choice is the “god adgang”-certification (www.godadgang.dk). In Germany, “Reisen für Alle” offers a national label for accessible offers (www.reisen-fuer-alle.de) (Figure 27, Figure 28).



Figure 27: Labels of the Danish "god adgang"-certification



Figure 28: Labels of the German "Reisen für Alle"-certification

Improve marketing and communication

Many providers and tour operators in the field of bird watching are rather small enterprises, often consisting of just one person. Preparation and organisation of the tours take a good deal of time, and the performances of the tours are time consuming as well. Most providers are not specialised in marketing or interested in the matter at all, so they neglect the marketing part of their business. As a result, the offers are hard or very hard to find on the internet (see chapter 6.2). For guests who are already on the spot, the offers are easier to find, because most providers are part of a local network and the local tourism information centre is often aware of the bird watching offers. Mystery shopping in several tourist information centres along the seashore shows a high level of awareness among the staff and a high disposition to help with information on birdwatching offers.

However, many guests prefer to prepare themselves with the help of the **internet**, and even on the spot, the internet becomes a more and more important source for information. Most guests have and use mobile phones and applications to learn about recent offers.

An **attractive website** with proper programming including web accessibility and search engine optimization (SEO) is the basis for successful communication. The website should be up to date and linked with marketing organisations on different scale (local tourist information centre and destination marketing organisation²). For local guides, especially the calendar of events should be connected with the calendar of the marketing organisations. Bigger enterprises should think of using Google AdWords as an enhancement to their online marketing strategy, though some service providers report unsatisfying results. We may expect a growing importance of this tool in future. For some areas and target groups the user generated online travel platform TripAdvisor might be another useful tool to increase findability of offers.

Co-operation and networking is important in any case, not just in online marketing. National Park centres and NGOs are important marketing partners as well. Think of co-operations with regional service providers – especially in accommodation and gastronomy. They are often the first contacts for guests and it is helpful if they know about your offers.

Though the internet is often the main source of information, **leaflets and flyers** remain important. Especially on the spot, guests like to take away printed information in order to prepare the next trips in the restaurant or at home in their holiday flat.

For both, website and flyers, an attractive and **professional design** is vital for the success. Looking at the flyer or website should be emotional, this is why photos of high quality are very important (no self-made pictures taken by the mobile phone's camera – except on Facebook).

The target groups for “real” bird watching offers may not be very large, but they are rather easy to reach. A lot of them read **bird watching magazines**, and it could pay off to take out ads there. Some tour service providers report good experiences with magazines like “Der Falke”, “Naturgucker” or “Vögel”, but also lifestyle magazines like “Landlust”

² In Germany: Ostfriesland Tourismus GmbH (www.ostfriesland.de), Die Nordsee GmbH (www.die-nordsee.de), Nordsee-Tourismus-Service GmbH (www.nordseetourismus.de)

were mentioned in the interviews as a successful channel for ads (Figure 29, Figure 30). However, not all attempts in taking out ads were successful. A tour operator reported a try in the holiday insert of a national German newspaper. Though the ad was for sure not cheap, neither the hit rate of the website nor the amount of mails increased.

A good possibility to increase the overall popularity of the World Heritage Side Wadden Sea as a very suited and interesting bird watching area could be editorial articles in magazines and newspapers (e.g. in the travel section). Such articles could point out particular suited spots for bird watching and emphasize the unique possibilities for bird watching in the region.

Never forget: The best way to promote your offers is **word of mouth propaganda**. No marketing campaign can compensate unsatisfied guests. This is why service suppliers should be aware of the expectations and demands of their guests. A close contact to the guest and honest communication is an important contribution to constant **quality assessment**.

It could also be helpful to enthuse local inhabitants of bird watching (offers) as they can be very important (authentic and credible) advisors for tourists. An effective measure could be to invite locals for a free bird watching tour and make them your ambassadors.

Especially in the UK (www.birdfair.org.uk), but also in Germany (HanseBird in Hamburg – www.hansebird.de) and Austria (Pannonian BirdExperience – www.birdexperience.org) attractive **bird fairs** were established. They attract a lot of interested people and get a positive response. Because of the expert audience, taking part in fairs can be very target-oriented and a good opportunity for destinations (like the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site) and service providers to reach their guests. In addition, bird fairs allow a deep insight in the bird watchers community and in new trends in optical equipment, literature and travel behaviour.



Figure 29: Choice of magazines to take out an ad



Figure 30: Page with ads (mostly from service providers in tourism) in "Der Falke"

Find partners for sales and distribution

NGOs like WWF or NABU are important co-operation partners for many service providers and tour operators. Groups of NGO-members form a special target group for bird watching trips and holidays. The people know each other and plan their trips together. This could be a bird watching arrangement, but often they organise the trip for themselves and seek an experienced guide on the spot, who is able to show observation spots and explain local nature conservation approaches.

Set a focus on the European market

For all service providers in the interviews, the domestic market is the main source market for bird watching offers. The German market for bird watching tours seems to be very similar to the main source market for all guests (North Rhine-Westphalia, Lower Saxony, Schleswig-Holstein), while in The Netherlands and in Denmark the amount of foreign guests is higher, but does rarely exceed 30 %.

However, adjacent markets may play an important role in future. In many tours, guests from Switzerland and Austria take part and often come to the Wadden Sea especially because of the birding tour. In Denmark, Russia seems to be an emerging market (Russian guests are more interested in experience nature than in "real" bird watching, though). A problem can be the language, marketing activities and excursions must be performed in the language of the source market, or at least in English.

Very few attempts focus on those markets so far, not just in bird watching, but in tourism in general. Presumably, it would pay off to work at least the German speaking foreign market for German bird watching offers. Other foreign markets are interesting, too, but experiences how to penetrate those markets are few. Particularly the UK seems to be promising market because there is a long bird watching tradition and therefore a deep interest in birds. Moreover, a lot of species which are rare in the UK can be observed

regularly in the Wadden Sea. To attract more guests from foreign countries will be an important task for the future, and providers of bird watching offers should keep a keen eye on the future developments. However, it is mainly the part of the tourism marketing organisations to gather experiences and to push the marketing efforts in foreign source markets. It is worth doing so, because the status as a World Heritage site sets an international focus on the Wadden Sea.

Get a sustainability label and/or become a National Park partner / a National Park guide

Service providers should underline their sustainable orientation and communicate the values of the World Heritage site. In a first step, they have to make sure that they act according to the objectives of the World Heritage site, of course. In a second step, service providers should go for a sustainability label (like Viabono in Germany (www.viabono.de) or TourCert (www.tourcert.org)). Another – or an additional – option is to apply for a National Park partnership. The degree of familiarity with the label is rather low – only 20 % of the guests have heard about the certification (WWF 2013) – but many guests are interested in sustainable offers and complain about a lack of information on this important topic.



Figure 31: Logo and name tag of a National Park mud flat guides

Presumably, the amount of those guests is rather high in the target groups for bird watching activities. Therefore, the potential of the label is much bigger than it seems now. In addition, only few companies are National Park partners so far, this is why the certificate represents a “unique selling proposition” and an advantage in comparison with the competitors.

9.2 Recommendations for regions and destinations

Create good observation sites and communicate them

For almost all bird watchers, the experience of nature and birds is the main driver and motivation. Even for many twitchers and most of the advanced birders, rare species and long species lists are on-top features. If bird watching experiences shall contribute to supporting the World Heritage values, good observation sites are the inevitable basis.

Attractive spots for bird watchers are for instance breeding colonies, feeding or roosting grounds with outstanding large numbers of individuals, and spots with the chance of observing typical Wadden Sea species. At least some of those spots should be **easy to reach**, because a good quantity of bird watchers has special demands on accessibility (see chapter 9.1).

Observation spots should cause as few harm as possible to birds and environment. In order to **avoid disturbances**, spots for observation huts and shelters should be planned carefully. Though some guests and bird watchers will misbehave, a concise guidance system and information on how to behave (and why) are very important. Restricted areas are unavoidable and mostly accepted by visitors (especially close to the shoreline, it can be difficult to mark restricted areas. The tide often washes away information plates and physical barriers. Visitors penetrate the restricted area without knowing). On the other hand, restricted areas can be used to make visitors curious. In some cases, it can be an option to offer exclusive guided tours to less vulnerable places in restricted areas (see chapter 7.4).

During migration times or within special bird watching events, **mobile observation stands** can be installed on “hot spots”. During the “Zugvogeltage” (see chapter 7.3) such mobile stands are situated in places with both, large numbers of birds and visitors. Professional ornithologists and bird watchers take care for the mobile stands and explain the observed bird to the visitors (Figure 32).



Figure 32: Mobile observation stand during the “Zugvogeltage”

Bird watchers should know where to go – and where not. A good **source of information**, especially for bird watchers who are not familiar with the destination, are guiding books.

They are a helpful tool to channelize the visitors on one hand and to deal with relevant information for bird watchers on the other hand (Figure 33).



Figure 33: Example of a guiding book for bird watchers (Dierschke et al. 2008)

However, for many bird watchers the internet is the main source of information. Recent observations are available in The Netherlands, Germany and Denmark on observation platforms (Figure 34 – Figure 36). Thanks to mobile technology, those platforms are available in the field (if there is a mobile network), and they can be used to deal with additional and recent information. It is worth thinking of how to implement those platforms in the local information system (QR-codes, direct links and so on are options). In Schleswig-Holstein, 3 observation locations are planned where it is possible to get information about observed bird species on the spot by scanning QR-codes with a smartphone (The National Park of Lower Saxony is planning in the same way). This could be a nice gadget also for “beginners”. Certainly such a service requires the needed infrastructure like observing platforms and sufficient network coverage.

Recente zeldzaamheden

Vogels Zoogdieren Reptielen en amfibieën Dap-Inders Selecteer

Vernieuwd op: 31-05-2015 16:30 Volgende vernieuwing na: 31-05-2015 17:00

Datum	Locatie	Observatie
31-05-2015 10:10	1	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i> - Noord [L]
31-05-2015 04:11	4	<i>Kluisen Waterhoop - Porzana pusilla</i>
31-05-2015 14:14	2	<i>Ophospiza monticola - Hippoboscidae polyglotta</i>
31-05-2015 15:32	16	<i>Turdus merula - Turdus merula</i>
31-05-2015 14:02	1	<i>Buceo phaeocephala - Buceo phaeocephala</i>
31-05-2015	1	<i>Hybridus Ringknechtii x Kalkreuth - Aythya collaris x Aythya fuligula</i>
31-05-2015	1	<i>Kalkreuth - Aythya collaris</i>
31-05-2015 08:36	1	<i>Kalkreuth - Aythya collaris</i>
31-05-2015 09:09	2	<i>Gallus gallus - Gallus gallus</i>
31-05-2015 12:17	7	<i>Monticola monticola - Monticola monticola</i>
31-05-2015 15:20	5	<i>Ripidura ripidura - Ripidura ripidura</i>
31-05-2015 13:54	11	<i>Stellio - Stellio</i>
31-05-2015 07:54	2	<i>Zwarte - Zwarte</i>
31-05-2015 12:52	5	<i>Winkler - Winkler</i>
31-05-2015 13:26	7	<i>Winkler - Winkler</i>
31-05-2015 07:20	2	<i>Zwarte - Zwarte</i>
31-05-2015 09:26	2	<i>Breukelaar - Breukelaar</i>
31-05-2015 10:30	4	<i>Breukelaar - Breukelaar</i>
31-05-2015 11:06	1	<i>Flamingo - Flamingo</i>
30-05-2015 22:31	2	<i>Kluisen Waterhoop - Porzana pusilla</i>

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Figure 34: <http://waarneming.nl>



Figure 35: www.ornitho.de



Figure 36: www.netfugl.dk

On the level of the whole World Heritage Site, an overview of good observation sites with recommendations for bird watchers is missing, so far. Such an overview is highly desirable, for it would promote the Wadden Sea as an entire region and would show the great potentials of the whole region at a glance. In addition, an “inventory of suitable bird watching sites” could be task to strengthen the co-operation on the trilateral level. The inventory should consist:

- Analysis of the status quo: which bird watching sites do exist, which regions are particularly attractive? What is missing to develop good bird watching sites on the spot?
- Priority list: which actions can be done in order to improve the situation on the spot (not all promising spots can be developed, of course. So it is important to rank the measures and tasks).
- Putting to map: existing and improved sites should be mapped and presented to the public – at least on the internet. All improvements should be documented, and an update of the maps take place regularly.
- Adding tips and recommendations as well as deeper information on bird species and conservation status of the region in question.
- Think about publishing a joint book on bird watching spots and providers in the entire Wadden Sea and publish it in different languages (depending on the source market at target).

Support qualified Rangers and guides

Modern technology cannot replace personal contact with real human beings. Rangers and guides are important contact persons, and in addition, Rangers contribute to the guidance of the visitors and the protection of the area.

Other National Parks made good experiences with a narrow net of Rangers, and it is a pity, that only few of them are active in the (German) National Parks. However, in terms of bird watching, Ranger and other guides should be trained in bird observation and able to explain the particularities of the Wadden Sea. As we have seen above, there is a lack of staff that is skilful in bird watching. Additional trainings for Rangers and other staff members of National Park institutions (and related institutions) would be very helpful.

Co-operate with national and international partners

Bird watching offers do not consist of bird watching only. Guests and visitors have to reach the destination, they have to sleep and eat there. Co-operation along the whole service chain in tourism is necessary to meet the demands of the guests. Most co-operations lay in the responsibility of private service providers, but some depend on public and governmental institutions. **Transport** is for sure one of those public fields. Many interesting spots along the seashore are difficult (or impossible) to reach by public means of transport. Co-operations with providers of public transport are inevitable to improve the situation (an example in Lower Saxony is “Der Urlauberbus” – www.urlauberbus.info).

Co-operations on larger scale are necessary to serve guests who travel long distance. „Fahrziel Natur“, a co-operation between Deutsche Bahn (German Railway) and three NGOs, offered bird watching arrangements. This is a good chance to promote birding offers and at the same time promote travelling with public means of transport. However, the desktop research shows that those offers are rather difficult to find. An improvement of the marketing (on the internet) is advisable.

Strengthen the co-operation between National Parks, World Heritage site and marketing organisations in tourism

This is a recommendation not only for bird watching offers, but also for all nature experience offers in the Wadden Sea. Marketing organisations in tourism have developed tools and channels to promote the Wadden Sea for years. They have a vast experience how to reach the guests and how to meet the expectations of visitors. This is why they are essential partners for all offers in the Wadden Sea. Many good examples show how National Parks, World Heritage site and tourism marketing organisation work together successfully. For sure, the co-operation between the partners will produce fruitful results in promoting bird watching offers as well, for example a joint participation at a bird fair.

Use the National Park websites and the website of the World Heritage site to promote bird watching offers

The websites of the National Parks and the World Heritage site are for many people who are interested in birds and nature an important source for information. Though on some of the sites information on birding offers are present, they are usually not placed in a prominent way and difficult to find.

National Park and World Heritage websites could be a bird watching platform with a collection of many different information on bird watching, from tips for birding hot spots up to recent information on bird's sightings (in co-operation with the observation platform mentioned above). Such an attractive platform would be an interesting channel to promote chosen bird watching offers.

Create arrangements for the whole World Heritage site

The Wadden Sea as a World Heritage site wants to be perceived as a unique entity. An arrangement that shows the whole range of interesting bird watching spots at the Wadden Sea, independently from country borders, would underline this approach. Indeed, about 25 % of the guests desire a Wadden Sea arrangement (NIT 2014).

On the other hand, the experiences of the tourism marketing organisations show that arrangements often do not work along the seashore. The net of tourism facilities and service providers is very narrow, guests can easily organise the trips that they want on their own. It is likely that a bird watching arrangement in the whole Wadden Sea will share the fate of many arrangements and fails.

However, arrangements are more than bookable packages. They **show possibilities and inspire** the guests. In this way, an arrangement can be a useful marketing tool for the whole Wadden Sea.

Stimulate sustainable offers

We saw that many guests are interested in sustainable offers. Not less than one third of the guests prefer restaurants and accommodation facilities with regional products (NIT 2014), and 20 % are ready to pay more for an accommodation with an eco-label. We may suppose that the amount of those guests is even higher among bird watchers.

It is the task of private service providers to react on the demands of the market and to adjust their products. However, marketing organisations, National Parks and the World Heritage site can stimulate the awareness of the service providers. An **internal marketing campaign** on development of sustainable products in tourism in general (and bird watching offers in particular) is an important step. During the last years, many endeavours have been made in this field and many good results have been obtained. However, there is no reason to stop the efforts; still most of the service providers do not fulfil the criteria of sustainability (very important: often the service providers are not to blame. They often have a good will, but a lack of knowledge and money prevents them from changing their strategy).

It lies in the hand of the marketing organisations and all other promoters, which offers they put forward. In a World Heritage site, it is highly desirable to promote especially those offers that meet the demands of sustainability. To strengthen those offers would be a clear signal to all service providers.

However, in a first step, it is important to develop a guideline that

- describes the main standards of sustainability for bird watching services (and services in tourism in general),
- shows how the standards can be met by service providers,
- develops a certification system and
- makes clear how marketing organisations can promote such sustainable offers.

10 Conclusion

Some statements and requirements shall conclude the study on bird watching offers:

- Bird watching can be a strong tool to attract guests and to inform them about the unique features and the outstanding universal value of the Wadden Sea.
- Bird watching addresses to a wide variety of people with different interests – from the keen twitcher to the nature lover and beginner. Thus, bird watching offers must be adapted to the different demands of the guests.
- Bird watching can be a business opportunity, but take into account that the number of twitchers and advanced birders is still rather small, at least in Germany. In addition, they are rather individualistic and hardly take part in guided tours or arrangements (they need accommodation and food, though).
- The bird watcher community is much bigger in some adjacent countries like the Netherlands or the UK. Thanks to the excellent conditions like bird watching spots and touristic infrastructure, it may be profitable to lay an additional focus on these source markets.
- Bird watching can raise the pressure on a region significantly. Managers in tourism and nature conservation should act together in order to diminish the disturbance for the birds (guiding system, guided tours, observation huts and so on) and for the region in general (provision of public passenger transport, promotion of sustainable accommodation and gastronomy and so on).
- The key factor for the success of bird watching tours is the high quality of the guide, in both, expertise and social competence.
- In the World Heritage site, it should be a matter of course that all bird watching offers meet the demands of sustainability.

11 Literature

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Appendix

List of participants of the trilateral PROWAD workshop on touristic bird watching in Multimar Wattforum, Tönning, June 11th, 2015

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15.	Busch	Carsten	Nationalparkverwaltung Schleswig-Holsteinisches Wattenmeer
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17.	Domnick	Anja	Common Wadden Sea Secretariat
18.	Lüerßen	Gerold	Common Wadden Sea Secretariat
19.	Kämpfer	Steffen	Pagenkopf Consulting
20.	Pagenkopf	Kai	Pagenkopf Consulting