

# Bird Watching's Boost to Local Economy

By Paul Green, Executive Director, Tucson Audubon

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For decades, the Patons' small property at 477 Pennsylvania Avenue has attracted visitors for great views of special birds and for the tranquility the site offers. Its recent acquisition by Tucson Audubon is a big deal for both the local community and the international birding com-

munity. Renamed *Tucson Audubon's Paton Center for Hummingbirds*, the property is already being developed to attract more birds and birders.

Recent studies show that bird watching is among the nation's most popular recreational activities and growing. Why birding? Ask the more than 47 million bird watchers in America why they love birds, and you'll probably get a range of replies as diverse as the birds themselves. With colors and songs that can stop you in your tracks, equally colorful and evocative names, and life stories full of amazing feats of speed and stamina, birds are an exciting gateway to the natural world, right outside your door! A recent economic impact analysis suggests that Arizonans now have a billion more reasons to appreciate birds and wildlife.

Arizona's unique combination of geography and climate supports more than 400 kinds of birds—that's about half the total of all the bird species that can be found in the US and Canada, in just one percent of the land area. Diverse and distinctive, Arizona's bird life features 36 species not regularly found elsewhere in the US, and 40 found only in the US-Mexico border area. Combine all this with our rich cultural heritage and first-class destination services, and it's no wonder we're recognized as one of the top birding and nature destinations in the country, attracting ecotourists from around the world.

And that's where the billion comes in. You might be surprised to learn that Watchable Wildlife

recreation in Arizona has a larger economic impact than hunting, fishing, golf, or Tucson's Gem Show. Southwick Associates, a fish and wildlife economics and statistics firm, reports the total economic impact from 2011 watchable wildlife activities in Arizona to be \$1.4 billion (\$1.1 billion by residents and \$314.6 million by visitors). Southwick's analysis is based on raw data from the 2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. In this survey, "wildlife watching activities" include observing, photographing, or feeding wildlife.

When birders visit, they spend money—mostly on lodging, food, and transportation. Local participants contribute, too, with equipment purchases like optics, camera gear, and bird-feeding supplies (among other tools of the trade). These expenditures have increased since 2001, despite economic instability; in 2011, Arizona residents spent a total of \$665 million on watchable wildlife recreation, while wildlife watchers visiting from out of state poured \$183.7 million new dollars into the state economy.

Original expenditures by wildlife watchers generate rounds of additional spending throughout the economy, resulting in additional indirect and induced impacts that are commonly called the multiplier effect. Economic activity associated with both the direct spending and multiplier effect impacts is the total economic contribution resulting from the original expenditures.

Here in southeastern Arizona, watchable wildlife recreation has a



*Northern Flicker*

total economic impact of \$330 million and supports about 3,000 jobs in Pima, Santa Cruz, and Cochise Counties. To support and grow this valuable industry, we need to promote responsible wildlife observation, provide destinations like the Paton Center to attract visiting bird watchers and nature tourists, and protect and enhance the habitats upon which our wildlife depends. Local organizations, government, and business can work synergistically to build a bird-friendly and birder-friendly community and nurture "The Goose That Lays the Golden Eggs."

For more information, including Southwick Associates' full report (*Economic Contributions of Wildlife Viewing to the Arizona Economy*, May 2013), please visit <http://www.tucsonaudubon.org/birdingeconomics>.



*Elegant Trogon*



*Mountain Bluebird*