



LOUISIANA BIRD WATCHERS:
A FURTHER EXAMINATION OF PAST RESEARCH

By Jack C. Isaacs
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November, 2010

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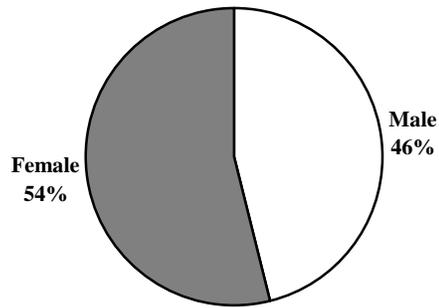
With an impressive array of avian species living in or migrating through the state, Louisiana possesses a rich bird resource which draws the attention of thousands of bird watchers every year. Those bird watchers are the topic of this research. This report presents the results of a survey of wildlife recreationists conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the findings of two surveys of bird watching festival participants conducted by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, and further findings of a survey of members of the American Birding Association conducted on behalf of the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program.

The National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation

Every five years the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Census Bureau conduct the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, a telephone survey that gauges the public's participation in and expenditures on various forms of nature-based recreation. The survey asks respondents who report observing, photographing, or feeding wildlife what kind of wildlife they target: birds, land mammals, sea mammals, fish, or other wildlife. Those respondents who report observing, photographing, and feeding birds are classified as bird watchers.

In 2006, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimated that 48 million people, 21 percent of the U.S. population, engaged in some form of bird watching. This includes 42 million who observe birds around the home and 20 million who took a trip of one mile or more away from home for the primary purpose of bird watching (called "away-from-home" bird watchers). Fifty-four percent of bird watchers in the U.S. were female (Figure 1) and 37.3 percent had a college degree or high level of formal education (Figure 2). Forty percent were 55 years old or older (Figure 4) and 88.8 percent were white (Figure 5). More than a third had a household income of \$75,000 or more (Figure 6).

**Figure 1. Percent of U.S. Bird Watchers by Gender:
2006**



**Figure 2. Educational Distribution of U.S. Bird Watchers:
2006**

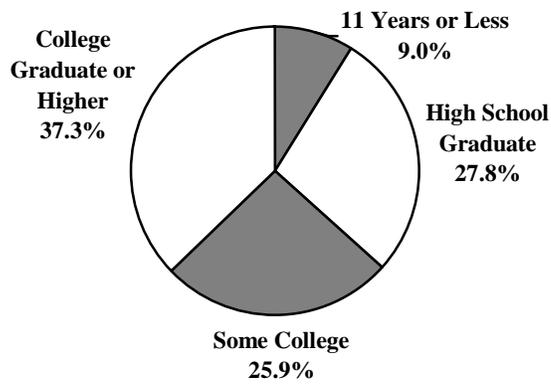
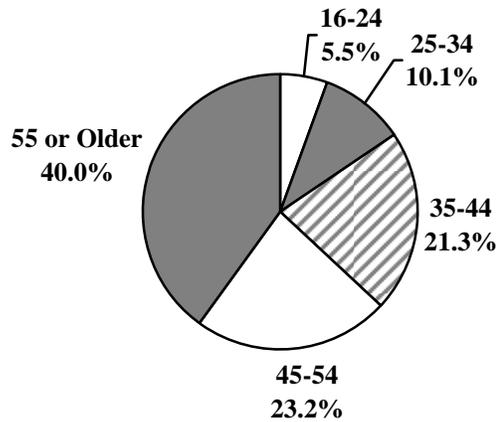


Figure 3. Age Distribution of U.S. Bird Watchers: 2006



Source: Carver, *Birding in the United States: A Demographic Analysis*, 2009.

Figure 4. Racial and Ethnic Distribution of U.S. Bird Watchers: 2006

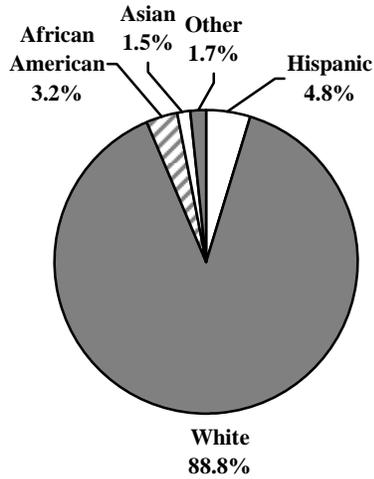
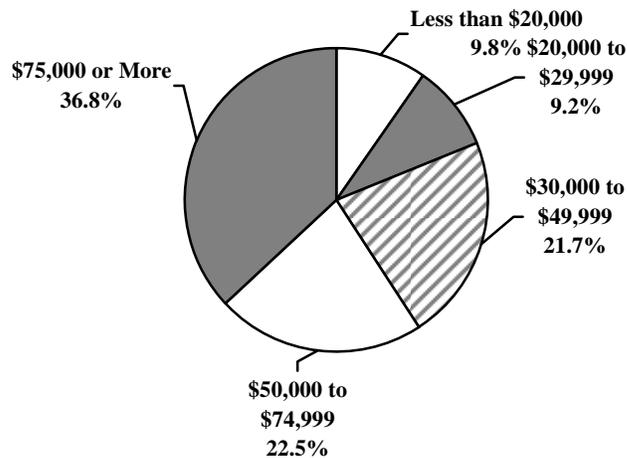


Figure 5. Income Distribution of U.S. Bird Watchers: 2006



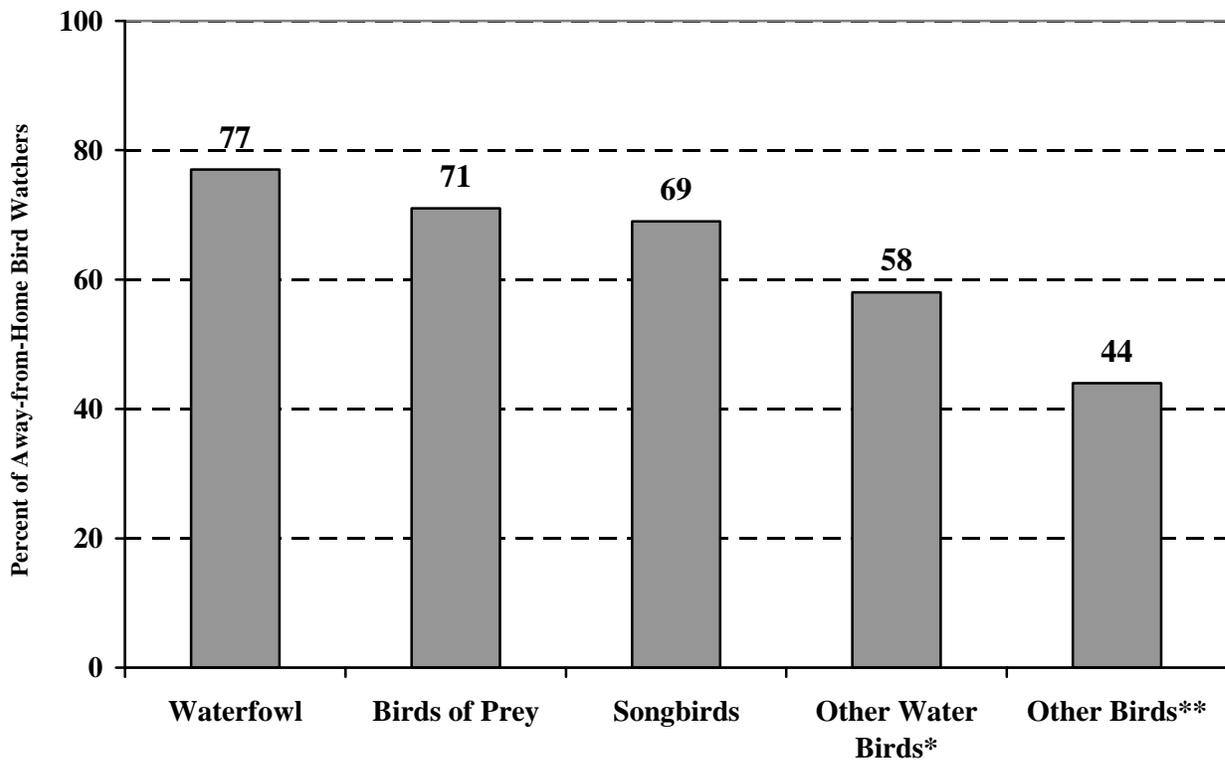
Source: Carver, *Birding in the United States: A Demographic Analysis*, 2009.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimated that bird watchers spent \$23.7 billion on equipment \$12.1 billion on trip-related expenditures, like food, lodging, and transportation, in 2006. Bird watchers nationwide spent an average of 124 days watching birds at home and 14 days watching birds away from home in 2006.

The most commonly observed types of birds among away-from-home bird watchers in 2006 were waterfowl (77 percent) and birds of prey (71%) (Figure 6). Sixty-nine percent observed songbirds and 58 percent water birds other than waterfowl, such as shorebirds and herons.

In 2001, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimated that nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of at-home bird watchers could identify one to 20 bird species by sight or sound and only six percent could identify 41 or more bird species (Figure 7). Away-from-home bird watchers had a somewhat better ability to name birds. Approximately two-thirds (67 percent) of away-from-home bird watchers could identify one to twenty species by sight or sound and ten percent could identify 41 species or more (Figure 8).

Figure 6. Types of Birds Observed by Away-from-Home Bird Watchers: 2006



* Other Water Birds – Shorebirds, Herons, etc.
 ** Other Birds – Pheasants, Turkeys, etc.

Source: Carver, *Birding in the United States: A Demographic Analysis*, 2009.

Figure 7. Percent of U.S. Around-the-Home Bird Watchers Who Can Identify Birds by Sight or Sound:

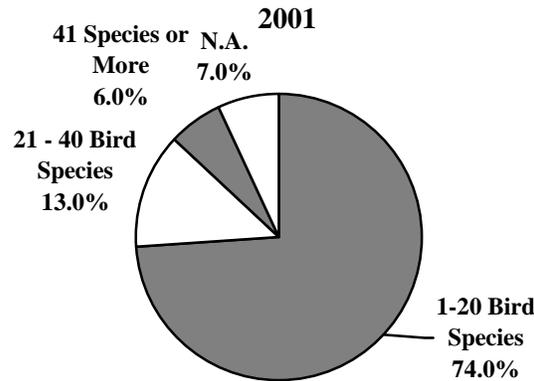
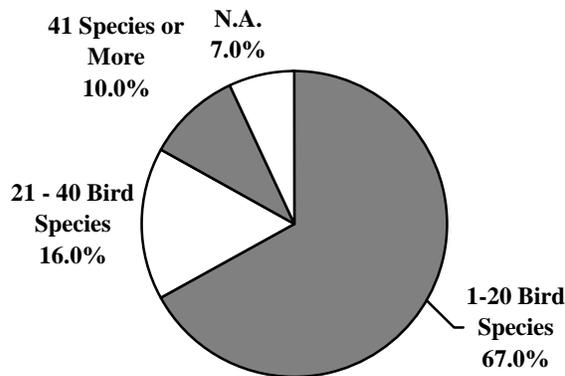


Figure 8. Percent of U.S. Away-from-Home Bird Watchers Who Can Identify Birds by Sight or Sound: 2001



Source: Carver, *Birding in the United States: A Demographic Analysis*, 2009.

In 2006, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's *National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation*, 552 thousand state residents and nonresidents observed wild birds in Louisiana, including 467 thousand around-the-home bird watchers and 197 thousand away-from-home bird watchers. Collectively they spent 65.5 million days of bird watching around their homes and 2.8 million days of bird watching away from home. Unfortunately, detailed demographic statistics of bird watchers in Louisiana in particular could not be discerned due to the small sample size of national survey respondents who participated in birding in the state.

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Bird Watching Festival Surveys

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries has also conducted surveys that describe two select groups of bird watchers: participants in Saint Francisville’s 2004 Audubon Country Bird Fest and the 2005 Grand Isle Migratory Bird Celebration¹. Reports based on these surveys present demographic details of the participants and the economic contributions of the events to the respective local communities. The results of these surveys should not be applied to Louisiana bird watchers in general.

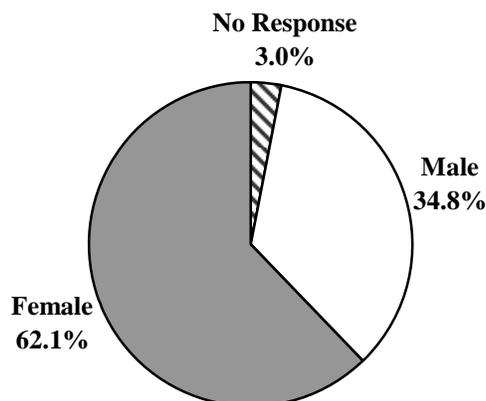
Audubon Country Bird Fest, 2004

A survey of 82 attendees of the Audubon Country Bird Fest in Saint Francisville was administered by mail shortly after the event in 2004. The survey response rate was 80.5 percent.

Over sixty percent of the Audubon Country Bird Fest survey respondents were female (Figure 9). Approximately 60 percent had a college degree or advanced degree (Figure 10). The average age was 54.3 years old. Nearly half (48.5 percent) had a household income of \$75 thousand or more (Figure 11).

Of the 66 respondents, 41 lived in Louisiana, seven in Texas, three each in Arkansas and Tennessee, two each in Illinois, Mississippi, Minnesota, and Washington, and one each in Georgia, New Mexico, Oregon, and Wisconsin.

Figure 9. Gender Distribution of Audubon Country Bird Fest Survey Respondents



¹ The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries gratefully acknowledges funding provided by the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program in support of the 2005 Grand Isle Migratory Bird Celebration survey.

Figure 10. Educational Distribution of Audubon Country Survey Respondents

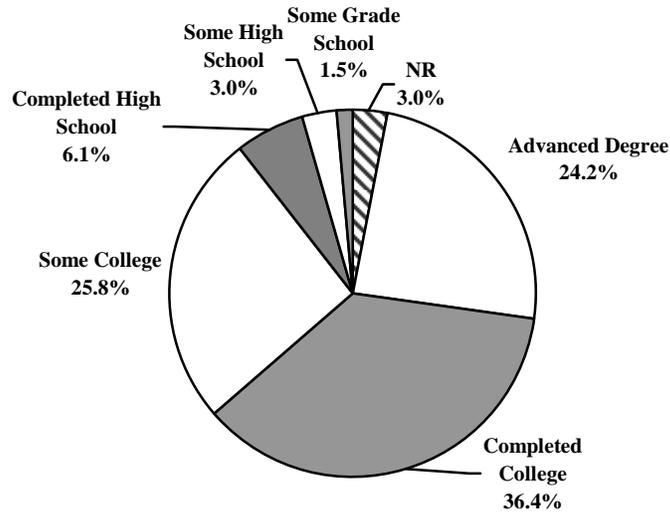
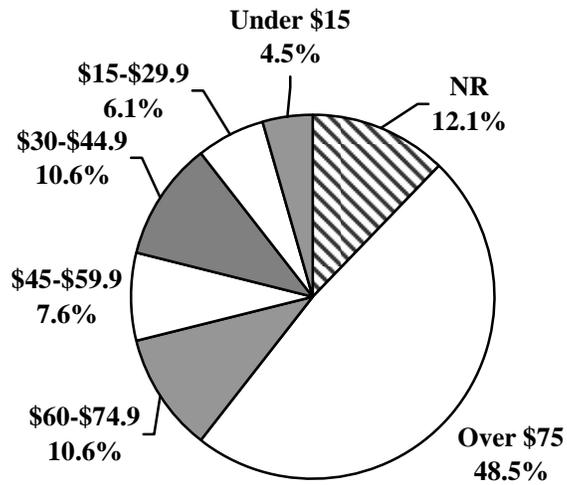


Figure 11. Income Distribution of Audubon Country Bird Fest Respondents



Household Income in Thousands of Dollars

Grand Isle Migratory Bird Celebration, 2005

A mail survey was sent to 196 participants of the 2005 Grand Isle Migratory Bird Celebration, a bird watching festival sponsored by the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program, shortly after the event. The survey response rate was 60 percent.

Over 60 percent of the respondents were women (Figure 12). Nearly two-thirds (61.4 percent) had completed college or earned an advanced degree (Figure 13). The average age was 57.8 years old. Approximately one-third (36.9 percent) had a household income of \$70 thousand or more (Figure 14). About one-quarter (24.6 percent) had a household income of \$40 thousand to \$70 thousand. Most of the bird festival respondents resided in south Louisiana. Four came from Mississippi, one from New York, and one from Massachusetts.

Figure 12. Gender Distribution of Grand Isle Migratory Bird Celebration Survey Respondents

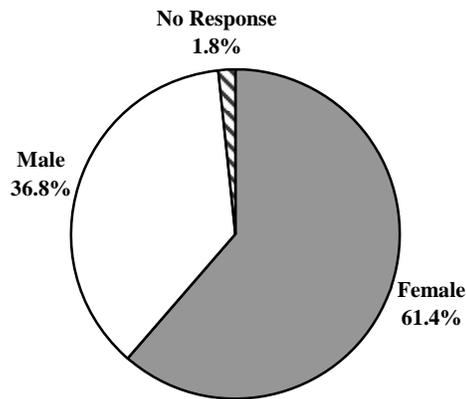


Figure 13. Educational Distribution of Grand Isle Migratory Bird Celebration Survey Respondents

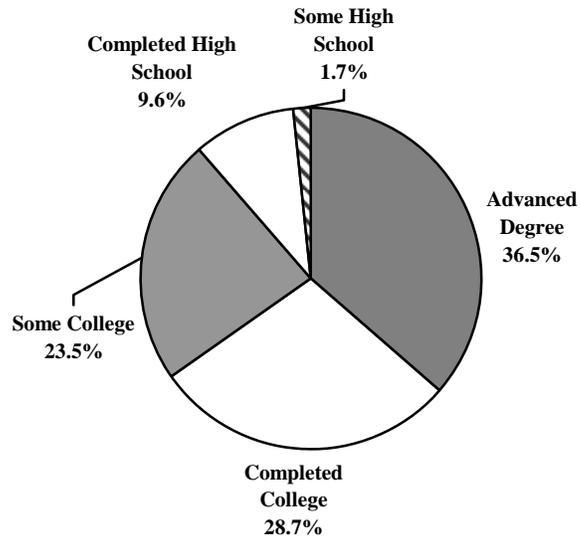
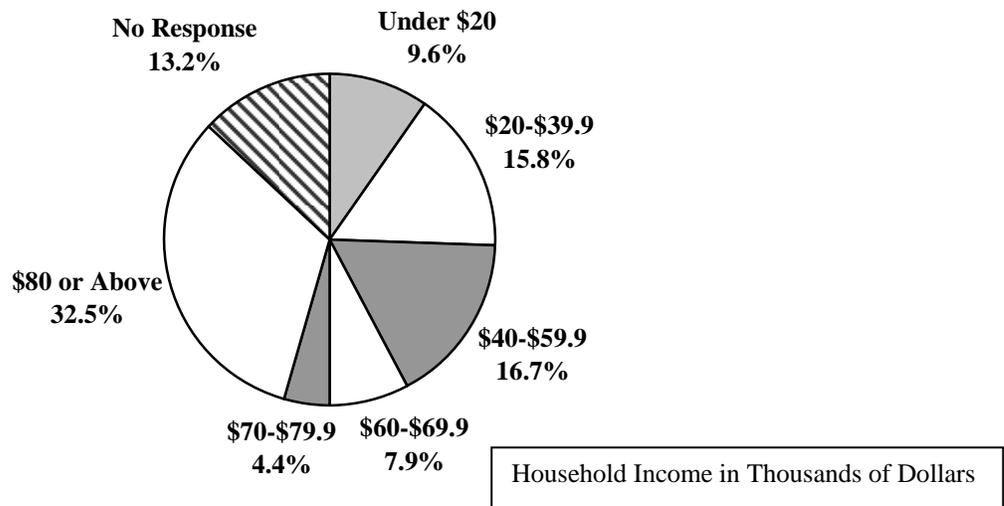


Figure 14. Household Income Distribution of Grand Isle Migratory Bird Celebration Survey Respondents



Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program's American Birding Association Survey

A survey conducted on behalf of the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program (BTNEP) in 2008 provides an additional portrait of a select group of bird watchers, members of the American Birding Association (ABA), and their activities and preferences. In 2007, BTNEP sent complimentary copies of a bird-themed wall calendar to 15,000 members of the ABA across the United States as part of its educational and outreach program. Later that year, a research program sponsored by BTNEP conducted a nationwide mail survey of 1,500 calendar recipients to gauge their opinion of the 2007 calendar and to collect data regarding demographics and birding activities, and preferences. The response rate for the survey was 50 percent.

Response Rate

Survey response rates based on the respondents' ZIP code (an item solicited in the questionnaire) seemed to decline unevenly with the survey recipients' distance from Louisiana (Figure 15). Of twelve survey recipients in Louisiana, ten responded (response rate = 83.3 percent.) The response rate was 58.3 percent for Texas and 56.2 percent for the eastern Gulf (Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida). Response rates for other regions or states ranged from 36.7 percent for California to 52.6 percent for the Pacific Northwest.

Demographic Characteristics

General demographic characteristics and birding activity statistics suggest that the respondents to the BTNEP survey, members of an avid user group, are dissimilar to those of general U.S. bird watchers. Over sixty percent of the BTNEP respondents are male (Figure 16), 86.8 percent had a college degree or advanced degree (Figure 17), and nearly three-quarters were 55 years or older (Figure 18). (The average and median ages were 61.3 and 61 years old, respectively.)

**Figure 15. BTNEP Bird Watchers Survey Response Rate,
By Region of the Contiguous United States**

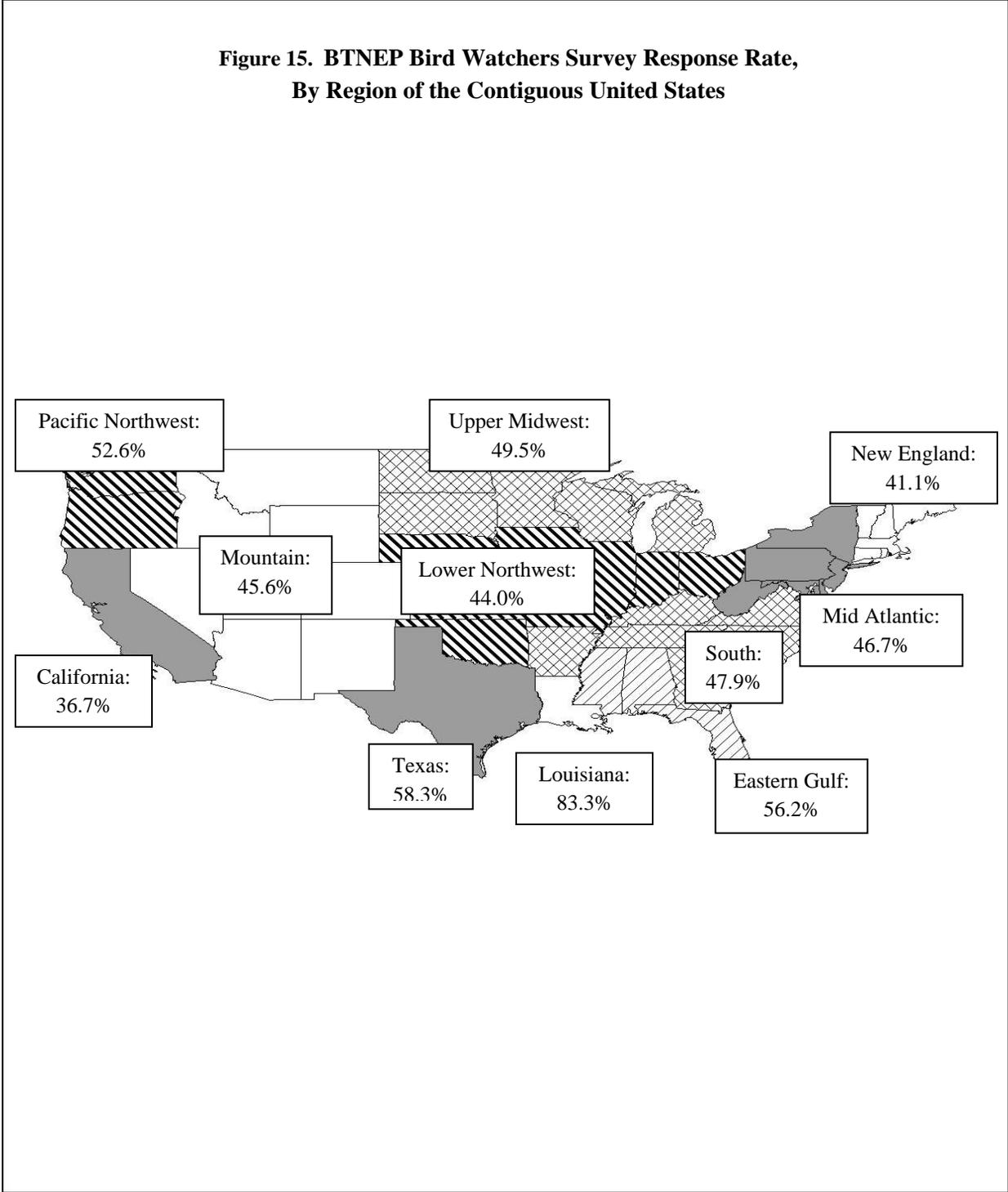


Figure 16. Gender Distribution of BTNEP Bird Watchers Survey Respondents

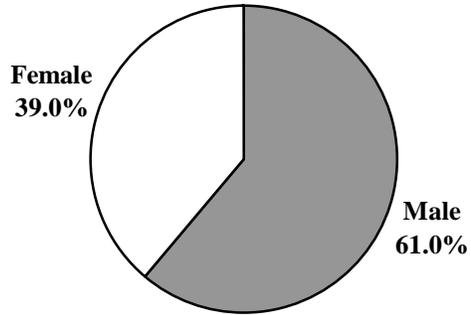


Figure 17. Educational Distribution of BTNEP Bird Watchers Survey Respondents

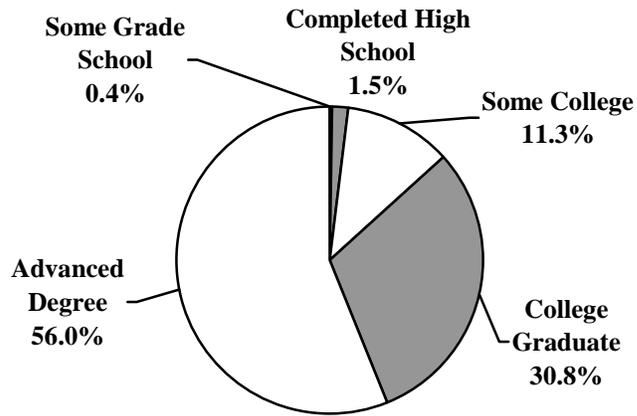
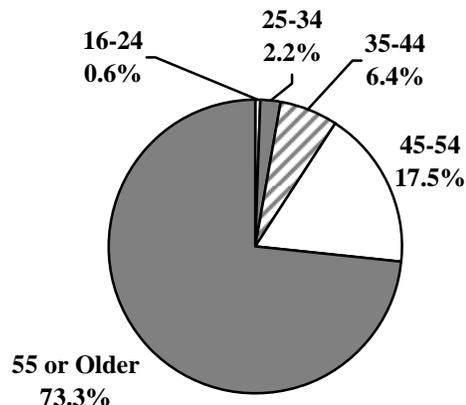


Figure 18. Age Distribution of BTNEP Bird Watchers Survey Respondents



Bird Watching Activities and Experience

Nearly ninety-nine percent had taken at least one away-from-home bird watching trip in the year before the survey (Figure 19). Among those who had taken at least one trip, the average number of trips was 30.66 trips with a median of 15 trips.

BTNEP respondents had an average of 28.48 years and a median of 26 years of bird watching experience. Nearly two-thirds (65.7 percent) described their bird watching abilities as “advanced” or “expert” (Figure 20). Over 90 percent could identify 41 species of birds or more without a guidebook (Figure 21). Nearly 80 percent could identify more than 80 species. Eighty-five percent of the survey respondents maintained “life lists” (Figure 22), records of the species of birds that they have seen, heard, and identified. Life lists are frequently kept by committed or experienced bird watchers.

Figure 19. Percentage of BTNEP Bird Watchers Survey Respondents Who Have Taken At Least One Away-from-Home Bird Watching Trip in the Year Before the Survey

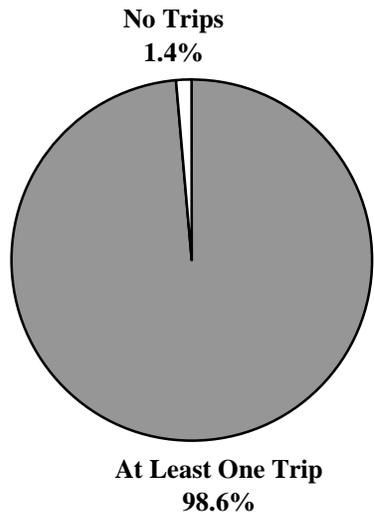


Figure 20. BTNEP Bird Watchers Survey Respondents' Self-Rated Ability to Observe and Identify Birds

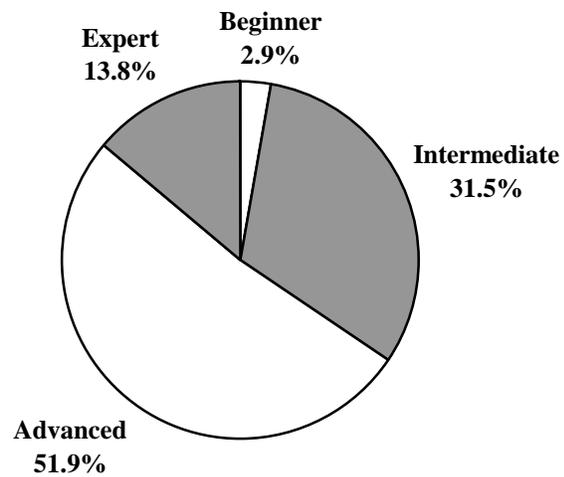


Figure 21. Percent of BTNEP Bird Watchers Survey Respondents Who Can Identify Birds by Sight or Sound without a Guidebook

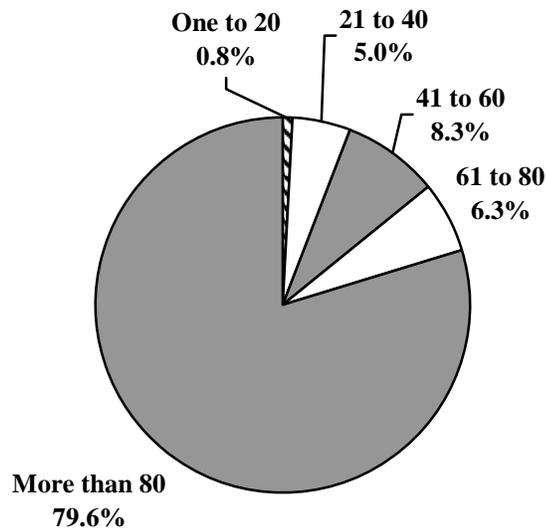
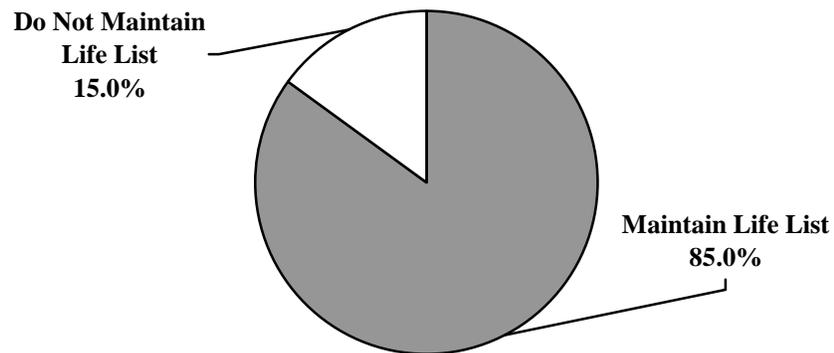


Figure 22. Percent of BTNEP Bird Watchers Survey Respondents Who Maintain a Life List



Respondents' Level of Interest in Bird Types or Categories

Respondents were asked to indicate the degree of interest – on a five-point scale - they held for nine types or categories of birds: neotropical migrants, raptors, wading birds, shorebirds, waterfowl, seabirds, song birds, nesting birds, and rare, threatened, and endangered birds (Figure 23). Based on the percentage of respondents in the “strongest interest” category (Figure 24), the top-three bird types or categories were song birds (46.9 percent), neotropical migrants (43.3 percent), and rare, threatened, and endangered birds (38.8 percent). The three lowest rated bird types or categories based on the percentage of respondents in the “strongest interest” category were seabirds (19.5 percent), waterfowl (21.0 percent), and nesting birds (21.5 percent).

Another method of ranking the preferences for each category or type involves generating a “weighted average.” The weighted average is computed by multiplying every “no interest at all” response by one, every “very little interest” response by two, every “some interest” response by three, every “great deal of interest” response by four, and every “strongest interest” response by five, adding all the resulting products together, and dividing by the total number of responses. Larger weighted average values indicate a higher degree of interest in the specified bird type or categories. The highest weighted averages (Figure 25) are evident for song birds (4.40), neotropical migrants (4.32), and rare, threatened, and endangered birds (4.21). The categories with the lowest weighted averages were seabirds (3.66), waterfowl (3.90), and nesting birds (3.76).

Figure 23. BTNEP Bird Watchers Survey Respondents' Degree of Interest in Bird Types or Categories

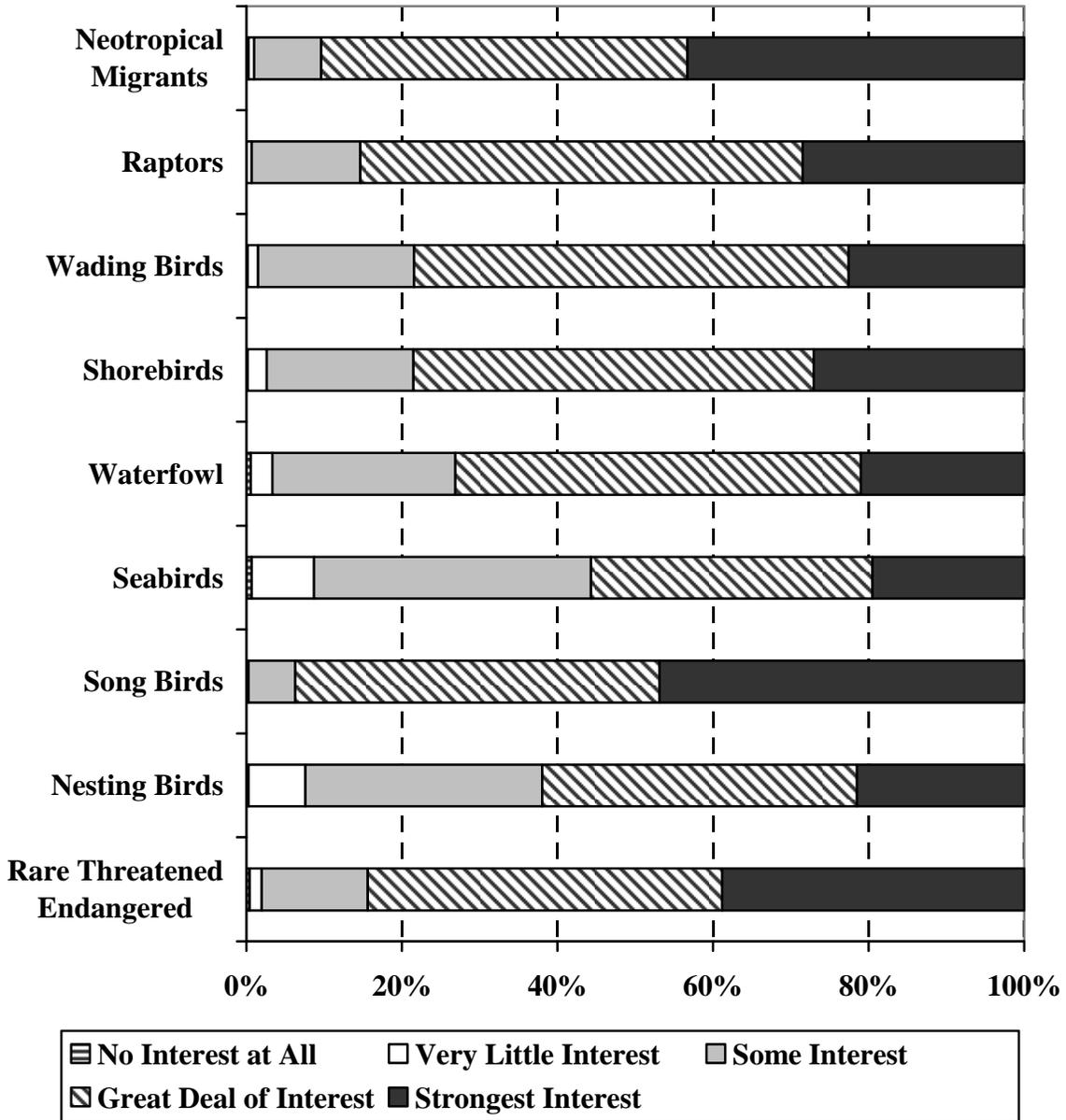


Figure 24. Percentage of BTNEP Bird Watchers Survey Respondents Indicating the "Strongest Interest" in Bird Types or Categories

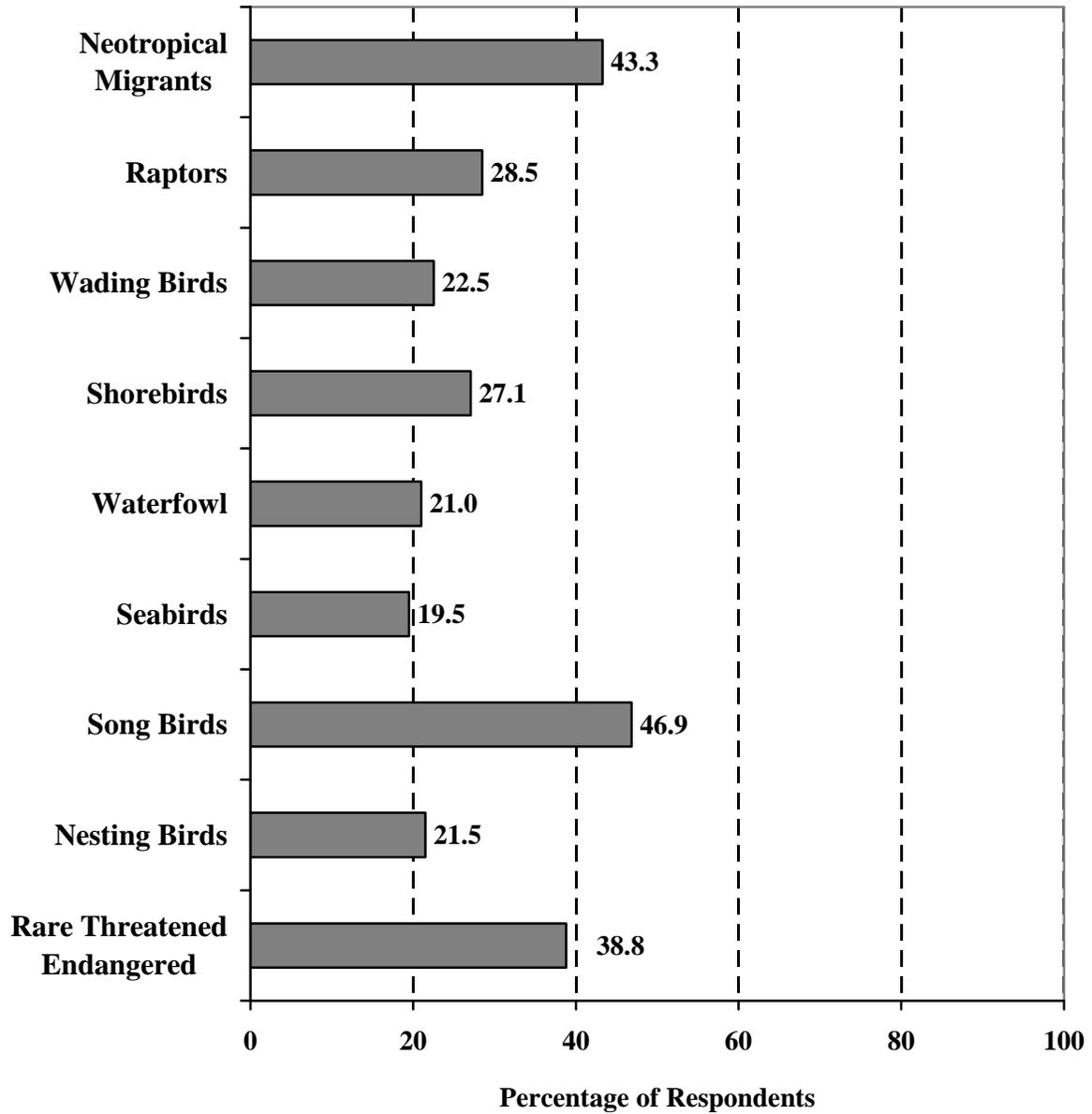
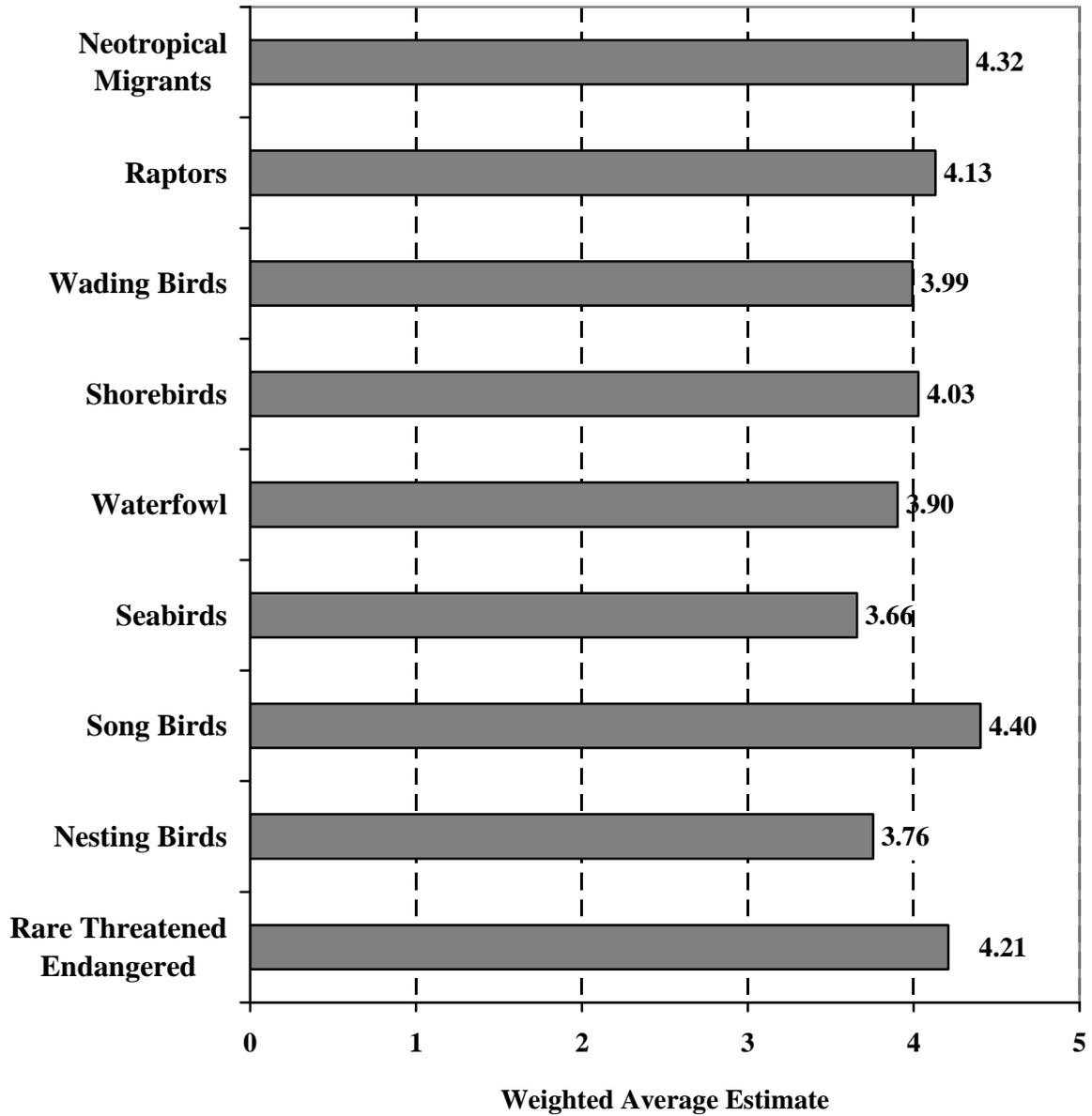


Figure 25. Weighted Average of BTNEP Bird Watchers Survey Respondents for Bird Types or Categories



Respondents Who Have Visited Louisiana or May Visit Louisiana

A series of three questions in the BTNEP survey had direct application to Louisiana. The first asked if the respondent had ever gone birding in Louisiana. The second asked those who had not yet taken a birding trip in Louisiana if they might go birding in Louisiana in the future. A third question asked respondents if they had ever taken a trip to Louisiana for some purpose other than bird watching.

Nearly 45 percent of the BTNEP survey respondents had gone bird watching in Louisiana (Figure 26). Of the survey respondents who reside in the contiguous United States and who have made a bird watching trip in Louisiana (Figure 27), 16.5 percent resided in California or the Pacific Northwest, 11.1 percent in the Mountain States, 17.2 percent in the Upper or Lower Midwest, 20.8 percent in the Mid-Atlantic or New England states, and 9.8 percent in the South (excluding the Eastern Gulf). Approximately 20 percent of the respondents with Louisiana bird watching experience lived in Texas, Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, or Louisiana.

The percentage of respondents who have made a bird watching trip to Louisiana generally declines as the distance between their place of residence and Louisiana increased (Figure 28). Over half of the respondents who resided in Texas (57.6 percent) or the South (57.6 percent) and nearly half of those in the Eastern Gulf States have been bird watching in Louisiana. Smaller percentages of those residing California (42.0 percent) or the Pacific Northwest (34.0 percent), the Mid-Atlantic (37.0 percent) or New England (39.2 percent) have made a bird watching trip to Louisiana.

Approximately one-third of those who had not previously been bird watching in Louisiana believed they might go bird watching in Louisiana in the near future (Figure 29). Of these survey respondents who might make a bird watching trip to the state (Figure 30), 23.8 percent resided in California or the Pacific Northwest, 12.7 percent in the Mountain States, 23.0 percent in the Upper or Lower Midwest, 25.4 percent in the Mid-Atlantic or New England states, and 6.3 percent in the South (excluding the Eastern Gulf). Approximately 8.8 percent of the respondents who may go bird watching in Louisiana live in Texas or the Eastern Gulf States.

Figure 26. Percentage of BTNEP Bird Watchers Survey Respondents Who Have Taken a Bird Watching Trip in Louisiana

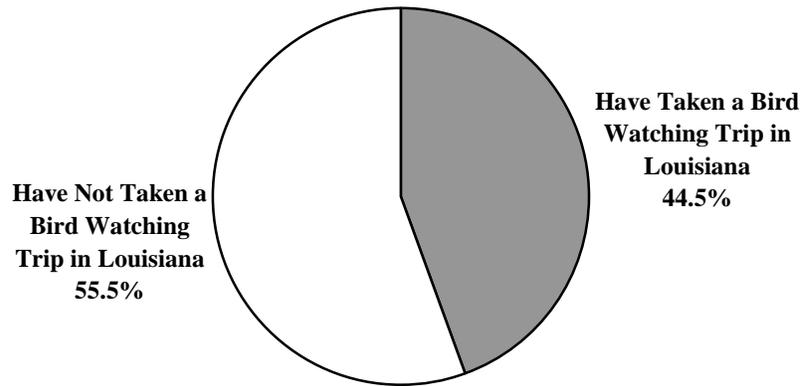


Figure 27. Region of Residence of BTNEP Bird Watchers Survey Respondents Who Have Made a Bird Watching Trip to Louisiana

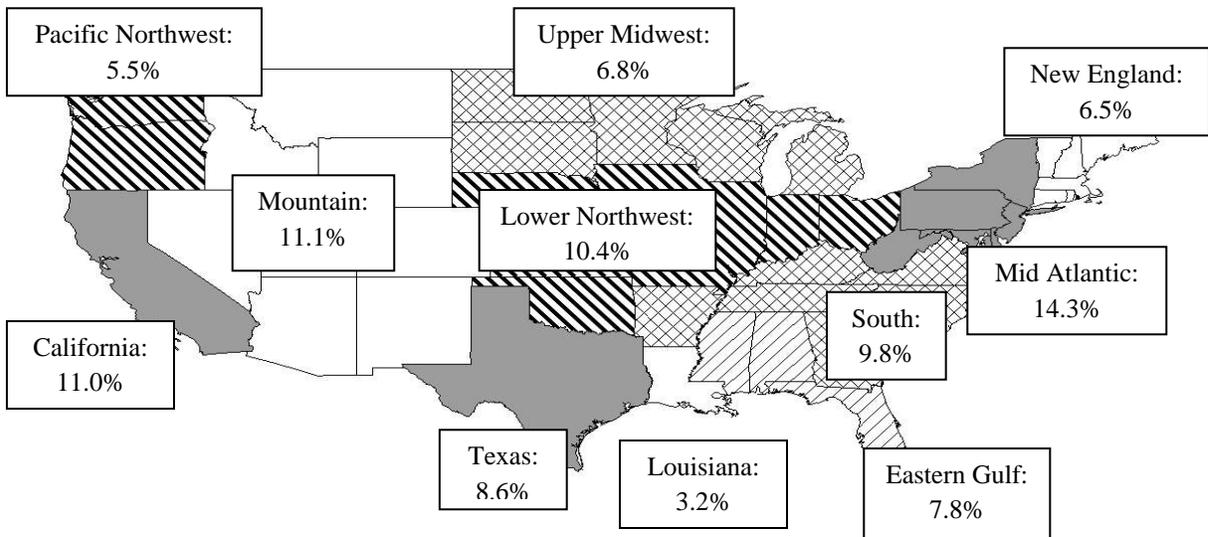


Figure 28. Percentage of BTNEP Bird Watchers Survey Respondents Who Reside in Each Region of the Contiguous United States Who Have Made a Bird Watching Trip to Louisiana

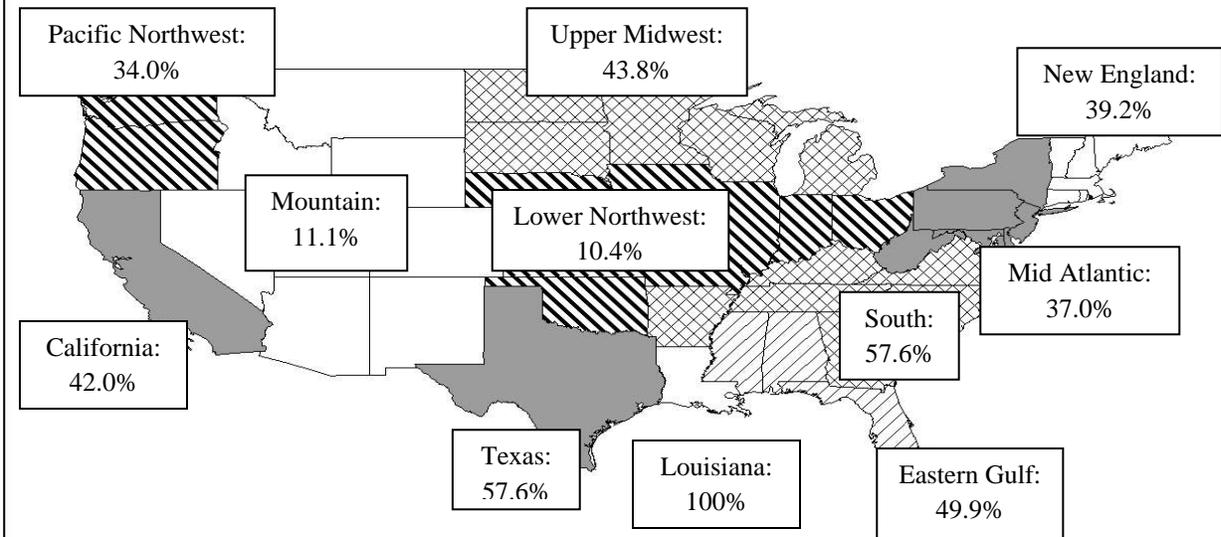


Figure 29. Percentage of BTNEP Bird Watchers Survey Respondents Who Have Not Been Bird Watching in Louisiana and Who Might Go Bird Watching in Louisiana in the Near Future

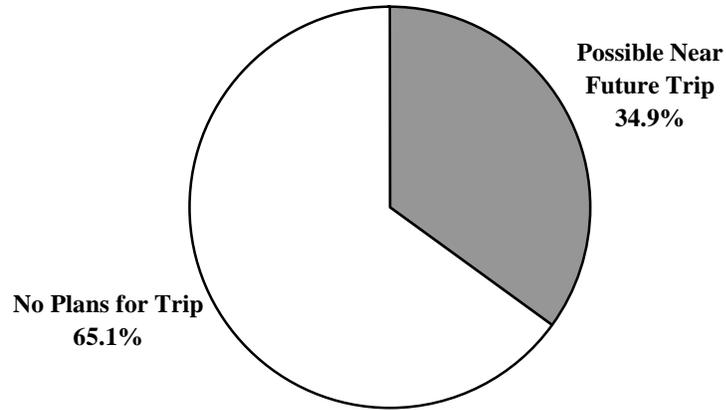
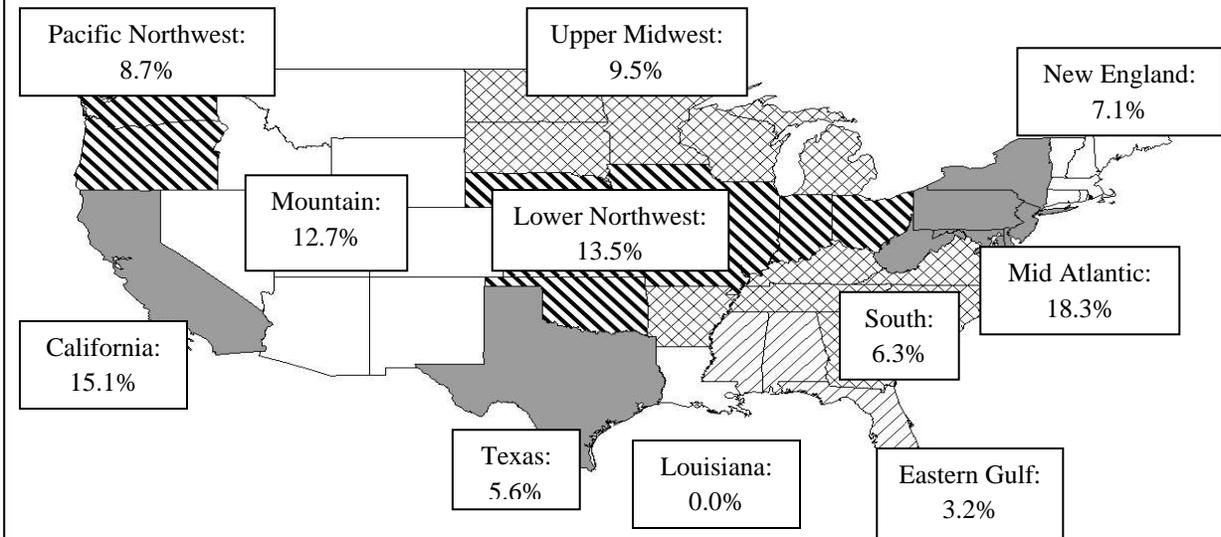


Figure 30. Region of Residence of BTNEP Bird Watchers Survey Respondents Who Have Not Made a Bird Watching Trip to Louisiana But Might Do So in the Future



Interestingly, the percentage of respondents who have not been bird watching in Louisiana but might make a trip in the near future is lower among residents in some states or regions close to Louisiana than among residents in some more distant regions (Figure 31). For example, of respondents residing in Texas who have not made a bird watching trip to Louisiana, 28.0 percent might go bird watching in Louisiana in the future. Approximately one-sixth (16.0 percent) of the respondents living in the Eastern Gulf who have not already made a bird watching trip to Louisiana may make such a trip in the future. In contrast, 40 to 41.5 percent of the respondents in the Upper or Lower Midwest who have not gone bird watching in Louisiana may do so in the future. Relatively distant California had a fairly high rate of planned visitation. Of those Californians who had not taken a trip to go bird watching in Louisiana, 40.4 percent might one day make a trip to the state.

Nearly two-thirds of the BTNEP survey respondents claimed to have taken a trip to Louisiana for some purpose other than bird watching (Figure 32), either because they lived in Louisiana (2.4 percent) or because they visited there from another state (62.9 percent). (The high visitation rate may be indicative of a source of bias among respondents if people who have visited Louisiana were more likely than those who have not visited Louisiana to participate in a survey administered by a Louisiana-based institution.) It is possible that some of the respondents who have gone bird watching in Louisiana did so during the course of a trip to the state that was primarily made for some other purpose, such as a convention, business trip, or fishing trip.

Figure 31. Percentage of Respondents in Each Region of the Contiguous United States Who Have Not Made a Bird Watching Trip to Louisiana But Might Do So in the Future

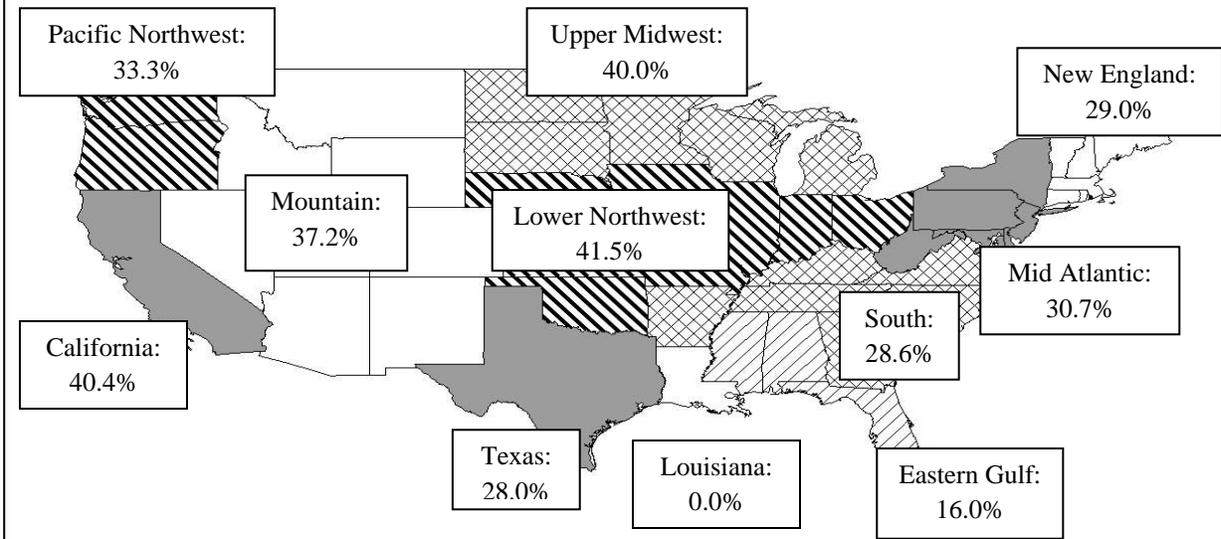
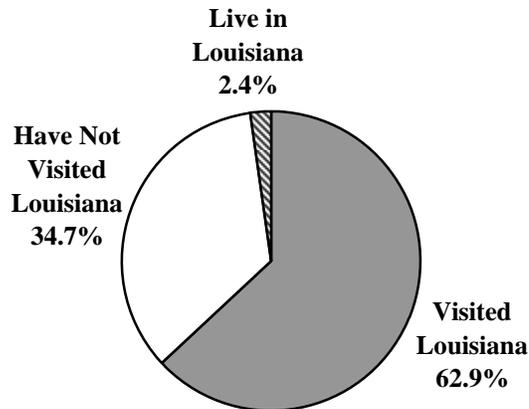


Figure 32. Percentage of BTNEP Bird Watchers Survey Respondents Who Have Visited Louisiana for Some Purpose Other Than Bird Watching



Classification of BTNEP Survey Respondents Based on Louisiana Bird Watching Status

Based on their responses to three questions with a direct application to bird watching in Louisiana, respondents were classified according to their Louisiana bird watching status. All respondents who indicated that they had previously been bird watching in Louisiana (“Yes” in Figure 26) were classified as “Louisiana Experienced” bird watchers (N = 321). Respondents who had not been bird watching in Louisiana but believed they might make a bird watching trip to the state in the near future (“No” in Figure 26; “Yes” in Figure 29) were classified as “Likely Louisiana Visitors” (N = 135). Those who had not been bird watching in Louisiana and believed they would not make a bird watching trip to the state in the near future (“No” in Figure 26; “No” in Figure 29) were classified as “Less than Likely Louisiana Visitors” (N = 252). This report will examine differences in the characteristics of these subgroups of respondents to the BTNEP bird watchers survey.

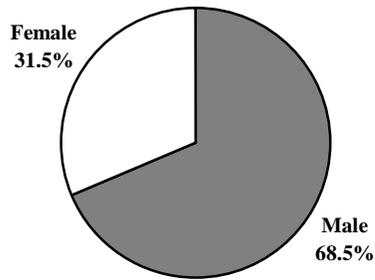
Demographic Characteristics

The subgroup of respondents who have been bird watching in Louisiana includes a larger portion of men than the subgroups of those who have not been bird watching in the state (Figure 33). While more

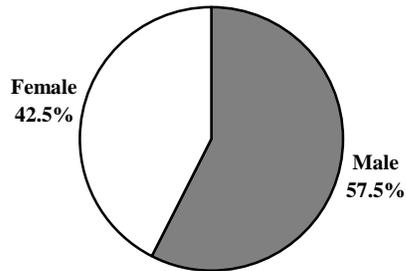
than two-thirds of the “Louisiana Experienced” respondents are male, smaller majorities of “Likely” (57.5 percent) and “Less than Likely” (54.2 percent) respondents are men.

Figure 33. Gender Distribution of BTNEP Survey Respondents, By Louisiana Bird Watching Status

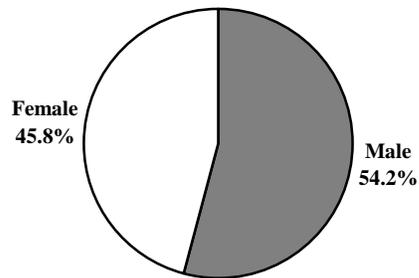
Louisiana Experienced



Likely Louisiana Visitors



Less than Likely Louisiana Visitors



The subgroups are similar in the distribution of educational achievement (Figure 34). Roughly 86 percent of each subgroup has a college degree or more advanced degree.

On average, respondents who have been bird watching in Louisiana (average age = 63.7 years) are older than the respondents who have not (Figure 35). The average age of the “Less than Likely” respondents (average age = 60.9) is significantly higher than the average age of the “Likely” respondents (average age = 56.9).

Bird Watching Activities and Experience

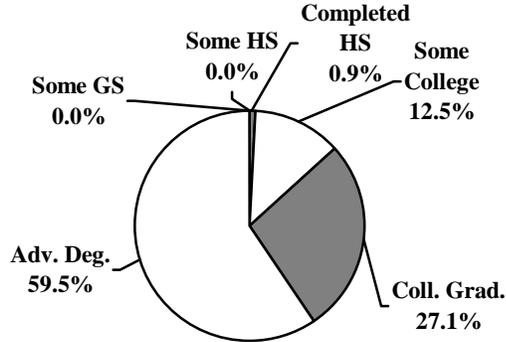
There are no significant differences in the percentage of respondents in each subgroup who took at least one away-from-home bird watching trip in the year before the BTNEP Bird Watchers survey (Figure 36). There are likewise no significant differences in the average number of bird watching trips taken by respondents in each of the subgroups (Figure 37).

Respondents who have taken bird watching trips, however, do appear to have a higher level of experience or ability related to bird watching. “Louisiana Experienced” respondents have a higher average number of years of bird watching experience (average = 32.32 years) than either “Likely” (average = 24.97 years) or “Less than Likely” (average = 26.06) Louisiana bird watchers (Figure 38).

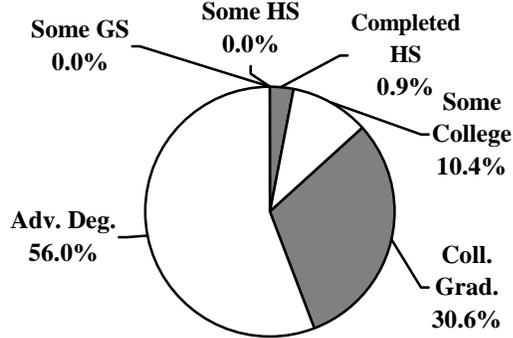
A larger percentage of “Louisiana Experienced” respondents rate themselves as “advanced” or “expert” bird watchers (77.8 percent) than do the respondents in the “Likely Louisiana Visitor” (57.9 percent) or “Less than Likely Louisiana Visitor” (54.1 percent) categories (Figure 39). Approximately 97 percent of “Louisiana Experienced” respondents can identify 41 or more species of bird (Figure 40). Eighty-five percent can identify more than 80 species. About 93 percent of “Likely” respondents and 91 percent of “Less than Likely” respondents can identify 41 species or more. Approximately three-quarters of the respondents in these two subgroups can identify more than 80 birds.

Figure 34. Educational Distribution of BTNEP Survey Respondents, By Louisiana Bird Watching Status

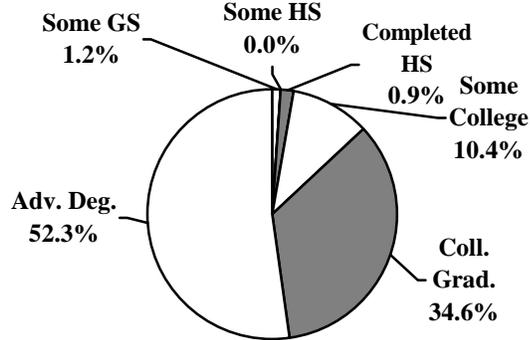
Louisiana Experienced



Likely Louisiana Visitors



Less than Likely Louisiana Visitors



Key:
 GS = Grade School
 HS = High School
 Coll. Grad. = College Graduate
 Adv. Deg. = Advanced Degree

Figure 35. Average and Median Age of BTNEP Bird Watchers Survey Respondents, By Louisiana Bird Watching Status

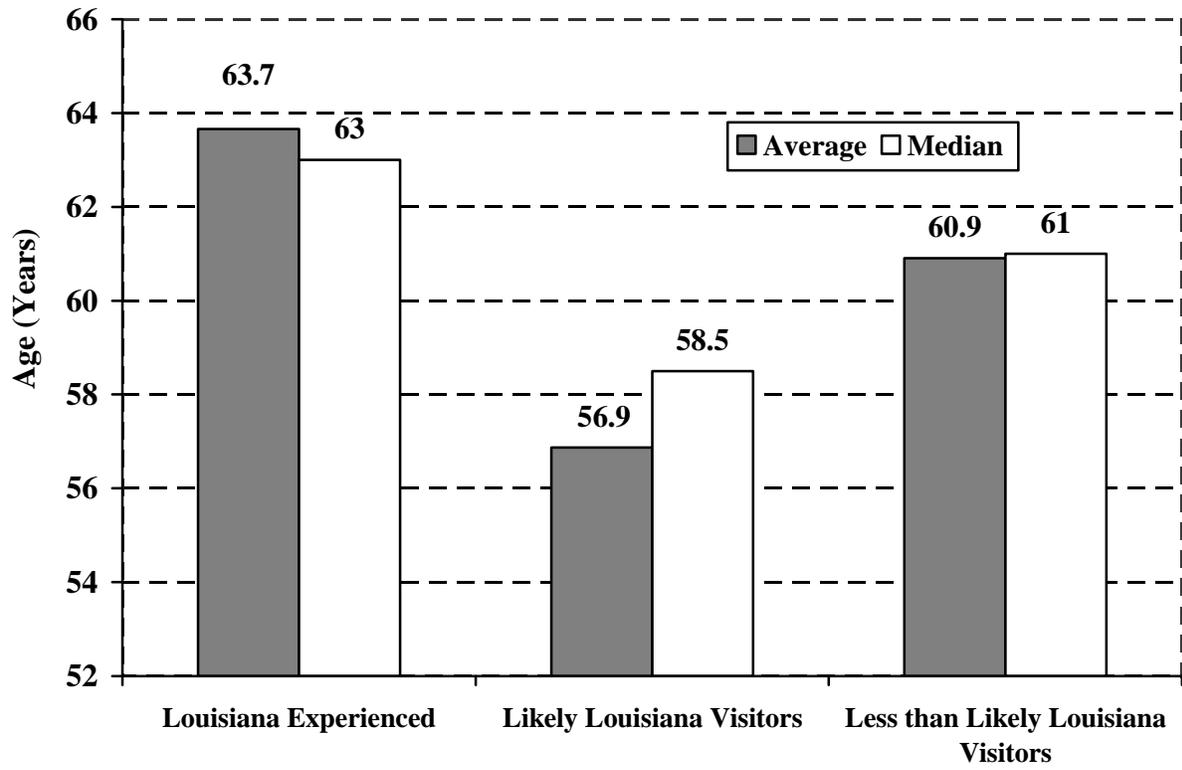
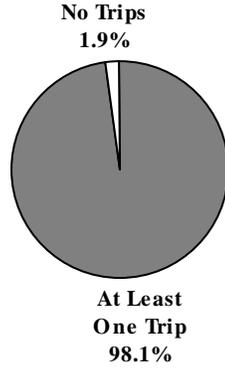
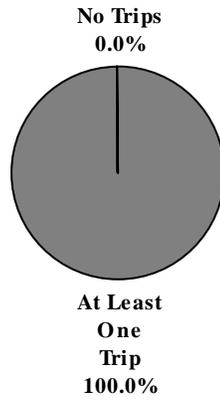


Figure 36. Percentage of BTNEP Bird Watchers Survey Respondents Who Have Taken At Least One Away-from-Home Bird Watching Trip in the Year Before the Survey, By Louisiana Bird Watching Status

Louisiana Experienced



Likely Louisiana Visitors



Less than Likely Louisiana Visitors

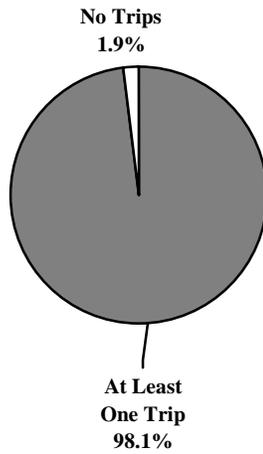


Figure 37. Average and Median Number of Bird Watching Trips in the Previous Year among BTNEP Bird Watchers Survey Respondents Who Have Taken At Least One Birdwatching Trip, By Louisiana Bird Watching Status

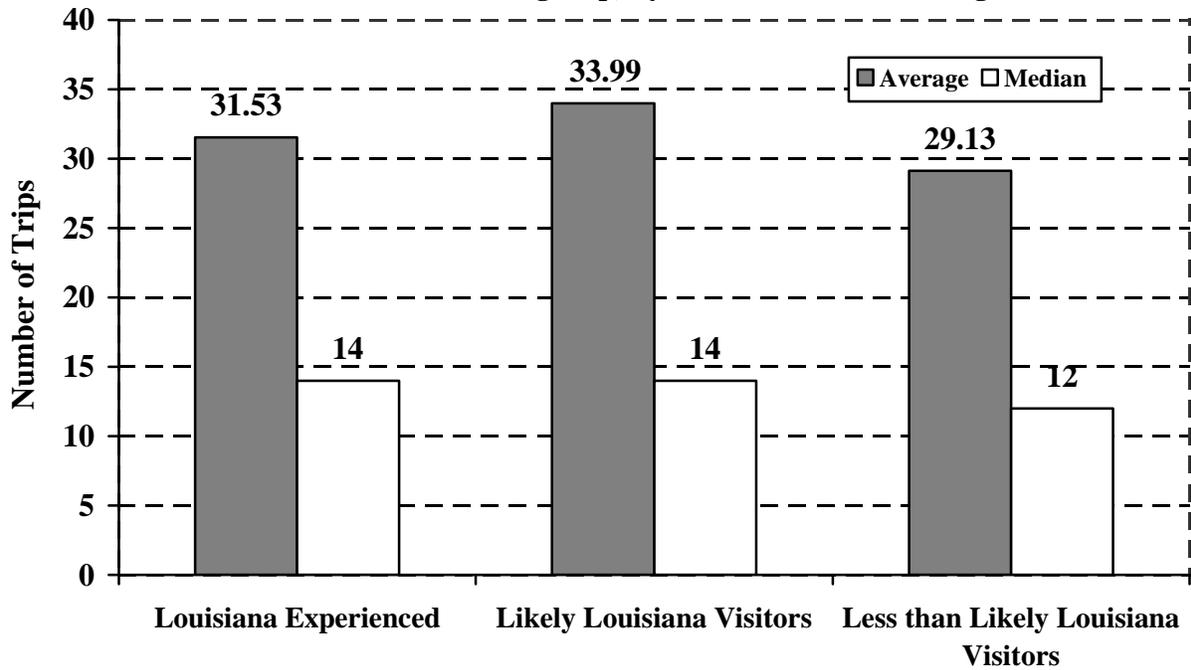


Figure 38. Average and Median Number of Years of Birdwatching among BTNEP Bird Watchers Survey Respondents, By Louisiana Bird Watching Status

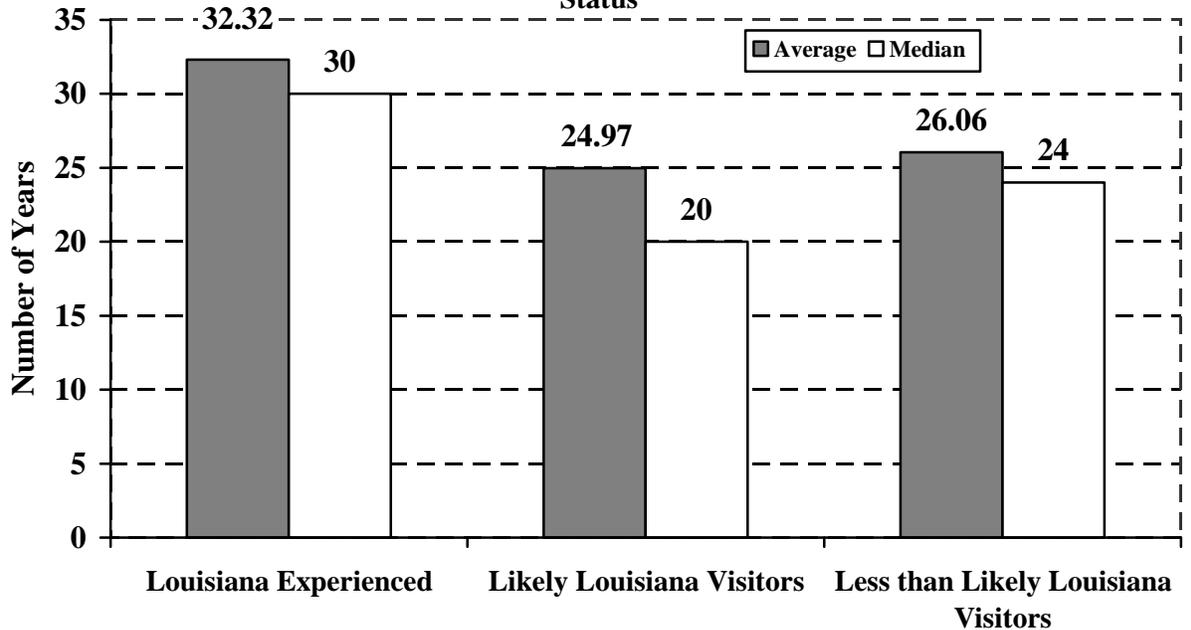
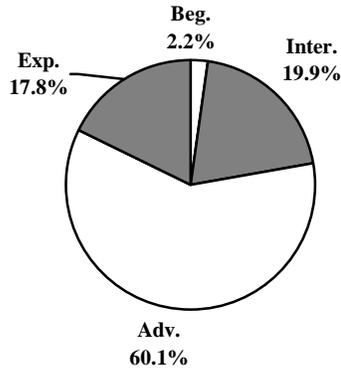
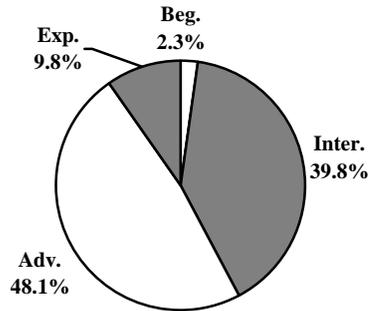


Figure 39. BTNEP Bird Watchers Survey Respondents' Self-Rated Ability to Observe and Identify Birds, By Louisiana Bird Watching Status

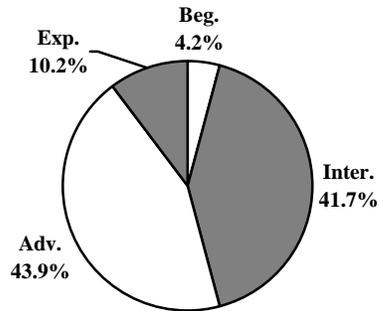
Louisiana Experienced



Likely Louisiana Visitors



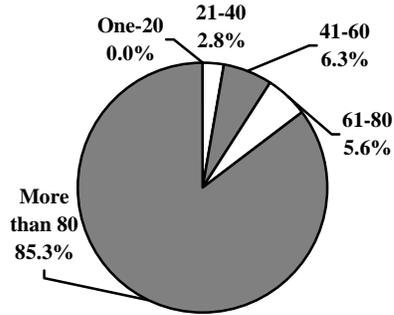
Less than Likely Louisiana Visitors



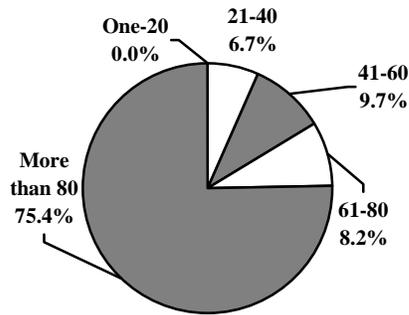
Key:
 Beg. = Beginner
 Inter. = Intermediate
 Adv. = Advanced
 Exp. = Expert

Figure 40. Percent of BTNEP Bird Watchers Survey Respondents Who Can Identify Birds by Sight or Sound without a Guidebook, By Louisiana Bird Watching Status

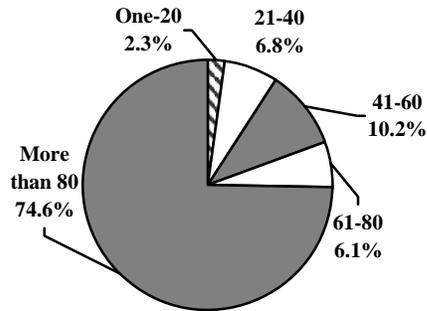
Louisiana Experienced



Likely Louisiana Visitors



Less than Likely Louisiana Visitors



A large majority of respondents in each subgroup of BTNEP survey respondents maintain a life list, a record of the species of birds that they have seen and identified. The percent of respondents who maintain a life list appear to be somewhat higher among those who have been birding in Louisiana or might go bird watching in Louisiana in the near future (Figure 41). Life lists were maintained by 80.3 percent of the “Less than Likely Louisiana” visitors and approximately 86 percent of the “Louisiana Experienced” and “Likely Louisiana Visitors.”

Respondents’ Interest in Types or Categories of Birds

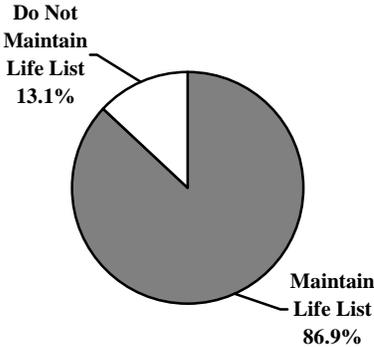
Respondents to the BTNEP Bird Watchers survey were asked to rate their level of interest in nine categories or types of birds on a five-point scale from “No Interest At All” to “Strongest Interest.” (See Figure 23.) Differences in response patterns among the subgroups in this survey were examined according to the percentage of subgroup respondents who indicated the “strongest interest” for each type or category (Figure 42) and by the weighted average calculated according to the method previously described (Figure 43).

Respondents in each subgroup demonstrated the highest degree of interest for neotropical migrants, songbirds, and rare and threatened species. Whether ranked by weighted average or the percentage indicating the strongest interest, these three bird types or categories appeared among the top-three for “Louisiana Experienced”, “Likely Louisiana” respondents, or “Less than Likely Louisiana” respondents.

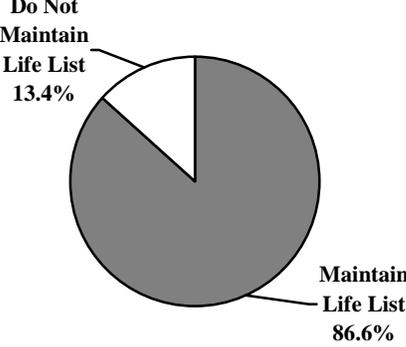
Nesting birds, seabirds, and water fowl have the lowest weighted averages among respondents in each subgroup. The same three bird types or categories also have the lowest percentages of respondents indicating the “strongest interest” among “Louisiana Experienced” and “Likely Louisiana Visitors” respondents. For “Less than Likely Louisiana Visitors”, the bird types or categories with the lowest percent of respondents indicating the “strongest interest” are nesting birds (18.4 percent), wading birds (18.0 percent), and seabirds (12.4 percent).

Figure 41. Percentage of BTNEP Survey Respondents Who Maintain a Life List, By Louisiana Bird Watching Status

Louisiana Experienced



Likely Louisiana Visitors



Less than Likely Louisiana Visitors

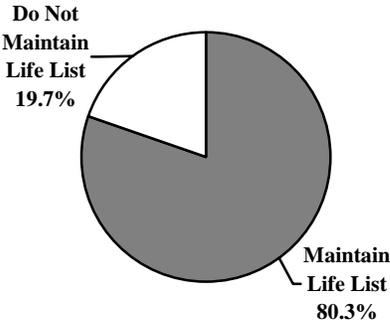


Figure 42. Percentage of Respondents Indicating the "Strongest Interest" in Bird Types or Categories, By Louisiana Bird Watching Status

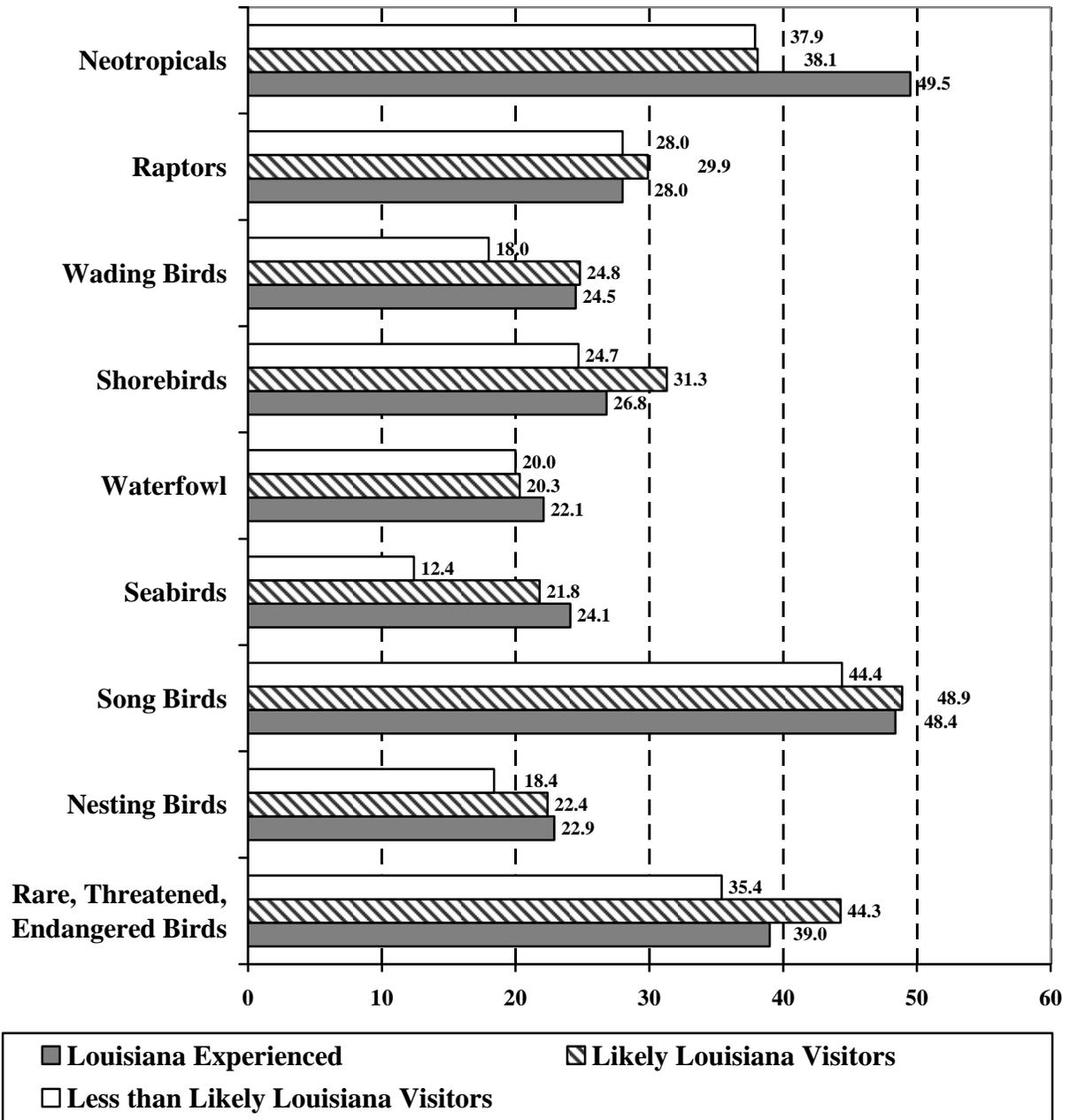
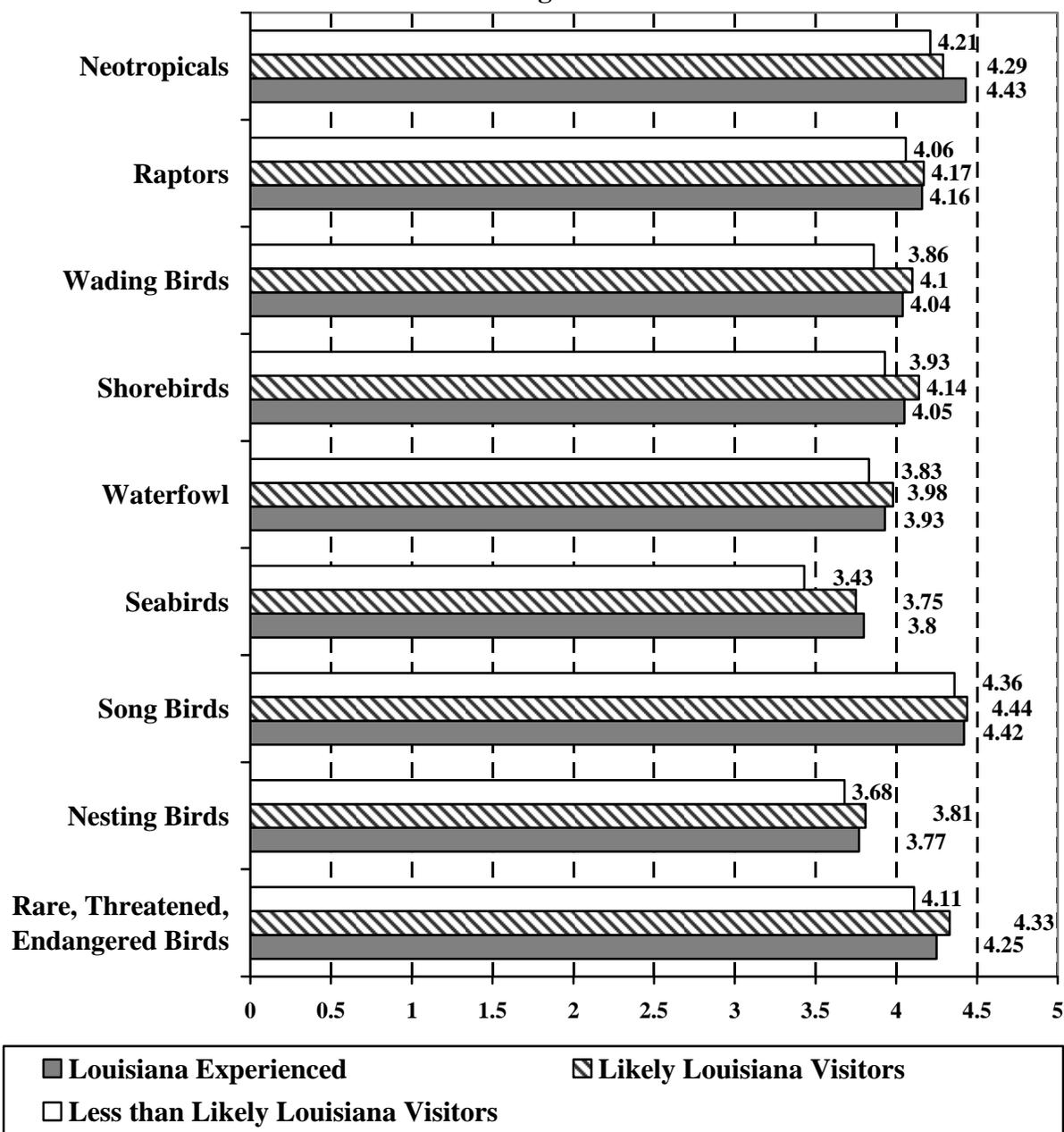


Figure 43. Weighted Average of BTNEP Bird Watchers Survey Respondents for Bird Types or Categories, by Louisiana Bird Watching Status



Percentage of Respondents Who Had Visited Louisiana for Some Purpose Other than Bird Watching

Nearly half of the respondents who have not made a bird watching trip to Louisiana have made a trip to the state for some other purpose (Figure 44). In contrast, about four out of five of the respondents who have made a bird watching trip to Louisiana have also been in the state for some reason other than watching birds. It should not be assumed that all of these individuals made separate trips to Louisiana, some visits were specifically dedicated to bird watching and other visits were dedicated specifically to some other purpose. Many of these who have made a bird watching trip in Louisiana may have done so during a trip that also included other activities as their primary purposes.

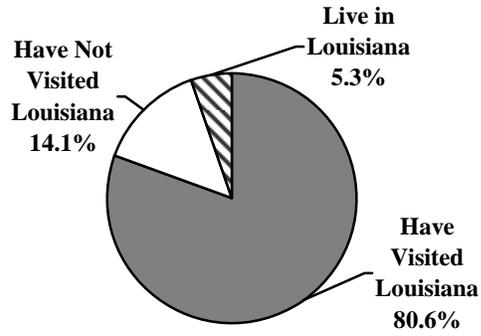
Conclusion

This report has summarized the results of three research initiatives that examined bird watching and bird watchers: the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Survey of Hunting, Fishing, and Wildlife Associated Recreation, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' surveys of two local bird watching festivals, and the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program's survey of members of the American Birding Association. Each of these projects focused on a different group of bird watchers and each had its own particular scope and limitations.

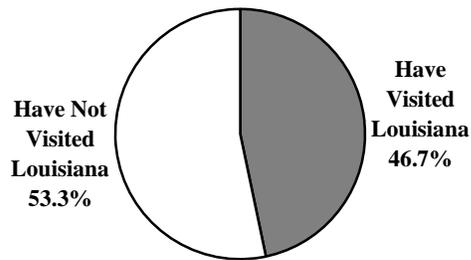
The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Survey of Hunting, Fishing, and Wildlife Associated Recreation provides the broadest portrait of bird watchers in the U.S. It portrays a cohort that is majority female and majority Caucasian that is somewhat older and better educated than the U.S. population as a whole. The bird watching cohort described in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's reports include both around-the-home bird watchers and away-from-home bird watchers, two arguably distinct groups of outdoor recreationists. There is little information in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's publication specifically related to away-from-home bird watchers, the segment that is likely of most interest to persons, businesses, and agencies involved in the tourism economy.

Figure 44. Percentage of BTNEP Bird Watchers Survey Respondents Who Have Visited Louisiana for Some Purpose Other Than Bird Watching, by Louisiana Bird Watching Status

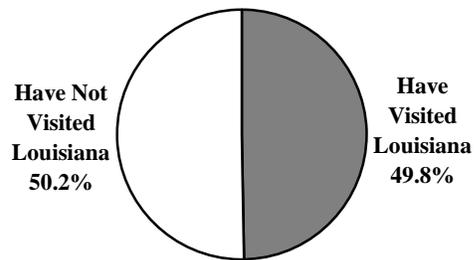
Louisiana Experienced



Likely Louisiana Visitors



Less than Likely Louisiana Visitors



The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Survey reports do contain some demographic details of general away-from-home wildlife watchers in the U.S., including geographic division, age, gender, race, ethnicity, and income distributions. Nevertheless, because this designation of wildlife watchers includes observers of everything from butterflies to whales, one must be circumspect in applying these estimates specifically to bird watchers.

The reports based on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Survey are unable to provide detailed information about bird watchers in Louisiana, whether around-the-home or away-from-home. The sample sizes of National Survey respondents who went bird watching in Louisiana were not of sufficient size to generate precise or reliable statistical estimates, often consisting of ten to 29 respondents. Some subsamples of bird watchers, such as non-resident away-from-home bird watchers who took trips to Louisiana, may be too small (nine or fewer observations) for even the most rudimentary of statistical estimates.

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' surveys of bird watching festivals may provide useful estimates of some characteristics of participants in the relevant events. The samples, while not large, were of sufficient size (66 and 114) to generate reliable statistical estimates. Further, the relatively high response rates (60 percent and 80.5 percent) suggest that the survey samples may be generally representative of the pertinent populations.

The data, however, are somewhat dated, of five to six years' vintage. They also pertain only to the particular populations from which they are drawn: participants in particular weekend events that are not reflective of typical Louisiana bird watchers. Indeed, the evidence suggests that there are profound differences between these bird watching festival participants and bird watchers in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Survey for some parameters, such as income, education, and the ability to identify birds.

Bird watching festivals, like those examined in the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' surveys, are attractive opportunities for drawing visitors. As discrete events that take place on

specific dates in specific locations, festivals are readily promoted and publicized². Many give participants opportunities to interact with and learn from individuals with highly-developed knowledge of local bird species and habitats. They frequently allow diverse types of bird watchers - novices and experts, local residents and visitors from across the country- to join together and learn from each others' experiences.

Perhaps best of all, bird watching festival participants seem to enjoy them. More than three-quarters (77.2 percent) of Audubon Country Bird Fest survey respondents and 81.6 percent of the Grand Isle Migratory Bird Celebration survey respondents were very or extremely satisfied with their respective festivals. Sixty-one percent of the Grand Isle festival respondents had attended a previous year's festival and 90 percent had plans to return in an upcoming year. About one-third (34.1 percent) of the Audubon Country Bird Fest respondents had attended a previous year's event but over two-thirds planned to come back to the next year's event.³

It is important to note, however, that the bird watching festivals described in these reports were relatively small. Their capacity to expand may be constrained by the festivals' relatively small budgets, staffs, and organizational resources. Further, many of the principal events on the festivals' schedules, such as habitat tours and bird watching field trips, may be unable to accommodate large numbers of participants.

The BTNEP birdwatchers survey generated some detailed information about a particular segment of bird watchers, members of the American Birding Association. This cohort, as may be expected by their voluntary association with an organization with that title, consists of atypically avid bird watchers. They are older, better educated, and more active than most bird watchers. Any statistical estimates from the BTNEP bird watchers survey should not be interpreted as applicable to bird watchers in general.

² The web site, Bird Louisiana, regularly maintains a list of bird watching festivals in the state.

³ Part of the difference between the percentage of Grand Isle festival respondents and Audubon Country Bird Fest respondents who had participated in a previous festival or who planned to return in the future could be attributed to differences in the percentages of respondents who lived outside that state. Compared to the Grand Isle festival's sample, the Audubon Country Bird Fest sample had a larger number of out-of-state attendees for whom repeated visits to the area may be more difficult and expensive.

The BTNEP bird watchers survey results do suggest that there is a marked degree of interest in Louisiana's avian resources among members of the American Birding Association. Though the Association's population may be relatively small, it is clearly defined and may be reached by discrete means (e.g., advertising campaigns in association publications).

None of these data sources is supportive of reliable estimates of the economic impact of bird watching in Louisiana. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimate that bird watching expenditures of \$35.7 billion in 2006 had an economic impact at the national level of \$82.2 billion of total industry output at the national level (Carver, 2009). At the state level, the relatively small sample size (10 – 29 observations) in Louisiana precludes the generation of reliable industry output estimates of away-from-home bird watching in Louisiana. In the broader category of wildlife watching (of birds, mammals, and other fauna), total expenditures for away-from-home and at-home wildlife-watching activity by Louisiana residents and non-residents totaled \$312.4 million in 2006 with a total economic effect of \$528.6 million (Leonard, 2008).

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Service's surveys of bird watching festivals did collect data for expenditures respondents incurred during the events. Audubon Country Bird Fest respondents and Grand Isle Migratory Bird Celebration respondents spent an average of \$202 and \$158 each, respectively, related to the festivals. These values cannot be applied to any bird watching expenditures or activities beyond those related to the festivals themselves.

Closing the information gaps relevant to bird watchers in Louisiana would probably require survey-based research efforts of individuals who engage in bird watching, a population segment that can be challenging to identify contact. There are no state license files of bird watchers since one does not need a license to observe birds. Bird watching association member lists would create samples that are not representative of the general bird watching population. Though surveys of general households may be able to produce representative samples of bird watchers, researchers would have to contact large numbers

of randomly selected individuals to find a number of respondents that is sufficient for a viable survey sample.

Regardless of the accuracy or sufficiency of participation and expenditure estimates, the evidence suggests that thousands of people each year enjoy observing the birds that live in or migrate through Louisiana. The richness of the state's bird resources is thus arguably more important than bird watching activity statistics in attracting bird watchers to the state.

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