

Adding It Up – The Value of Birdlife to Our Regions

Sue Williams - Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting Inc.

Regional Victoria is poised for business – if we allow it to fly in, and put an end to the anti-tourism activity of duck shooting.

Tourism typically contributes more to Australia's economy than agriculture, forestry, fishing, IT, media and communications combined. Nature-based tourism is the fastest growing component.

Tourism generates \$94 billion in spending, is Australia's largest services export earner and provides around half a million jobs.

In 2019/20, Tourism was worth \$23 billion just to Victoria and employed 230,000 people. Year ending March 2020, 17.6 million domestic tourists engaged in at least one nature-based activity in Victoria – up 75% in just five years. And most, that is 12.5 million of them, did so in our regions, spending \$3.5 billion in the process (up 85% in five years).

Tourism Research Australia (TRA) defines nature-based activity as visits to na-

tional parks, botanic gardens, wildlife parks, whale watching, bushwalking, birdwatching, scuba diving and snorkeling.

According to a study by Griffith University for Tourism Australia (Consumer Demand Project), our wildlife is our number

one attraction. This is a global trend. In the USA, most recent published studies by U Fish and Wildlife Service show that while interest in hunting is declining, interest in wildlife watching is soaring, particularly birdwatching, (on its own worth over \$40 billion USD).

Here in Australia, TRA captured birdwatching data for the first time in 2019. That year, there were over 1.4 million tourists who birdwatched in our country and spent a whopping \$2.88 billion! More overnight domestic tourists birdwatched than visited the reef, and the number of international tourists who birdwatched was more than double those who fished.



Blue-billed Duck, by E. Dilley

Latest data by TRA, shows that despite COVID, the number of domestic overnight tourists who birdwatched across our country has grown a further 28%! As a percentage of the total overnight nature-based activity doers, those who birdwatched doubled, outnumbering scuba - divers and snorkelers put together.

Here in Victoria, it's often the usual contenders reaping the rewards of tourism: The Great Ocean Road, Philip Island .. Yet, the untapped potential to our small rural towns which are blessed with fabulous waterways and waterbirds (many species

unique to our country) is ready and waiting. There's no infrastructure investment required.

The stunning Kerang wetlands are listed as internationally significant, while the beautiful wetlands of Boort and Corangamite are rich in the oldest culture on earth. In fact, most of our tucked-away rural wetlands each have a unique story to tell, and none are hard to market.

All we need do, is stop the recreational killing of our birds. Because, unsurprisingly, studies show tourists avoid places where there is shooting.

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