

**Exploring the Potential of Avitourism as an Ecotourism Niche Market  
in Ghana: the Case of Kakum National Park**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Avitourism is a highly specialised area of nature-based tourism which is based on viewing avian species in their natural settings. Studies conducted in many countries have shown that this segment of ecotourism is growing rapidly. The international market potential for avitourism in Ghana which has remarkable birdlife is not fully explored. This study explores the potential of Kakum National Park as a niche market for avitourism in Ghana; profiles the socio-demographics of domestic and international avitourists; investigates their motivations, preferences, and level of agreement to ecotourism principles. The cross-sectional research design was used and primary data were gathered by means of questionnaires and structured interviews. Among the key findings were that avitourists have different motivations and preferences in terms of birder type, but agreed on ecotourism principles. The results also indicated a relatively low awareness but high interest in visiting Ghana as a birding destination. The study concludes that Kakum National Park has a potential for avitourism in Ghana, and recommends proper packaging of the avitourism product and destination marketing.*

*Key words: Avitourism, Ecotourism, Niche market, Kakum National Park*

## **1. Introduction**

Many alternative forms of tourism have evolved over time due to the rapid growth of tourism, of which avitourism or birding has become one of the fastest growing niche markets around the world (Conradie & Zyl, 2013). Avitourism is one of the fastest-growing nature-based tourism activities worldwide and is fast catching up with many countries. According to Cordell and Herbert (2002: 61), “avitourism represents a bigger segment of ecotourists and as an avenue for income generation in ecotourism”. Avitourism is where tourists travel to view birds in their natural habitat, usually with binoculars. It is steadily increasing in popularity and expanding nature-based tourism activity in many countries such as India, South Africa, Australia, and Thailand. It includes bird-watching or birding which has been a popular hobby in many countries across the globe.

Avitourism contributes towards a number of tourism sectors’ objectives such as increasing tourists length of stay, spending patterns, geographical distribution of tourists and volumes; reduction of seasonality and promotion of special tourism (South African Tourism, 2008). This niche has helped to boost tourist flow in countries like India, Brazil, Thailand, Australia and South Africa. Due to its ornithological variety, Africa is a destination for many avid birdwatchers and twitchers from abroad. Bird-watching or birding as it is now commonly referred to, is one of the fastest growing pastimes in the world and a new alternative niche tourism and it can be conducted virtually anywhere (South African Tourism, 2008).

## **2. Background to the Study**

The economic, social and conservation benefits that avitourism offers for destinations cannot be underestimated. However, little attention has been given to its promotion as an important ecotourism niche area in Ghana. Inadequate research has been conducted on this niche area of tourism in Ghana, except for a study conducted by Kuuder, Doe and Yirbekyaa (2013) on the ecotourism potentials of Xavi Bird Watching Sanctuary in the Akatsi District of Ghana. Ghana has 18 protected areas, 7 national parks, 6 resource reserves, 4 wildlife sanctuaries and one strict reserve all together occupying 13,048km<sup>2</sup> or 5.5% of the country's land size. There are about 222 known species of mammals of which ten are threatened and 721 bird species of which seven are threatened (Agyei-Ohemeng, 1991). Unlike the popularity that most national parks enjoy, bird sanctuaries or areas with avitourism related potentials tend to be least patronised by tourists for recreation purposes though they offer great forms of amusement (Kuuder, Doe & Yirbekyaa, 2013). There is the Xavi Bird Watching Sanctuary located at Akatsi in the Volta Region of Ghana, a community based project which was established in the year 2000. Ghana is amazingly an undiscovered destination for birds, especially Kakum National Park.

Avitourism or birding tourism accounted for the number of tourists attracted to Ghana's reserves to view the many unique species of birds on offer. Birders from around the globe are avidly seeking new and fascinating places to visit and Ghana is an obvious destination of choice considering the huge and unique diversity. Avitourism has the potential for

opportunities for job creation and community development in Ghana, especially for communities around Kakum National Park. Ghana is endowed with ecotourism attractions which have been promoted over the years. However, little consideration has been given to avitourism as a niche market. This study is based on Kakum National Park, which is located in the Central Region of Ghana. The study explores the potential that Kakum National Park has for the promotion of avitourism as a niche market for ecotourism in Ghana; profiles the socio-demographics of domestic and international avitourists to Kakum national Park; investigates their motivations, preferences, and level of agreement to ecotourism principles.

### **3. Study Area (Kakum National Park)**

Kakum National Park is located in the Central Region of Ghana. It covers an area of 375 square kilometres. It was established as a reserve in 1931. However, it was gazetted as a national park in 1992 after an initial avifauna research was conducted. The area is covered with tropical rain forest, and the uniqueness of the park lies in the fact that it was established at the initiative of the local people. It is also one of the two (2) locations in Africa with a canopy walkway, which is 350 meters long and connects seven tree tops which provide access to the forest. The most notable endangered species of fauna found in the park are the Diana monkey, Giant bongo, Yellow-backed duiker and African elephant(Kakum National Park, Wikipedia, 2020).

Kakum National Park is the jewel in the crown of Ghana's protected reserve system. Amongst the many species to see from the canopy walkway are some of West Africa's most sought-after forest jewels.

Species that are regularly seen include the cotinga-like Blue cuckooshrike, Violet-backed hylia, Sharpe's apalis (an upper Guinea endemic), Rufous-crowned eremomela, African shrike-flycatcher, Lemon-bellied crombec, Green hylia, Yellow-mantled weavers and the extremely rare Yellow-footed honeyguides, White-headed and forest wood hoopoes, Grey longbill, Red-headed and crested malimbos, and the Chestnut-breasted nigrity among others (BirdLife International, 2008).

Kakum National Park is one of the well-studied sites in Ghana, an Important Bird Area (IBA) recognized by the Bird Life International. The Bird Life International included the park area under its list of Bird Life Areas in Ghana in 2002 under the criteria A1, A2, A3. They recorded 266 species of birds, all of which are resident and most of them are under the Least Concern categorization. An additional 56 species that are yet to be confirmed have also been identified. The globally threatened species listed under the Near Threatened category are: Green-tailed bristlebill (*Bleda eximius*), Red-fronted antpecker (*Parmoptila rubrifrons*), Rufous-winged illadopsis (*Illadopsis rufescens*) and Copper-tailed glossy-starling (*Lamprotornis cupreocauda*). The vulnerable species identified are White-breasted guineafowl (*Agelastes meleagrides*), Brown-cheeked hornbill (*Bycanistes cylindricus*), Yellow-casqued hornbill (*Ceratogymna elata*) and Yellow-bearded greenbul (*Criniger olivaceus*). The White-breasted guinea fowl (*Agelastes meleagrides*), which is one of the eight species of global conservation concern recorded has been found to occur in low numbers. In addition, nine species of Hornbills and the African grey

parrot (*Pittacus erithacus*) have also been recorded (BirdLife International, 2020).

The 266 birds listed for Kakum National Park also include rare species listed on the Birds Checklist of the World. These species include among others, White-faced whistling-duck (*Dendrocygna vaduata*), Blue-spotted wood-dove (*Turtur afar*), African green-pigeon (*Treron calvus*), Yellow-bill turaco (*Tauraco macrorhynchus*), African emerald cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx cupreus*), Cattle egret (*Bubulcus ibis*), Red-chested goshawk (*Accipter toussenlii*), Giant kingfisher (*Megaceryle maxima*), White-throat bee-eater (*Meroos albicollis*), Hairy-breasted barbet (*Tricholaema hirsuta*), Little green woodpecker (*Compenthera maculosa*), White-breasted nigrity (*Nigrity fusconotus*), and the Village weaver (*Ploceus cucullatus*) (Lepage, 2020).

The uniqueness, biodiversity and the 266 species of birds makes the park one of the best destinations to attract both local and international birders.

#### **4. Literature Review**

Tourism is described as the largest and fastest-growing economic sector in the world (WTTC, 2011). This continued growth of tourism, both domestically and internationally, has resulted in fundamental changes in the needs, demands and expectations of tourists (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009) bringing about niches in tourism. Niche tourism has evolved as a response to the demands of the postmodern tourists (Lew, 2008) who chooses to engage with a product or service that satisfy their particular interests and

needs (Derrett, 2001). Avitourism, an example of niche tourism, is identified as a growth area and a trend in tourism (Wheeler, 2008; Cordell & Super, 2004). According to La Rouche (2003), birding or bird watching is referred to as avitourism if the birder takes a trip of a mile (1.6 km) or more from home for the primary purpose of observing birds. Hvenegaard (2002) and Sekercioğlu (2002) classify avitourism as a component of ecotourism since it is expected to contribute to ecotourism's goal of enhanced conservation and wellbeing of the local community.

Similarly, Sekerlcioglu (2002) has defined bird watching as the act of identifying birds in their native habitats. Other activities that are undertaken by birdwatchers include half, full or multi-day tours, camping, guided tours, birding photography, bird walks, identification of birds, bird surveys and counts, bird ringing, biological species research and other related activities (Tourism Queensland, 2002). The United Nations World Tourism Organization defines a tourist as a person, who travels away from their normal place of residence for at least 24 hours and spends money for the trip (UNWTO, 2008). This definition therefore implies that a birder can only be regarded as a tourist if he travels away from his usual environment to another location for the purpose of bird watching and spends money in the process.

Avitourism has been defined as a travel beyond one's usual situation undertaken overnight, to view birds in their natural habitat by using a binocular (Nicolaidis, 2014). Bird watching or birding tourism, also known as Avitourism, which refers to a specific sector of nature-based

tourism which is focused on looking at bird species (Biggs et al, 2011). From the point of view of Glowinski (2008), birdwatching is the lively observation, identification, and photography of birds for leisure purposes. Avitourism is a very fashionable hobby and it is a sub-category of nature-based tourism, along with wildlife tourism, marine tourism, hiking and trailing and botanical tourism (Keyser, 2009). According to Nicolaidis (2014), avitourism includes Bird-watching or Birding as well as Twitching, which refers to birders who travel long distances to site rare bird species. Birdwatchers seem to be more interested in the detailed study of bird types, the scientific classification of avian species as well as environmental issues. Twitchers on the other hand, are more likely to be focused on finding rare species of birds.

#### **4.1 Characteristics of Avitourists**

Defining the term 'birder' is difficult, since "there is no hard and fast definition of a Birder" (Turpie & Ryan, 1998). According to La Roche (2003), to be considered a birder, an individual must take a trip of a mile (1.6 km) or more from home for the primary purpose of observing birds or must closely observe or try to identify birds around the home. For the purposes of this study, only birders who take trips away from home were included in the study and are referred to as 'avitourists'. Turpie and Ryan (1998:27) state that "large numbers of people enjoy watching birds from time to time, some more frequently and enthusiastically than others". Birders are not all alike and consist of "a group of heterogenous recreationists, exhibiting a diversity of skills and interests (Scott & Thigpen, 2003:201; Hvenegaard, 2002:22; McFarlane, 1994:362; Kellert

&Brown, 1985:273). The following four studies have categorized birders into different birder subgroups:

Firstly, a study by Scott, Ditton, Stoll and Eubanks (2005) developed three measures of birding specialisation to ascertain the best predictor of birder motivation. Respondents had to indicate whether they were a committed birder, an active birder, or a casual birder. The three birder categories according to Scott et al. (2005) are as follows:

- *Committed birders*: In general, people who are willing to travel at short notice to see a rare bird, who subscribe to a number of birding magazines that specialize in the identification of birds and places where they may be seen, who lead field trips or seminars for local birding clubs, who keep a detailed life list as well as a daily journal, who purchase ever-increasing amounts of equipment to aid in attracting, recording and seeing birds, and for whom birding is a primary outdoor activity.
- *Active birders*: In general, people who travel infrequently away from home specifically to go birding, who may or may not belong to a local birding club, who subscribe to general interest bird magazines (such as Wild Bird or Birdwatcher's Digest), who participate in but do not lead local field trips or seminars, who keep a general list of birds seen, and for whom birding is an important but not exclusive outdoor activity.
- *Casual birders*: In general, people whose birding is incidental to other travel and outdoor interests, who may not belong to a formal birding organisation, who may read an article on birds in a local newspaper but do not subscribe to birding magazines, who keep no life list, and for whom birding is an enjoyable yet inconsistent outdoor activity.

According to Kellert (1985), 'active' or 'committed' birders were defined as those that could identify 40 or more species of birds, while 'passive' or 'casual' birders need to be able to identify 10 or more species and enjoy the aesthetic qualities of birds. Various other authors (Scott & Thigpen, 2003; Hvenegaard, 2002; Cole & Scott, 1999; McFarlane, 1994; Bryan, 1977, 1979) have used recreational specialization to categorize birders in their studies. Researchers have regarded recreational specialization as an indicator of intensity of involvement and have used it to access differences among participants (Scott & Shafer, 2001).

Nicolaides (2013) states that avitourism is a branch of ecotourism that has a high potential because birdwatchers are usually well educated and wealthy individuals who love to see birds in their natural habitats. They are usually relatively well educated middle-aged males with money available to spend on travel abroad (Jones & Buckley, 2004). As in the case of most nature-based tourists, birdwatchers generally emanate from the affluent strata of their societies (Mehmetoglu, 2007).

#### **4.2 Motivations of Avitourists**

Besides defining who a birder or bird watcher is, another important question that arises is, are people driven by the same desire for bird watching and is this desire at the same level of intensity and how this phenomenon can be explained. Academic research on these questions indicates that there are psychological inclinations that lead people into birding. Sekerlcioglu (2002) and Hottola (2008) concurred that bird watchers are people who observe birds in their natural environments. Three

reasons that explain why people choose to pursue the activity of bird watching have been identified by Decker and Cornelly (1989).

The first is the affiliation-oriented grouping, where participants undertake bird watching to accompany a person in order to strengthen relationships (Decker & Cornelly, 1989). The second reason is the achievement-oriented motive where involvement is aimed at meeting a standard performance and lastly the appreciations-oriented motive participation in which the participant seeks a sense of peace, belonging, familiarity and stress reduction (Decker & Cornelly, 1989). Other reasons include bird watching for the appreciation of bird's aesthetic appeal, for learning and study purposes, for the enjoyment and authenticity of experiences with wildlife and for competition amongst participants

Hottola (2008) provides some light on the various embedded motivations that encourage people to embark on this recreational activity, where he indicated that there are various reasons birders partake in bird watching in his analysis of specializations and motivations of birdwatchers. McFarlane (1994) introduced a psychological concept for understanding the motivations of bird watchers. He contends that there are typically several satisfactions or goals that are sought by participants in consumptive and non-consumptive recreational activities.

#### **4.3 Avitourism and Ecotourism Principles**

Since avitourism forms part of ecotourism, the principles of ecotourism are applicable. As a guiding conceptual principle, ecotourism can be regarded as tourism that occurs in natural settings with an attempt to increase benefits to the economy, society, and environment through

sustainable educational practices from locals to tourists and vice versa (Diamantis, 2004). Ecotourism could provide economic benefits to the ecotourism industry including foreign exchange earnings, contributions to government revenue, generation of employment and income, and stimulation of regional development (Queiros & Wilson, 2005, Lickorish & Jenkins, 1997).

## **5. Methods**

The descriptive and cross-sectional method was employed for the study. Relatedly, the study employed the survey method because it allowed a group of respondents to be selected from a larger population which enhanced accurate inference about the larger population from a small sample. Therefore, the population for the study comprised international and domestic tourists and the management of Kakum National Park. For the purpose of the study and 50 tourists were surveyed. The sample size was chosen because that was the number available and willing to participate at the time of the survey. The small sample size is also informed by the fact that the park receives only a few tourists who visit purposely for birding activities. The convenient sampling method was used because of the nature of the population (as and when they were available). However the management members were purposively selected to respond to specific questions. The questionnaire was the main data collection instrument used for the study. Questionnaires were administered and structured interviews were also conducted. The Statistical Product for Service Solution (SPSS) version 21 was used to analyse the data.

## 6. Results and Discussion

### 6.1 Socio-demographic profile of respondents

Results for socio-demographic profile of respondents are presented in Table 1. Over half (64%) of the respondents were males. The gender distribution of the population sampled indicates that more males were included in the study. This may be explained by the fact that avitourism demands more effort to partake in and may be considered as a domain for males. Many studies have also shown that males tend to travel more than females. Majority (80%) of the respondents were married. More than half of the respondents were above 52 years. Similarly, Goodfellow (2017) reported that 53 per cent of birders were 45 years of age or older and 30 per cent were 55 years or older. On the contrary, Omar et al. (2019) observed that avitourism also has enormous potential to attract birders from different age categories including the youth. This means that most birders belong to the elderly age bracket. Most (32%) of the respondents were from the UK, with the least (4%) number being Ghanaians. This finding implies that Ghana indeed has a low domestic avitourism base. This implies that majority (74%) of the respondents had tertiary education (postgraduate). The implication is that avitourists are highly educated.

**Table 1. Socio-demographic profile of respondents**

| <b>Variables</b>      | <b>Frequency<br/>(N=50)</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Gender</i>         |                             |                       |
| Males                 | 32                          | 64                    |
| Females               | 18                          | 36                    |
| <i>Marital status</i> | 40                          | 80                    |

|                           |           |            |
|---------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Married                   |           |            |
| Single                    | 7         | 14         |
| Divorced                  | 2         | 4          |
| Widow                     | 1         | 2          |
| <i>Age</i>                |           |            |
| 18 and Below              | 1         | 2          |
| 19-29                     | 2         | 4          |
| 30-40                     | 7         | 14         |
| 41-51                     | 10        | 20         |
| 52 and above              | 30        | 60         |
| <i>Nationality</i>        |           |            |
| European                  | 16        | 32         |
| American                  | 8         | 16         |
| Dutch                     | 4         | 8          |
| German                    | 4         | 8          |
| South African             | 8         | 16         |
| Ghanaian                  | 2         | 4          |
| Russia                    | 4         | 8          |
| Chinese                   | 4         | 8          |
| <i>Level of education</i> |           |            |
| SHS                       | 4         | 8          |
| Diploma                   | /First    |            |
| degree                    | 9         | 18         |
| Master's degree           | 20        | 40         |
| PhD                       | 17        | 34         |
| <b>Total</b>              | <b>50</b> | <b>100</b> |



Source:Fieldwork, 2019

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Almost all the respondents (98%) naturally cherish birds (Figure 1). In line with this finding, Scott et al., (2005) observed that all categories of bird watchers naturally cherish birds.

Source:Fieldwork, 2019

**Table 3. Preferred travel style**

| Travel          | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------|-----------|----------------|
| Organized tours | 23        | 46             |
| Independently   | 27        | 54             |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>50</b> | <b>100</b>     |

Source:Fieldwork, 2019

From Table 2, almost half (46%) of the respondents have been watching birds for 1 - 5 years, and 42% have been watching birds for 6 - 10 years. The result indicates that majority of the respondents were experienced and skilful birders. In terms of categories of birdwatchers, more than half of them were committed birdwatchers. According to Kellert (1985:347), 'active' or 'committed' birders are those that could identify 40 or more species of birds. Previous studies of avitourists made a distinction between those who are committed, or 'active', and those who are 'passive'.

Active avitourists take frequent birding trips, attend courses and invest in equipment, whereas passive avitourists are defined as people that are able to identify common birds in their neighbourhood or take a passing interest in birds when travelling. The findings could assist in developing avitourism products to meet the needs of particular avitourists and help plan for a more enjoyable experience at the birding destination.

**Table 2. Number of years of involvement in bird watching**

|                                   | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Years of bird watching</i>     |                  |                       |
| 1 -5 Years                        | 23               | 46                    |
| 6 - 10 Years                      | 21               | 42                    |
| 11 - 20 Years                     | 6                | 12                    |
| <i>Categories of birdwatchers</i> |                  |                       |
| Casual/passive                    | 3                | 6                     |
| Active                            | 14               | 28                    |
| Committed                         | 33               | 66                    |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>50</b>        | <b>100</b>            |

Source:Fieldwork, 2019

From Table 3, birdwatchers prefer to travel independently. The results indicate slightly more than half of the respondents (54%). Most studies have shown that avitourists usually prefer to organize their own tours.



Source: Fieldwork, 2019

Figure 2. Life list of birdwatchers

Figure 2 indicates that majority (94%) of birdwatchers that visit Kakum National Park keep a life list of the birds they have seen. This result therefore confirms the study of Applegate & Clarke (1987) which concluded that bird watching is a consumptive sport, because birders keep a life list where an observed species is ticked once in a lifetime.

The result from the Table 4 shows that majority (48%) of the respondents have 810 and above birds on their life list. Respondents with the least number of birds (201-300) on their life list were represented by only 2%. This result indicates that birders are very much interested in keeping the list of birds they see, during their stay.

**Table 4. Number of birds on life list of birdwatchers**

| <b>Numbers of birds</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|-------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| 201 - 300               | 1                | 2                     |
| 301 - 400               | 2                | 4                     |
| 401 - 500               | 1                | 2                     |
| 501 - 600               | 6                | 12                    |
| 601 - 700               | 7                | 14                    |
| 701 - 800               | 9                | 18                    |
| 801 and above           | 24               | 48                    |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>50</b>        | <b>100</b>            |

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

More than half (60%) of the respondents spent between 2 hours to 1 day on birding, during their visit to Ghana. 22 per cent spent 2 -3 weeks, while 18% spent 1 month and above on birding activities during they visit (Table 5). The results indicate that birdwatchers do stay for a significant period during their visit to Ghana, thus accommodations providers should consider this niche market in their marketing strategies to create more accommodation facilities.

**Table 5. Period involved in birding**

| <b>Period</b>     | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|-------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| 2hrs - 1 day      | 30               | 60                    |
| 2 - 3 weeks       | 11               | 22                    |
| 1 month and above | 9                | 18                    |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>50</b>        | <b>100</b>            |

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

The results from Table 6 clearly shows that majority (80%) of birdwatchers get their sources of information about the birds of Kakum National Park from travel agents, followed by the internet, word-of-mouth and magazines. From this result, it appears that travel agents are not doing badly in creating awareness about the birds at Kakum National Park.

**Table 6. Sources of information**

| <b>Sources of information</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|-------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Word of mouth                 | 2                | 4                     |
| Internet                      | 7                | 14                    |
| Travel agent                  | 40               | 80                    |
| Magazine                      | 1                | 2                     |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>50</b>        | <b>100</b>            |

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

## **6.2 Motivation of respondents**

This section looks at the respondents' motivation for bird watching. In this regard, a 5 point likert scale [Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N)Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD)] was used. Respondents were asked to tick the alternative which best describes their opinion. Table 7 presents the results. Over half (60%) of respondents agreed that, the motivation for them is to contribute to the conservation of birds. Most (48%) of them agreed that they want to see many interesting places apart from birding interests. The implication is that birdwatchers are also interested in other activities apart from watching birds. Again, most (48%) of them agreed to be motivated by the competition with other birdwatchers,

during their visit to Kakum National Park. Close to half (48%) agreed that they want to see new or rare species of birds, which serves as a motivation for them. This indicates that birdwatchers are strongly motivated by new or rare species which adds to the excitement of birding.

**Table 7. Motivation for bird watching**

| <b>Motivation</b>  | <b>SD</b> | <b>D</b> | <b>N</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>SA</b> |
|--|-----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Contributing to the conservation of birds                | -         | 2        | 30       | 60       | 8         |
| Seeing many interesting places apart from bird interests | -         | 2        | 28       | 48       | 22        |
| Competing with other birders                             | -         | -        | 14       | 48       | 38        |
| Seeing new or rare species of birds                      | 2         | -        | 14       | 48       | 36        |
| Adding more birds to my life list                        | -         | 4        | 6        | 54       | 36        |
| Photographing birds                                      | -         | -        | 4        | 38       | 58        |
| Seeing as many bird species as possible                  | -         | 2        | 4        | 38       | 56        |
| Friendly and helpful people in the community             | -         | 2        | 4        | 44       | 50        |

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

The result from Table 7 again indicates that majority of the respondents put together agreed (54%) and strongly agreed (36%) that adding more birds to their life list serves as a motivation for them. More than half (54%) agreed and 36 per cent strongly agreed that they are motivated by photographing the birds. A little over half (58%) strongly agreed and 38 per cent also agreed that seeing many species of birds motivates them. Exactly half(50%) of the strongly agreed and 44 per cent also agreed that they are motivated by the friendly helpful people in the community.

### **6.3 Level of agreement to ecotourism principles**

This section deals with respondents' level of agreement to ecotourism principles. In this regard, a 5 point likert scale [Strongly Agree (AS), Agree (A), Neutral (N)Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD)] was used. Respondents were asked to tick from the alternatives which best describes their opinion. Results are presented in Table 8. From Table 8, half (50%) of the respondents strongly agreed to the fact that they are concerned by whether the venue or destination respects the environment or not, and 44% each indicated agree and neutral respectively. Studies have shown that ecotourism principles in avitourism include sustainable use of resources and mitigation of negative impacts on the environment and local community - economic opportunities for industry and local communities (Fennell, 2008; Queiros & Wilson, 2005; Diamantis, 2004). 46 per cent of respondents agreed and 44 per cent strongly agreed that accommodation providers should operate in an environmentally friendly way by applying ecotourism principles. They also agreed (44%) and strongly agreed (42%)

to the fact that tour operators should encourage interaction between local communities and birders. Contrary to this, Sekercioğlu (2002) observes that the involvement of international tour operators often result in less local control and smaller economic returns to local communities.

A little over half (52%) of respondents agreed that it is important for birders to learn about local communities on each trip. To this end, 36 per cent also indicated strongly agree. This shows that birders are interested in learn and know about the local people on each trip. Less than half (44%) of them strongly agreed and 40 per cent agreed that ecotourism should support social development in the area in which it operates. Education and interpretation will make both tourists and local communities aware of the environment, which need to be incorporated into the social and economic life of the local community (Diamantis, 2004). More than half (60%) of them agreed that the tourism industry should contribute to conservation of nature.

**Table 8. Ecotourism Principles**

| <b>Ecotourism Principles</b>                                     | <b>SD</b> | <b>D</b> | <b>N</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>SA</b> |
|--|-----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Destinations Respect<br>for environment                          | -         | 2        | 4        | 44       | 50        |
| Environmentally<br>friendly practices by<br>accommodation sector | -         | 2        | 8        | 46       | 44        |
| Good interaction<br>between locals and                           | -         | -        | 14       | 44       | 42        |

|                        |   |   |    |    |    |
|------------------------|---|---|----|----|----|
| birders                |   |   |    |    |    |
| Knowledge of birders   |   |   |    |    |    |
| about locals           | - | 2 | 10 | 52 | 36 |
| Social development at  |   |   |    |    |    |
| the destinations       | - | 2 | 14 | 40 | 44 |
| Destination that       |   |   |    |    |    |
| contributes to         |   |   |    |    |    |
| conservation of nature | - | 2 | 10 | 60 | 28 |
| Minimization of        |   |   |    |    |    |
| impacts by tourists    | - | 2 | 10 | 46 | 42 |
| Destination that makes |   |   |    |    |    |
| use of local guides    | - | - | 6  | 40 | 54 |
| Destinations that      |   |   |    |    |    |
| markets the local      |   |   |    |    |    |
| products               | - | - | 4  | 36 | 60 |

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Source: Fieldwork, 2019

The result from the Table 8 also indicates that 46 per cent agreed that tourists should minimize their negative impacts on the environment. 42 per cent strongly agreed to this principle. This confirms the assertion by Hay Smith and Hunt (1995) that avitourism development that is not properly planned and managed may put pressures on birds and the environment resulting in negative impacts. Slightly more than half (54%) strongly agreed and 40 per cent agreed that local tour guides should be used. This indicates that birders are concerned about promoting the well-being of local people. Majority (strongly agreed=60%; agreed = 36%) of

the respondents were of the view that birdwatchers should support the local community.

## **7. Conclusion**

The study concludes that avitourism can be recognised as an important niche market with high potential to induce economic, social and conservation benefits for Ghana. The results of this study clearly show that there is a huge potential for avitourism or birding activities at Kakum National Park. There is already an international market that can be enhanced through promotion. Furthermore, the remarkable wealth of birdlife and supportive infrastructure at kakum National Park necessitate an investigation into the international market potential of avitourism in Ghana. Based on results obtained this study provides insight into domestic and international avitourists profiles, offering the possibility of unleashing its potential for the market. The insights include the socio-demographics, motivation, preferences and agreement to ecotourism principles of birdwatchers, which could be factored into the development of appropriate marketing strategies.

The results also indicated a relatively low awareness (as evidenced by the fewer number of participants in the study) but high interest in visiting Ghana as a birding destination. Kakum National Park has a potential for avitourism as an ecotourism niche market in Ghana, and thus needs proper packaging of its avitourism product. This study's assessment is that avitourism is an attractive niche market for Ghana, with growth potential for Kakum National Park that can be harnessed and properly

marketed. This niche segment possesses the potential to further the growth of ecotourism in Ghana, specifically for Kakum National Park.

## **8. Recommendations**

To ensure that avitourism at Kakum National Park is properly developed and sustained, proper packaging of the avitourism product, destination marketing and proper management of natural resources are very important. The findings of this study could give clearer insights and could also provide some guidelines to the Ghana Tourism Authority and the Wildlife Department to come up with more effective avitourism marketing, management, and planning.

A national avitourism stakeholders' forum should be established to address current challenges in avitourism development in Ghana. The forum could consist of key stakeholders in the avitourism value chain, including the Ghana Tourism Authority, the Ghana Wildlife Department, the Forestry Department and the Kakum community.

Marketing efforts should be targeted at all categories of birders. In terms of the domestic and international markets, demand could be stimulated for avitourism among casual birders with a general interest in nature-based tourism, and possibly cultural tourism. Casual birders typically include those interested in other outdoor and nature-based activities (e.g. wildlife, butterfly watching, etc.) who could be persuaded to include birding as an additional activity.

The Ministry of Tourism Arts and Culture should develop a single, comprehensive website to serve as a portal to all avitourism opportunities in Ghana. The Internet is a tool that is used by all categories of tourists

including birders. Therefore the availability of detailed and reliable electronic information on avitourism in Ghana is very necessary. This website would benefit both domestic and international birders and also help to raise awareness of avitourism in Ghana.

## **9. Future research**

The information collected for avitourism motivation is important in assisting to predict the type and level of demand for birding destinations (Hvenegaard, 2002). This information could also be used in future research to assess the satisfaction levels of birders at particular birding destinations. This research identified important attributes preferred by avitourists, which could be used in future research by performing an importance performance analysis as a monitoring mechanism to ensure high levels of customer satisfaction at the birding destination (Ellis & Vogelsong, 2004). The current research could also be used to investigate other special interest groups, for example, botanists and people interested in butterflies or other wildlife user groups.

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