



The Development of Ecotourism: Its Benefits to Different Social Levels

Rodrigo Noriega,

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I was asked to play the devil's advocate in my presentation. My reputation precedes me. I'm talking as a public official. Those who are committed to expanding the environment of democratic participation and public management have to pay attention. That is why the title is ecotourism—as if people mattered. When we think about tourism, we have to understand that tourism is the largest private industry in the world. The second largest employer of all after agriculture. Two years ago it surpassed the military industry in the world. In 1980, many groups came together to make the Manila declaration on tourism in the third world. It states that tourism as practiced today is more detrimental than beneficial to people and society of the third world. It does not benefit the people, but exploits them—pollutes their environment, destroys their ecosystems and cultures, takes away their values, and submits women and children to the terrible slavery of prostitution. The declaration is a statement that is very strong. Unfortunately, there are many stories of tourism that follow the words included in the declaration. Using the declaration as a bench mark, as an indicator of the things that we

should not have, we ask ourselves: “How did we reach this phase?”

Last year, almost 600 million people traveled in the world, so then one of the Swiss academics who follows this topic asked: “Why do people travel?” He said it's because they are not content with the place where they are—their work sites, their homes—they feel the monotony of their daily routines and the cold rationality of their positions, their offices, and their apartments. Massive tourism is a result of the most depersonalized time in human history. So then I ask myself: “What do we do, how do we face this situation?”

Ecotourism as an emerging industry offers many opportunities. Hana Ayala has just talked about it and its enormity. We have businessmen here who are working on this topic. Definitely, Latin America has a great wealth, a great resource. The Latin America geographic area has some 56 % of the tropical forest remaining in the world. In Central America there are 56 Indian groups, 8 of which are in Panama.

In 1995, the World Tourism Organization did a survey of

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tourists in developed countries. It asked them what they wanted while they are traveling. Eighty-five percent of the Germans wanted environmentally correct vacations. Americans also said that they want to have tours that would improve their lives. Three elements are the determining criteria of responsible ecotourism. I've tried to summarize these. First would be the community impact. It could be explosive and it could be a victory, a triumph. So we ask ourselves: "What does each community win or lose with these impacts? What values are stimulated?" This can pose problems, as stated by Hana Ayala this morning. We must establish measures that are responsible for the use and management of resources. If we do, we will definitely have an activity that will contribute to local development. Unfortunately, Panamanians are witnesses to what has happened in the ILA Grande, for example. There are problems with garbage, electricity, and water, because of tourism. It is due largely to a lack of planning. But one also finds another economic element involved. Who actually benefits from the income generated from ecotourism? Studies say that on average, 68 % of the income generated by tourism remains in the developed countries. In the Caribbean countries, this reaches 80 %. In Kenya, 77 %. In Thailand, 60 %. The World Bank says that in some countries, less than 10 % of this income remains in the country. For example, in Bali, the tourist operators charge \$250 for the presentation of a local dance, but the performers only got \$20. This is a presentation where 200

dancers participated at \$0.10 per dancer. This is a case where the poor people subsidize the tourism of the rich. We should also mention plane fares, travel agents, credit cards, insurance, cosmetics, safaris, and all of the paraphernalia that is needed for ecotourism. These are all parts of the pie whose economic benefit is not received by the destination countries.

An issue that caught my attention in reviewing the literature was the example of a cocktail. A drink—a whiskey sour or rum and Coke, for example—represents a mix of European or U.S. alcohol and ice. The results are that at least 65% of the cost of the cocktail goes to pay imports. Can we imagine the creation of a Panamanian cocktail? Seco with milk, rum, and coconut water, or Sangria with Seco, or rum with palm wine. The potential for growth is enormous. According to Hana, I repeat again, you have to do research. Not only biological research, but all types of research. When you think about a resort such as Gamboa, you can imagine a Margarita in your hand, or a rum and Coke, but you can't imagine where the bottle of Seco is in this post card. One imagines the sun-tan oil of a certain brand, a cosmetic or shampoo of a given brand. On a recent visit to Costa Rica, I had a good surprise made of banana leaves. This was given out by my hotel in Costa Rica. In every room, there was organic shampoo and soap made in Costa Rica. The flight of income was disappearing by producing these goods in the host country. This is something we need to think about and develop further.

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What effect does environmental impact have upon the activity of the tourist family? How do you regulate this load, this impact? Most of the effects of ecotourism obviously relate to the environment. A responsible person needs to consider the impact when traveling in a foreign country. For example, we have to take into account the fact that 2/3 of tourists that travel in the developing countries travel sick; they have the flu or something worse. The mass of ecotourists need to consider human values. You remember the hypothesis of AIDS. There was a famous patient--patient zero, the Canadian who traveled from Australia to Canada. There's the case in the Amazon where visiting anthropologists murdered indigenous people, isolated for centuries from the diseases, bacteria, viruses, thanks to the germs the anthropologists imported. They killed the people they came to study. How many of you have seen people on trips who have a cat, a dog, a parrot, their pet, that they have to bring along? And their pet is a vehicle that can bring disease. A group of Japanese ecologists have defined the construction of golf courses as one of the greatest threats that tourism has brought to their culture and country. Native habitat of mangroves and forested areas are cleared or seriously altered to make space for golf courses.

I would like to recommend that all golf course developments in Panama take their impact on the forest into account. Obviously, what we have here is an established framework that needs to

be overcome. It is the tourist agencies who are responsible, they are established to promote their packages. It is important that Panama develops precise guidelines, since we have so many models of ecotourism. Obviously, I propose to put this type of review into practice.

I would like to take this time to give 2 examples. An example that is very important and is very close to me because it is my Alma Mater in ecology is the Organization for Tropical Studies (OTS) of Costa Rica. This is a consortium of 43 institutions that all established themselves in Costa Rica to create a living laboratory where the students would make use of environmental services. OTS did not meet their responsibilities and we had a conflict in the 1970s and mid-1980s with the local communities, because no one knew if the Americans there were scientists, tourists, Contras, etc. What are these strange people doing around here? The OTS started an aggressive program to work with the local people. They started to publish all their works in Spanish and started joint programs with the community. When the community didn't want the OTS to do something, they didn't do it. But then they entrusted the community to continue on. This is a quote of one of the objectives of OTS: "This institute will not exist in the tropics unless we contribute to preservation and unless consumers will be happy in the developed world."

Another example is the harpy eagle, an animal that faces extinction. The harpy eagle's

international enemy is Panama. The University and the Summit Zoo have started to develop an initiative with the sponsorship of the City of Knowledge. The initiative is not a thematic park like in Costa Rica, but created to study the eagle in a controlled environment and with the least interference possible. We should desire to be in deep ecotourism where the visitors do not feel strange and the space of others should not be affected by what I do or don't do. Our reality is our best source of wealth. The model of ecotourism that we should strive for is deep ecotourism in which the experiences are more real and more intense. Thank you.

Question:

What do you think about the emergence of prostitution in Cuba and its relationship with tourism?

Answer:

In tourism there is this struggle for interest of the tourist; it may be manageable or it may not. For example, today in Cuba, tourism is the most important source of income of the country. The sugar cane is being left aside. However, when you make an analysis of what happened to the tourism sector there, you find that their hotels are well planned, as is the management of solid waste and all those things that are necessary to protect the environment. Their tourist activities in the forest are well planned. But what is happening is that all of a sudden the tourist is degrading the local scene. I would not say it is prostitution. These people have seen that tourism can be an additional

source of income and thus you have women who are going to dance for the tourists and women who are going to sleep with the tourists. There is a page on the Internet, put there by Americans and Europeans, that refers to Cuba, not as a beautiful country, but as a great destination for "sexual tourism," so to speak. I call them geishas because they're well-trained people—educated people who are probably working in the technology office in the daytime. But at night the tourist can give them \$10, which would perhaps be more than their monthly wages. They are not doing this because they are hungry, but because it gives them an additional benefit to what they are earning per month. So then the tourism sector will plan all of these to protect the environment, but tourism is still degrading a part of society and generating a series of changes which were the cause of a revolution in the past because people were against it. But it's hard to change because in the end, the taxi driver gets something, the elevator guy gets something, the restaurant waiter, the guard, everybody gets something, so there is a vicious circle surrounding tourism.

On the other side of the coin is Acapulco, Mexico, which is the most famous tourist center and has been for a long time. During the last hurricane which passed through the coastal Pacific, everyone heard on T.V. how Acapulco was destroyed. As a tourist center, it was destroyed. We had a hurricane, but there was a time when 100 % of the rooms were occupied. It is

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incredible to see on the back part of the hotel sector this enormous natural park which was created to protect the environment and to prevent tourism from degrading this natural park. There is part of a hotel that had been eating up the natural park. The people that work at the hotels are very poor and come from other states. They don't even come from Acapulco. They work at the hotel, but this does not allow them to have certain social conditions for their survival. This is an area where sewage discharges from these poor residential areas are going into the bay of Acapulco, where the same people might be using the recreational areas. And when we had this enormous amount of water--it rained as much in 2 days as it does during an entire year--it pushed all this soil into the tourist area. Everyone said: "It's not my problem, I didn't degrade anything, I didn't destroy anything, I didn't do anything, so it's a problem of the government." These are examples. It is not easy to manage a sector where there is a complexity of interests who are all struggling to position themselves to obtain economic benefits. I thank you for your comment.

Question:

What do you think about involving local people?

Answer:

This is very important in any tourism planning. You must involve the people who are going to work there and the people who live in the community--the people who are going to be

affected in the long term. We have reached the point where we are packaging an ecotourism experience that has been watered down. We have dissolved it. I am emphasizing that ecotourism should be a profound experience, not an experience of the charter. There is some of this, but there must be more. Busch Gardens is also ecotourism, but it's a simulation, where they try to build a fictitious world behind the back of the environment and of the social world. Another thing: prostitution is always going to exist in port areas, airport areas, and tourist areas. We cannot fool ourselves. We have to consider what other options are available for women and children working in the sexual industry. These are topics that have not been explored.

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Economics, the Environment, and Tourism: Their Link to Panama's Future

Richard H. Payne,

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It strikes me that there are both advantages and disadvantages to leading off the second day of this meeting. The main advantage is that you have a wonderful, rich context for what you plan to say, because of the first day's activity. The disadvantages are that you have to rewrite what you had planned to say and you are sandwiched between a series of excellent presentations on the first day and a rather daunting list of speakers following on the second day. So, there is a distinct possibility that everything I say this morning will be forgotten within an hour or two.

Yesterday afternoon it occurred to me that we were spending a good deal of time discussing resources associated with ecotourism or nature tourism, but were not spending any time talking about the market. What I would like to do this morning is talk about the people who are ecotourists. I will lean heavily on the American experience, because that is where we have the best data. Over the last decade, Paul Kerlinger, Ted Eubanks, and I have been studying visitors to a variety of wildlife refuges and wildlife viewing sites. We have done more than 30 site

surveys of these nature tourists, mainly in the United States but also in Latin America and the Caribbean. These studies have essentially been market analyses in an attempt to determine who the visitors are, when they are visiting, why they are visiting, and their potential economic impact.

Let me start by giving you some context for this work. This will reflect a bit on some of the things that were said yesterday. Global tourism is arguably the world's largest industry. It is also an industry which has seen tremendous growth across the last 2 decades. All of the projections I have seen suggest that growth will continue through the next decade. Nature tourism accounts for a fairly significant portion of this worldwide growth industry, and in the United States, wildlife-related tourism is an important niche market. Numerous studies, including those done by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, have found that wildlife viewers (nature tourists) now outnumber hunters and anglers. In 1991, approximately 76 million people were engaged in some form of wildlife-related recreation. More than 30 million people were

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taking trips to look at wildlife, and they were spending large sums of money on their travel, their equipment, and other things associated with their avocation. The dollars generated by wildlife-related recreation in the United States are astounding. In 1996, wildlife watchers spent more than \$29 billion pursuing their hobby, including more than \$9 billion on travel.

Nature tourism, defined as discretionary travel in pursuit of outdoor activities and experiences that are related to the natural resources of an area, is a significant potential market. In the last decade, the fastest growing form of outdoor recreation has been wildlife-related recreation; specifically, birdwatching. The increase in the United States was 155 %. There is no other recreation activity that comes close to that.

Yesterday a comment was made that I thought was quite accurate: "People are escaping from something when they engage in nature tourism." I contend that they are also escaping to something. They are escaping to a nature experience. As we develop ecotourism or nature tourism, or what Eubanks, Kerlinger, and I have chosen to call avitourism, because it is related to birding, we have got to capture that motivation on the part of the tourist. I am suggesting that birders are the most obvious nature tourists. They are the easiest to see simply because they have binoculars hanging around their necks during their waking hours. Indeed, I have come to view birders as an indicator species for all of nature tourism.

Let me note here that what I'm going to say in the remainder of my time has 3 broad implications: Implications as it applies to money, as it applies to marketing, and as it applies to management. I hope these will be obvious during the course of my comments.

So, who are these tourists? How do you describe the typical nature tourist or birder? Let me go through some characteristics that will give you a sense of what this market looks like. The particular slides I'll show you are based on a study we did at High Island, Texas. However, we found essentially the same things at every other study site. The consistency is truly compelling. When we look at the results from all the survey work we and others have done, we see the same things over and over again. It doesn't matter whether it's in South Texas, the East Coast, Belize, or Jamaica.

One of the interesting things about this form of tourism is that there is greater gender equity than in just about any other outdoor recreation activity. People also tend to come to nature tourism as a recreational pursuit a bit later in life than is the case with others. I don't have solid data to support this, but I think one of the reasons is that prior to their early forties most people are busy raising young children and getting established in their careers. They suddenly have greater leisure time when they reach their forties. So, one of the things you should note is that nature tourism—birding in particular—tends to be an activity of an older age cohort. These people are also very well educated. As a

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matter of fact, this is where we find the most significant difference between nature tourists and the general population. Not surprisingly, given their education, they tend to be found in the professions. In one study I did, 54 % of the people surveyed earned their income in some profession. That is also highly unlike the rest of the population. It should not come as a surprise, then, to learn that nature tourists earn very good incomes. They tend to be older, are more likely to be married, well educated, in the professions if not retired, with good incomes and a willingness to travel.

Nature tourism is an activity of the affluent. If you are going to market nature tourism, that is important for you to understand. That was highlighted particularly well yesterday. You are not going to appeal to low-income tourists with the large projects discussed yesterday. Obviously, you're appealing to those in the high-income brackets. If nature tourism is an activity of the affluent, international nature tourism is even more the province of that group. Those who are most likely to arrive here in Panama are going to be found at the high end of the education scale and the very high end of the income scale.

If I do another project on this topic, it will probably involve a survey of tour company clients. One of the things I'm convinced we will find is that repeat customers with tour companies such as Victor Emanuel Nature Tours will be quite affluent. These people have money and they spend

money. Their profile is such that it is easier to market to them at the high end of the scale. They travel extensively, both at home and outside their home state and nation. And, they spend money in pursuing their avocation.

In looking at a number of studies of the dollar impact at wildlife viewing sites, we find that in every case, significant spending takes place in a very short period of time. For example, in the High Island study, \$2.5 million was spent in 6 weeks. So you get a compressed time frame with high rates of spending. A study done by Elizabeth Boo in Costa Rica found that nature tourists were spending more money than all other types of tourists. Other studies show the same thing.

In a 1990 survey, the American Birding Association found that travel and tour spending by their members was almost \$4 million. That is direct spending, and does not deal with the resulting economic impacts. Studies have also found that people are willing to spend even more money if there are other things available for them to purchase. Ted Eubanks has just completed a study on The Platte River in Nebraska, and one of the things he has found is an increased willingness of people to spend additional money while viewing cranes on the Platte River. One of the things we did in our studies, by the way, was identify categories of expenditures. What I want to look at for several minutes now are some experiences we had in terms of spending by birders in the state of Texas, where I live. When we studied the spending at 3 or 4

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viewing sites, this is how it broke down in terms of where the birder is spending her or his dollar. Note that none of this is travel to and from the area. From the tourism standpoint that is very important, because travel is the greatest source of leakage. Of dollars spent by tourists, probably the second most significant source of leakage is in lodging, because of hotel chains and other non-locally owned establishments.

Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge is a very small refuge in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, a 5-county area in deep South Texas. Sabal Palm Sanctuary is a National Audubon Society sanctuary located in Brownsville, Texas, which is also a part of this 5-county area. Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, a fairly large property, is in the same area. In 1994, we did studies on all 3 properties and found, for example, that 48,000 birders visited Laguna Atascosa that year, while Sabal Palm Sanctuary attracted about 10,000. The combined expenditures of the nature tourists visiting these 3 sites contributed more than \$88 million to the local economy. That is what we now refer to as total gross output. Arriving at that figure can be fairly straightforward, methodologically. We know what the average cost of a hotel room or campsite is in the area, for example. The same is true for the cost of eating in a restaurant and other expenditures. The visitors are asked about where they are staying and about other expenditure activities, as well as how many days they are in the area. It then becomes a relatively simple

calculation to figure direct spending. Each area will have what is called an economic multiplier, which shows how each dollar rolls over in the community. Applying that to the direct spending figure gives you the total impact or gross output of the dollars spent in the area. There are other ways to calculate this, but what I've outlined is one of the simpler ones. The kind of spending I've described is significant, but it's not a recent phenomenon. As early as 1981, birding in Canada was credited with creating 86,000 jobs and generating \$870 million in tax revenue. So, we are talking about significant impacts on local economies. And, I think you have to keep in mind that most of this activity takes place in relatively rural areas that do not have other significant economic enterprises. For example, High Island, Texas, is a town you can probably drive across in 3 minutes obviously, not a heavily populated area.

It is important for the local community to maximize its capture of the nature tourist spending. You're always going to have some leakage. I think that was one of the things we did not touch on in our discussions yesterday—a need to figure out how to capture the leakage. How do you begin the maximization of benefits and capture of tourist dollars, and how do you increase what I call the quality-of-life contribution? I use the term quality-of-life contribution from an economic standpoint. Local citizens also visit these areas and they also spend money, but the money they spend is going to be spent in the community anyway. Now,

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however, they are spending it on wildlife viewing and on nature tourism. I contend that improves the quality of life in the area. The way you maximize all this is very obvious, by protecting the resource that attracts the tourist. I will suggest to you as a birder myself, that when birders travel, they travel to specific locations simply because birds are there in abundance or in some unique complex of species or because of a unique species. In other words, there is a resource in place that is accessible, and if it is not actually being protected, at least it hasn't been depleted. It's those locations that are among the obvious candidates for protection, regardless of your mechanism for protecting. You protect all this through management, and I suggest to you that you must manage this in its entirety. You cannot just manage the resource and you cannot just manage the activity of the nature tourist. You have to manage this as a process, all of it together. If nature tourism is to be sustainable in the long run, you need some overall strategies, and this involves outreach and marketing outreach and marketing specifically to the tourist. You can do this to the tourists directly, to their organizations, or to those in a position to reach the tourists. That's not new in the travel industry. It's just that now we are talking about a particular type of tourism, but for all practical purposes the nature travel industry is a relatively new market. The other important marketing component, however, would involve convincing the local population of the value of the resource that accrues when left in place.

Historically, we are accustomed to thinking about resource values in an extracted sense, and now suddenly we're turning this value thing on its head and talking about the value of resources left in place and protected.

Partnerships must be developed for fostering conservation or at least renewing interest in it. Where resources have been depleted or habitat has been destroyed, restoration has to be undertaken or at least considered. And habitat must be acquired and placed under real, and I emphasize real, protection. Basically, if nature tourism is to be sustainable and successful in the long run, the development of some infrastructure is required, so that effective management can take place. Local businesses must be able to supply basic services to visitors. Governing bodies must provide services that protect or enhance the nature tourism experience. The private and public sectors must protect the resources on which the activity is based. That may be the most important step you can take in nature tourism development—the collaborative effort on the part of the private and public sectors. As was stated yesterday, Panama has rich and unique resources to underpin significant nature tourism. There appears to be a commitment to collaborative development in nature tourism. There is a research infrastructure in place. Through collaboration in the development of a research-based nature tourism strategy, Panama can avoid the problems associated with simply painting traditional tourism green or only engaging in green marketing.

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Question:

Dr. Payne, most of the research except for one study you mentioned in Costa Rica has been done in the U.S., correct? What about outside the U.S.? We're basing some of the future of travels here on U.S. statistics. How do you suggest we go about getting better information here in Panama?

Answer:

I must say that a good deal of the research that I have seen done in Central and South America has been less than impressive to date. I don't want to sound hypercritical of colleagues, but it has been rather soft social science research. Let me give you 2 answers to your question.

First, I would suggest that a lot of what we have learned about tourist activity by individual tourists is the same, again and again and again, regardless of where we see it. The work that Paul Kerlinger did in Belize and in Mexico shows essentially the same kind of thing found elsewhere. I mentioned, however, that the international nature tourist tends to be at the high end of the education and income and spending curve. A lot of that tourist activity is Americans and Europeans coming in. But that doesn't give you the total answer.

My other suggestion is that the university here could undertake this research activity. One of the things that we had a little bit of difficulty overcoming is the tendency for people to think about birding as entirely a venue of the biological sciences, and not a

venue for social science research. Interestingly enough, Paul Kerlinger, the fellow who started all this, is a biologist. Kerlinger is a biologist, Ted Eubanks is a businessman, and I'm a political scientist. How we ever got working together I don't know. And actually, we worked for 3 years without ever meeting as a group. Then we met and did not publish anything for over a year. I don't know if there is any connection. I would think one of the universities here might want to consider adding a component of social science research to the whole research agenda. If nature tourism is going to be successful, you have to turn to people in the social sciences--people in areas like community planning, regional planning, and regional development. Those are the studies that need to be done. I would also suggest that once the enterprise gets started, (and my reaction from yesterday is that the enterprise is on its way--it's going to happen, and you and I are not going to stop it), you have an obligation to monitor what happens across time.

Question:

I want to know how to define lodging. In these remote areas there are hotels and bed and breakfasts. Are there other things that attract people to those areas?

Answer:

The best way to answer that is to tell you what we did in the study of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. We had one category of people who camped, another category

who stayed in recreational vehicle parks, another category who stayed in condominiums (which included bed and breakfasts), and a category who stayed in hotels and motels. In the model we used, the convention and visitors bureau in that area has a dollar figure per night for each of those types of lodging, so even if the person is sleeping on the pavement, we've got a way to factor in how much they spend. You've got to be able to do that.

Question:

When you mentioned the town in Texas that had 48,000 tourists in 2 weeks, this gives me the impression that this is something like Woodstock. I mean, what's the capacity of this town, and how can they handle about 48,000 people going there?

Answer:

That's actually an annual headcount of birders going into one wildlife refuge. Yours is a question that has to be asked by any community, and I'll tell you of a place with which I am reasonably familiar that is really facing that issue. During the last week in January I was visiting again in Monteverde, Costa Rica. Monteverde has probably 2,500 people who live in the zone, not just in the community. They get thousands of tourists there. There are a few times in the year that it seems you can be trampled by them. What they've done is limit the number of people who can go into the reserve. I believe the limit is 100 at a time, but I am not entirely sure. In the town of High Island, Texas, thousands of visitors show up in this little bitty

town that has little lodging and only one restaurant. It's almost overwhelmed just by parked vehicles. For awhile the resource itself was in danger from the sheer number of people. The attraction is what we call oak mottes on the Texas coast, small stands of oak trees that stand out by themselves. They are really magnets for birds in spring migration, so all the visitation gets concentrated in a very small area of a few acres. The trails would become absolute mud after any rain. The Houston Audubon Society, which owns the property, built elevated boardwalks throughout the woods. So, you start with the realization that the habitat concentrates the species that you want to view. Now you have roads and trails that concentrate your visitors. As part of the management experience, you've got to plan your trail structure so that you minimize damage.

Question:

From your experience, is it advantageous to have metropolitan areas close by the natural areas such as the ones we have in the Canal area?

Answer:

Advantageous for the tourist or for the resource? First of all, you don't have any choice. You're not going to move Panama City. I know that and you know that, but from a quality-of-life contribution, I think it's imperative that you have opportunities near urban centers, for no other reason than to allow children to go out and see what an animal or tree or whatever it is looks like. I was

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seated by a fellow from Houston on my flight down the other day. He's lived in Houston for 6 to 7 years, and he asked me if there was any place near Houston he could go to see birds. High Island is just a short drive away from Houston, but he didn't know about it. I think it's imperative from an educational standpoint. My son and his wife and my 2 grandchildren live in one of the largest urban areas in Texas, the Dallas/Fort Worth area, and I would hate to think that there is no place for my grandchildren to go out and see wildlife. I think if you have those opportunities close to population centers, it stimulates the population to support conservation and protection of wildlife. It's going to make it much easier for the society as a whole to protect areas that are less accessible.

Question:

What are we considering ecotourism? I've been to High Island, Texas, and the Platte River during migration, and other birding hot spots. Frankly, I don't consider that an ecotourism adventure or an ecotourism experience. I simply consider that a birding hot spot where I know there will be thousands of people, and I'm going to be elbow-to-elbow with them viewing wildlife. On the other hand, I came here a year ago on an 8-seater plan, flew to the Darien, and spent 5 days in a hut, and sitting on a tree stump at night watching wildlife in the jungle. I find that those are 2 entirely different experiences. Even yesterday we had a broad range of different perspectives on nature tours and ecotours and

resort development. Do you have any sense of how to disentangle these? What do we need to do? Do we need to call the whole bundle ecotourism, or should we have subsets for ranges of experiences?

Answer:

No, No, Yes, Yes. What you are describing is 2 ends of a continuum. They are both nature tourism activities. I don't like birding at High Island the last week of April and the first week in May, but I do it every year, because that's when the birds are there. We're now finding out that the fall migration is absolutely wonderful at High Island as well, and, of course, there is nobody else at High Island, Texas, in August. If you walk outside right now you'd get a sense of what High Island, Texas is like on a cool day in August. There are nature tourism experiences, and there are ecotourism experiences. They're just different levels. Subsets is a good way to describe it. Ted Eubanks could tell you about this in great detail, since he found some interesting things in his study at the Platte River. He looked at about 7 or 8 subsets of the nature tourism market identified through the surveys. He and his colleagues were interested in knowing which of all these different levels of interest in seeing those cranes had the highest conservation ethic; which group was willing to pay the extra dollars to preserve biodiversity; which group thought the Platte River in March was one of God's greatest gifts to the planet. And when he had the data, he called me on the phone and said: "Payne, you are

not going to believe this." The group of people with the highest conservation ethic was the group of people that did not own a pair of binoculars. Is this amazing?

No, it is not. Let me tell you why it's not amazing. Well, when he first told me, I said, "I'm going to hang up and call you back, because you've lost your mind." But these people were getting a total nature tourism experience. They were not using the binoculars to focus on that one bird that they may or may not have seen in the past. It was a total tourism experience. So that's one part of the continuum. That's a very long-winded answer to a very good question, but it's something you've got to be aware of. You must find the niche. We cannot be all things to all people, so every one of your ecotourism sites in Panama and every group that gets involved in trying to market nature tourism has to decide what part of the market it can go after and what part it's going to specialize in, so as not to dilute the experience. To me as a casual observer of the scene here in Panama, the major resource available to you is that Canal. I would figure out some way to run people up and down that Canal, and charge them large sums of money every time.

Question:

I was wondering if you could address the seasonal problem with nature tourism. What do they do at High Island when the birds are not there? Is it a temporary industry? That's one of the problems I see in nature tourism. It is seasonal. For example, you have a lot of people coming here in

our dry season, and then in our rainy season, we don't have as many. How do these places cope with that situation?

Answer:

Most of them just deal with it. They take the money when it shows up. Yes, it tends to be transient. However, I think that's going to be a major characteristic of nature tourism in temperate climates. I think part of the problem is that many people have an image of the tropics in the rainy season—people wandering around up to their knees in water all the time and that isn't the case. I think part of it is a marketing problem. You need to do a better job of marketing these things year-round, because they don't exist only in the dry season.

Question:

Hunting is still popular in Mexico, but birding seems to be much less popular or noticeable, particularly amongst Mexicans. What do you see as the potential for birding in Mexico?

Answer:

I think we are on the cusp of having a significant increase in the number of persons crossing the border to bird in Mexico. There is greater and greater interest that I see almost on a daily basis. One of the reasons is the Internet. In fact, we just created a discussion list on Mexican birding a few weeks ago. Second, and more important to the recreational and tourist experience, hunting and fishing are male-dominated—fishing to a lesser degree than hunting. Why? When we look at the figures, why do we see a decline

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in the number of hunters? Part of it is urbanization, but part of it is where people learn these recreational activities. Where do birders learn to become birders? Who got me to be a birder? It wasn't my dad or mother—we never watched birds when I was a kid. I learned birding from friends after I became an adult. But where did I learn to hunt? I learned to hunt from my dad. Generally, fathers teach sons how to hunt and fish. That is happening less and less, so we get less socialization in hunting and fishing. I think what you are seeing in Mexico is the tail end of the high-dollar hunting and fishing. I would wager that that is either going to plateau or drop off in the next decade or two, and you're going to see an increase in birding. Every single outdoor recreational activity that had an increase in the last decade was a low-impact form of recreation. I think that's the trend, and from a marketing standpoint, I also think that's where Panama has to look.

Richard H. Payne is a Professor of Political Science and chairs the Department of Political Science at Sam Houston State University in Texas. He is one of the founders of the Texas Research Institute for Environmental Studies. Dr. Payne received his Ph.D. from the University of Georgia in 1970. He has maintained an active research agenda and has authored or co-authored more than a dozen papers on nature tourism in the last 6 years. In addition to a continuing research interest in nature tourism, his current projects include the development and study of indicators of sustainability as a means of enhancing local decision-making capacity and land-use management in Costa Rica.



Ecotourism Guide Places of Interest for Bird Watching

Wilberto Martinez,

Panama Birding Tours

Thank you and good morning. It's a privilege for me today to speak about a subject that is a large part of my life. And I sincerely thank the Audubon Society of Panama because it has helped in my training as a conservationist, ecologist, activist, and professional, and has helped me to be a little bit more of a romantic nature lover. I am very impressed with the topics that have been presented and the select speakers who have illustrated this topic that is so important to ecotourism. After hearing the presentations of such honorable persons, I have taken up the challenge of describing what ecotourism means to me. I would like to show you how important an ecological guide or ecotourism guide is to the appreciation of nature. I am very proud to say that 21 years ago I was one of the crazy bird watchers. You see, to go out to watch birds any place in Panama was considered to be foolish or mad. "What's this thing about watching birds and little flowers and observing nature?" But in 1978, I participated in the first Christmas bird count with a group of members of the Panama Audubon Society. Now we feel a little better about watching birds. Back then, Panamanians would

say: "We have a group of mad gringos watching birds." It's very interesting for me to see the different faces of the bird watchers today. As a child, it was a child's game to try to fool birds by imitating their songs, using traps, or collecting different color skins. These games had an impact on me, and throughout the years I have always kept them alive. I read some articles about bird watchers in the United States and realized that there could be prestige in this. It is interesting that what I did as a game when I was a child, now I can do as a job.

I was able to lead the Panama Audubon Society—one of the first Panamanians to do so, and I feel very proud that the Society now has a very considerable group of birders. And we're making great efforts to maintain the prestige of more than 20 years of being one of the sites where the highest numbers of bird species is recorded during the Christmas bird counts. In 1978 I realized that this was a very important place. We're always working with different famous enterprises of the United States and Canada and Europe, and trying to enjoy and share what we have. Even what is

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very common we can enjoy and share.

What does being an ecotourism guide mean to me? After having listened to and seen the figures that show the millions and millions of dollars that ecotourism can generate, I feel the appropriate place for me is to wait to see if even a little bit of this money reaches me. There are so many natural resources that we have around us with so many beautiful things. But when is ecotourism in Panama going to start making money? I find myself with many others who are in the same situation. Sometimes we have asked who is going to help be the bridge, the link that joins nature with the tourists? The nature guide, he's the person that can make this happen. But how do you become a nature guide? I believe that we have good universities and very good programs here in Panama, but it takes years to develop, to show that we are professionals and that we can handle/manage a program and that we know where the natural resources are and can offer tourists what they require.

The nature tourist is very demanding, and there are several different kinds. One wants to escape the complications of life and relax or to find a pleasant moment to express himself. Another is the type I have called a naturalist maniac. At 3 a.m. he's awake and he puts some chocolate in his bag and he's ready to be out there by 5 a.m., before the first bird sings, to locate it. And then it's 10 p.m. and he's still out there, waiting for the bird to go to sleep. I've guided these maniacs.

For us guides there is not enough time to sleep. We have to go to bed at midnight and then get up at 2 a.m. to take care of the tourist.

In my personal experience I have noticed that the ecotourist guide has to be a living encyclopedia. He has to have an answer for everything, for everyone. From the most curious person who knows nothing about nature, all the way to the well-educated scientists. This can be a problem, but it's also gratifying. I had an 82-year-old lawyer who had spent \$10,000 looking for a particular bird. He was unable to see it in Costa Rica or Guatemala. He arrives here at the airport, saying it's impossible to see this bird in Panama. I said that on Thursday at 2:00 in the afternoon there is a guest trip where you will be able to see it. He looked at me seriously and said "I'm not kidding, I've invested \$10,000 for this bird and haven't been able to see it." Well I told him, "You're hiring a very serious naturalist and if at 2 p.m. on Thursday I don't show you this bird, I'll return all your money."

An ecotourist guide has to be a specialized guide, so specialized that he can capture the mind of the client. And one evaluates oneself. When you say farewell to the client, you put him on the airplane, he says thank you or he gives you a nice tip. There are specialist guides who work only for the tips they will receive. They know very well what they can provide the client and they receive very good compensation for it.

In my experience all these years I have found very pleasant moments being an ecotourism guide. Some of the best moments are when I can guide an angry scientist who argues with me about bird identification. And if I turn out to be correct, he will say, "How is it you are able to identify a toucan at a mile high without even using your binoculars?" It's a lot a common sense and a lot of relations with nature and a lot of time learning the language of nature. It's similar to moving the dial of a radio and identifying each radio station that you find along the way. You can do it because you listen. When you come to the field you can identify the difference between the grasshopper and the bird by sound. The language of the birds is very impressive.

I had a person travel and invest \$3,000 to see even the branch where a harpy eagle perched. She came with some friends on a 4-day trip. You have to be in good physical condition to be able to see where the eagle perches, and these tourists had been preparing themselves for months. So I took them to the jungle and we slogged for 3 rainy days with mud up to our knees, almost crying at times. But on the last day we just had a half an hour to go, we saw the harpy eagle. I couldn't believe it. They were perched on the branch where they breed. The client kept looking up and then one of the eagles called out. It was a very impressive scream. She and her companions said they forgot all their pains and all the hardship in the jungle—they just forgot all about it.

Friends, the ecotourism guide has to be the poet, the artist that can bring this language of nature to the participant and make him live at that moment, make him forget the bills that he has to pay, or the dog that he left in the vet's office, or all his family problems. I led a group of bankers once. They were complicated people very bored and tired with their daily lives. They were escaping from their daily routine. It was very interesting. I was a little bit concerned because every day they were proposing more and more tours. But there is one who told me, "Wilberto, I'm going to come and honor you." When I asked why, he said: "Because you've helped me overcome a family problem. You told me once that ecotourism regenerates mentally and physically, but what you didn't tell me was that it also regenerates sexually. Why, the first time you invited me here I had a lot of problems with my wife, and she told me that if I went to the mountains she was going to leave. But you know what? Now she tells me, oh darling, when are you going to the mountain again?" Oh, how interesting. I'm going to put this in my records that ecotourism also saves marriages. Believe me, the ecotourism guide has to be a living encyclopedia, has to have a sense of humor, has to maintain a group of people as a group and as individuals.

Now I pose the question, the same one that I've been asking for a long time. How do we prepare for the large projections of tourists we have before us? How do we get guides who can interpret all the resources that we

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have in our country, to have them trained and prepared? Well here we are. We have some trained staff that can handle any type of tourist in the ecotourism world. But we only have a few. The first reason is that we have the problem of languages. You have to be bi-lingual—at least you should speak English. But now there are Chinese tourists and Japanese and German. We have very good bilingual people in the city but they don't like the mosquitos or don't want to be exposed to nature. We have what I call very good local guides. We also have some people who are very good interpreters of nature, but they have problems with communication and with management of people. I believe that we should place a lot of importance on the specialization of more guides in Panama, but we have no organized training at this time. Personally, I have had a marketing method throughout the years and I've also been able to take care of those companies that hire me as a guide. But now things have changed. The rules of the game have changed and it's taken me more than a year to try to make the necessary adjustments to face new enterprises coming to Panama. Now they are working under a different style of cooperation. There are companies bringing their own tour conductors and doing things their own way. We in Panama are not organized enough to tell them that we have the infrastructure here, we have the program here, we have the guides. We're professionals and we need to be competitive. This is one of our concerns at the present time.

Security is another concern. We experienced the cancellation of many programs last season because it was not possible for us to take clients into certain places where there was no security. Security is one of the most important things that the tourists demand. When you see police or guards with heavy caliber weapons, it makes tourists nervous.

As guides, we never guarantee anything, although many things are nearly a 100 % guarantee. We have to work hard to update our programs, and the guide has to update himself. That is another problem. We have some groups who are following the Birds of Panama, and following all the instructions as to where they can be found. But times have changed, the environment has changed, and the birds are not always found in the places they used to be found. Some have left this site because their environment has been altered. This has happened throughout our country. So we have to update ourselves and we have to change programs. I received a letter recently that says: "Wilberto, I came to Panama because I want to see these birds. What is the probability of seeing them?" We have to show them we are professionals, that we know where the resources are, and that we know how to help them enjoy discovering them.

This morning my challenge has been to present this topic on the ecotourism guide. I tried to transport you through these places and show you that it is not easy to be a guide. It is very difficult

because one has to dry the tears of some people, make them feel that they are safe, they have a friend, there is someone who can take them where they want to go. You have to be a sort of chaplain sometimes, because a large number of the people who come to these areas are elderly and may have some sort of an illness or aches and pains. Perhaps when they come to Panama this might be their last trip. I had a lady from Canada come here. She was very sick—every 2 hours she had to go to a private place. The tour conductor told me what her problem was and I said: “No problem; we’re going to make her happy.” When she left, and this is the gratifying thing about being a guide, she was crying and she said: “Wilberto, I’m going to come back to Panama before I die.” She came a second time and then a third time, and she said: “I’m going to come back to Panama every year before I die.” In February of last year, another group of the same company arrived, and they said she had been on the list to come. She had paid her deposit but she died 15 days before the trip. She loved Panama and she wanted to come back. We did our best so she could have a good impression of our natural resources.

As ecotourism guides, we work for our prestige and for our love of nature. I would recommend it to anyone who has an interest. It is an open, new field. You have to specialize, and it is not easy, but it is very gratifying. Thank you for your kind attention.

Question:

How can we have ecotourism in a way that the resources would not be destroyed or damaged and so that there would always be a recycling of tourists and environment that we could enjoy?

Answer:

I’m very happy that you are here and I understand your question. I feel this is a great challenge, and that all Panamanians and all those involved in tourism should follow the philosophy in which the economy is balanced together with the ecology. We cannot think only about economics and forget ecology. Nor can we think that ecology has to be maintained while we starve. We have to balance everything.

Wilberto Martinez represents Panama Birding Tours, an ecotourism company. He is widely known internationally as the Panamanian guide most experienced in ecotourism and bird watching. He has more than 20 years experience as a naturalist and conservationist in Panama.

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