

LOOKING FOR GOOD BIRDS IN FAR AWAY AND NEAR BY PLACES: VARIETY-SEEKING, SATISFACTION AND ENJOYMENT OF BIRDING: AN ETHNOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT

While variety seeking is recognized as a fundamental activity in consumer and consumption behavior, issues such as satisfaction from variety seeking and the actual behavior of variety seeking have not been explored. Using an ethnographic approach, the authors use birding to provide an exploratory account of the experiences that count as variety to birders. Implications for both theory and marketing practice are given.

INTRODUCTION

Seeking and experiencing variety is a fundamental source of satisfaction in many consumption activities:

While birding in Venezuela, after a late breakfast the birding plan is to take the trucks or walk to a grove of trees only a mile or so from camp. I decide to walk. Poking along, admiring the view of fields of birds, enjoying the continuous "por favor" call of a flycatcher, I am alone. On the fence, I see a new bird that looks like a fat kingfisher, one that so enjoys food. Oh! Great! A bird I haven't seen! I so want to identify it. I excitedly sketch the new bird in my notebook: brown cap, white at eye, two brown stripes on a lighter colored breast. Looking in the field guide, it is a Russet-throated Puffbird, a very distinctive bird. A couple of Tropical Mockingbirds are fussing at my puffbird. After a while it flies off and disappears into the foliage of a small tree. I am enormously pleased; my Puffbird is the only bird I have seen and identified by myself.

The theme of our article is that variety is sought, experienced and enjoyed in different ways and different motivations direct different variety seeking efforts. In the context of birding, we analyze **experiencing variety** by seeing a new bird

and/or seeing a number of familiar birds on the same outing. Different types of travel constitute **variety-seeking** in birding. New birds are much more likely to be seen when birding in areas far from home and a major motivation for such travel is to enjoy the variety of seeing new birds. Resources for distant travel are limited and birders turn to near by places and appreciate a second form of variety, seeing a number of familiar birds on the same outing. Finally, we will resolve what appears to be a paradox, creating variety from familiar experiences.

VARIETY SEEKING LITERATURE IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Variety seeking is recognized as a fundamental activity and motivation in consumer and consumption behavior. Marketers have recognized this in the travel (Fesenmaier 1995, Link 1993, Forbes 1993) and meeting location (Island Guide: U.S. Virgin Islands 1992, Island Guide: Barbados Bermuda 1992) literature. Hospitals have recognized using a variety of programs/services to increase revenue (Kania 1993). Milon and Clemmons (1991) found that species variety is a normal good sought by hunters. Yet the extensive literature on variety-seeking behavior has neglected the following vital issues in variety as a consumer experience: 1. Empirical evidence of satisfaction and enjoyment from variety seeking; 2. The actual behavior of variety-seeking; 3. Sources of variety beyond brands; and 4. How consumers interpret their experience as constituting variety.

In theory, variety is sought in order to experience satisfaction. The recent literature on variety-seeking also posits that variety is rewarding or satisfying (Van Trijp, Hoyer and Inman 1996). However, the empirical link of variety to satisfaction remains unexplored (Van Trijp, Hoyer and Inman 1996).

A second major gap in the literature is the absence of studying consumer behavior in the pursuit of variety. That is, beyond variety arising

from brand choice, what do consumers do in order to experience variety?

A third topic that has been neglected is what are some of the important sources of variety in different consumption contexts? Almost the only source of variety that has been addressed in the literature is alternative brands. However, in many contexts, including services and leisure activities, brands are not likely to be an important source of variety. In this study we treat the natural environment as a source of variety and in so doing we hope to broaden variety seeking beyond brands (Feinberg, Kahn, and McAlister 1992, Kahn and Isan 1993) to suggest the more general point that variety can arise from a number of different sources depending on the consumption context.

A final phenomenon that the literature has not treated is how do consumers interpret their experience as constituting variety? A distinction found in the literature contrasts true variety seeking versus derived varied behavior depending on whether switching behavior is intrinsically or extrinsically motivated. True variety seeking is defined by Van Trijp et al (1996) as intrinsically motivated change in behavioral response due to the utility inherent in variation per se, apart from the instrumental value of the chosen alternative. Variety is sought for stimulation it brings, curiosity, and to escape boredom (Van Trijp et al 1996). Derived varied behavior is brand switching motivated by instrumental goals, such as buying at a lower price. While the distinction is important in studies of brand switching, it begs the question of how consumers interpret their experience as constituting intrinsically motivated variety. What is variety to the consumer? Our report provides an exploratory account of the experiences that count as variety to birders. We believe that our findings will provide some ideas that could be used to analyze the experience of variety in other settings.

Going to certain areas in hopes of seeing new or a variety of familiar birds is important in birding, but does not exhaust ways that variety is sought and appreciated by birders. Our focus was chosen to include a vital dimension of birding and to illuminate what we believe are some important issues in variety seeking and satisfaction that are neglected in the literature. This study is very much in the context of discovery and we hope to

offer several concepts and processes that may provide a foundation for research in other consumption activities beyond birding.

We first describe the fieldwork that provides data for this article. Second, we treat two ways that variety is experienced in birding. Third, an account is provided of distant or local travel as modes of variety seeking. Fourth, variety as a source of satisfaction is discussed. Finally, discussion and conclusions end the article.

METHOD

Our general interest was in learning how birders experience satisfaction/dissatisfaction, not to test hypotheses drawn from a well established literature stream. Very little is known about consumption experience and processes of variety seeking related to satisfaction. Thus an inductive, ethnographic method, primarily participant observation was used (Hudson and Ozanne 1988, Hunt 1991). Similar methods have been employed in recent studies of consumption experiences (Arnould and Price 1993; Price, Arnold and Tierney 1995; Sherry 1990; Celsi, Rose and Leigh 1993). After observing birding activities, it became clear that variety was a very important source of satisfaction and our attention shifted to that topic.

More specifically, one of the authors has been actively birding ("birdwatching" is a term used by the general public) for over 30 years and systematic field work was initiated about 18 months ago as he began to take field notes and keep newsletters/ announcements and other documentary material from birding organizations. The field notes were transcribed and entered in a word processing system. Most of the field notes were taken while on field trips. During field trips birders go individually or with others to an area in order to observe and identify birds. His field trips with others include a key informant, trips with the Metro Birding Association, the State Birding Society and a trip to Venezuela by a commercial tour operator.

On birding field trips it is common for a number of participants to make a list of the birds identified and on many occasions note taking attracted little attention. If anyone asked or seemed to notice that my note taking was more

extensive than usual, I explained or reminded people who knew me, that I am a college professor, people in my field study recreational activities and that I hoped to write articles on birding. No one objected or seemed uncomfortable. In fact some expressed interest or were otherwise supportive of my efforts. I did not observe differences in the other participants' behavior between occasions when I did or did not take notes. The only exceptions are that some times when I took notes during and/or at the end of the trip people would ask questions such as: how many birds have we seen? What birds did we see? While looking at a bird, sometimes I was asked: have we seen that bird before? Also on a trip to Venezuela, acting on the requests of the other participants I wrote a description of the trip. After a little over a year of field work, variety emerged as a topic and field notes and observations were focused on that topic. Most names are pseudonyms.

In addition, this article draws from a key informant, Frank Knight, who shared his birding experiences in discussions and written narratives of his experiences on various field trips. These narratives describe the locale and the discovery of each of the birds seen as well as the group's response to these sightings. These descriptions help to fix the experience in Frank's memory and also may be shared with other participants so that they, too, may re-live the events. These narratives include trips to Wakulla Springs State Park and the St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge, both near Tallahassee, Florida; and more distant excursions to China and Trinidad and Tobago.

EXPERIENCING VARIETY IN BIRDING

"Life Birds": Seeing New Birds

For many birders, a most enjoyable way of experiencing variety is to see a species of bird that one has not been seen before, a "life bird". To birders, a life bird is any species, that is a taxonomic category or type of bird, such as a Wild Turkey, Little Turn and so on, that the birder can not recall having seen before. During a birding trip to Venezuela Charles Slater, one of the participants, experiences a life bird:

The bus is taking us to another location in the paramo, the slopes of the Venezuela Andes, close to 10,000 feet high, and we bird on the way. Birds are seen, the bus stops. Birders quickly exit the bus, line the edge of the road and begin looking down the steep slope with binoculars to see the birds. Bob Lewis, trip leader, calls in a loud voice: "Paramo Pipit". It is reddish buff above, recognizable as a pipit by its skinny Robin shape and thin bill. Bob to Charles Slater: "Is that a life bird?" Charles smiles broadly: "a lifer".

Experiencing a species as a life bird is contingent on an interpretative process that includes several elements. First, the birder or a birding companion identifies the bird's species. Bob Lewis said: "Paramo Pipit". Recall the opening vignette of this article: I compared my sketch of the new bird seen to birds illustrated in the *Birds of Venezuela* field guide (De Schauensee 1978) to identify it as a Russet-throated Puffbird. Second, the birder matches the bird just identified to a mental and/or written list to conclude either that the bird has (old bird) or has not been previously identified (new bird). I could not recall having seen a Puffbird. Third, the birder and new bird are both in the same place at the same time. My major motivation for going to Venezuela was to see new birds. Fourth, the bird's presence must be known to the birder. I saw the Puffbird.

Seeing A Number of Familiar Birds On The Same Field Trip

In addition to seeing "Life Birds", that is birds not identified previously, another way that variety is experienced in birding is to see a number of familiar birds during the same field trip. Experiencing variety by seeing a number of familiar birds on the same outing happen at Vincent National Wildlife Refuge, less than 100 miles from our home city. Vincent is a popular birding area as it has a variety of different habitats including wetlands, bottom land hardwoods, pine uplands, grass lands, agricultural fields, seasonal mud flats, ponds and a major river. The diversity of habitats attracts, on some occasions, a variety of birds. On a December day trip one of us goes to Vincent and in the morning happens to meet two

birders from the that area. The three of us enjoy quite a variety of about 30 different birds including three species each of woodpeckers and geese; two species each of larks and hawks; four species of ducks; a species of egret, heron, crow, wren, tohee, mockingbird, nuthatch, dove, jay and some others. All of the birds, except one species of geese are reasonably common to Vincent. That is, will probably be seen during the right season.

Experiencing a variety of familiar birds during a field trip involves a process of interpretation very similar to that of "getting a life bird". First, the birder or a birding companion identifies the bird's species. A Harrier was seen at Vincent. Here's how it was identified. The size, color and shape of the bird was immediately recognizable as hawk-like. I compared my observation of the new hawk to my recall of the major field marks for hawks. Field marks are distinctive features of a species. The white rump patch that I see is unique among hawks in the area as the Northern Harrier. The female is brown, the male grey, and I am looking at a brown bird. Thus, I identify the flying hawk as a female Northern Harrier. My birding companions confirm the identification.

Species identification is a critical foundation to experiencing variety in birding. By that time in the morning we have seen two hawks: A Red Tailed Hawk and the Harrier. A nonbirder may simply recognize both the Red Tailed Hawk and the Northern Harrier as "hawks" and not experience the variety of seeing two different hawk species. A second element in constructing variety occurs as the birder matches the bird just identified to a mental and/or written list to conclude either that the bird has (old bird for the field trip) or has not been previously identified during this outing (new bird). I, and one of the Vincent area residents, are keeping written lists. I clearly recalled that this was my first sighting of a Northern Harrier. Many birders seem to keep a running mental list of birds already seen as subsequent sightings of the same bird may be of much less interest than the first. Typically at the first sighting, who ever sees the bird first will name the species and tell others in the party where to look. Often on subsequent sightings the bird is ignored. Next, we present a typology of variety-seeking in birding in which we link two types of birding variety-seeking in birding in which we link

two types of birding variety experiences to variety seeking travel and field trip motivation.

VARIETY-SEEKING IN BIRDING: EXPERIENCING DIFFERENT TYPES OF VARIETY BY TRAVELING TO DIFFERENT TYPES OF AREAS

"Life Birding": Traveling To New, Distant Areas For Life Birds

One mode of variety seeking, and enjoying birding, is traveling to a foreign country or to a region in the United States in which one has not birded, in hopes of finding life birds. Our home area is Metro City of a Southeastern State. One of the authors has been on trips abroad to the Ecuadorean Andes, Amazon Basin Forest and Galapagos Islands; Baja California; Venezuela; some of the Western States; North East; and Canada. Travels of a key informant include Kenya, Australia, Costa Rica, Trinidad, China, Venezuela and Nepal.

New areas often hold the promise of life/new birds and a major motivation for such travel is to see birds one has never seen. An announcement promoting the June 1996 trip to Venezuela says: "There is much that should be seen during this tour, including as many as 400 species of birds". The announcement lists 31 "Top Birds of the Venezuela Tour" (voted by participants at the end of a previous tour). Of the 31, I only recognize one that I have seen, a second is rare in South Florida and the others all occur in Venezuela, but not the US. The promise of variety is fulfilled. One of the tour leaders keeps and compiles a list of all birds seen which numbers 296. Finding "Life Birds" was part of Frank Knights trip to Kenya.

Our leader, who is an experienced birder having visited Africa annually for twenty-five years, keeps a mental list of our daily sightings. Before leaving on the trip, each participant was sent a list of all the birds we might see, arranged according to taxonomic order. Every second evening, the group meets in our lodge or hotel to go through the list. The leader calls out the names of the birds and briefly describes the habitat in which the birds

were found. We check these on our lists, thus keeping a running total. By the end of the trip (24 days), the list includes more than 500 species, all of which are new to the participants. Adding these to my life list at home brings me up to just over 2,000 species.

A life list, of course, is simply a way of recording variety. Each new species added to the list makes it once more numerous and more varied. As there are more than 7,000 bird species world-wide, there is still plenty of variety for me to discover!

In summary, one category of variety experienced in birding is identifying a bird never before seen, a life bird. Once someone has accumulated some experience in birding, life birds are not often seen near home. Distant travel becomes a means of seeing life birds and a strong motive for such travel. Birders have terms for part of the experience, such as "life bird", "lifer", "good bird" but no term for distant travel seeking life birds. We term such variety-seeking behavior **life birding**.

"Diversity Birding": Traveling To Near By Areas For Variety During A Field Trip

Birding is quite a popular activity. The Metro City Birding Association has over 1,000 members in an area of about 900,000. The National Birding Association has about 600,000 members. Nation wide a large number of people do some birding. The key point we develop is that the wide participation in birding would not be likely if variety was only experienced by seeing new birds. The resources for extensive travel are not readily available to so many people. The genius of birding may well be rooted in the capacity of birders to create variety by seeing a number of old birds in different habitats close to home on outings of a few hours, half a day, a full day or a weekend. As noted above, during the same outing to Vincent Wildlife Refuge, pleasure and satisfaction were obtained from variety constructed by identifying a number of different species.

Often a major motive for selecting which near by area to bird is the potential for variety. A skilled birder, Ted O'Donnell, has written an

unpublished guide to the Vincent Wildlife Refuge area. He describes one "hot spot" (excellent birding area):

Undoubtedly one of the best shorebirding areas in (our state) ... Where else in the area can 10 shorebird species be considered a slow day? ... There is no telling what may turn-up here! Recent records include Lesser-Golden, Black-bellied, and Piping Plovers, Buff-breasted and Baird's Sandpipers, American Avocets, and Marbled Godwits!

In summary, a second category of variety experienced in birding occurs as a diversity of species is seen during the same field trip. Species diversity is often a motive for choosing which near by area to bird and we designate such variety-seeking behavior **diversity birding**.

VARIETY IN THE PRODUCTION OF SATISFACTION

On field trips, in addition to the authors' personal feelings of satisfaction linked to variety, the remarks and talk we hear from other birders clearly indicate that variety contributes to enjoyment of and satisfaction with birding field trips. Recall that as he saw the Paramo Pipit, a life bird, Charles Slater smiles broadly, a clear indication of enjoyment/satisfaction. During a local field trip the first sighting of a familiar bird is often accompanied by remarks that strongly suggest satisfaction, that is positive affect. At Vincent Refuge:

A telescope is set on a Pintale Duck, the first sighting of the day for that species. I hear: "That's nice", "Handsome duck", "Great light, see how it brings out the color", "You need to see this".

Often near the end of a field trip, an evaluation of the trip is voiced by the participants. We briefly reported above on experiencing a nice variety of 30 species one morning at Vincent. About noon we have returned to the place where we started the morning birding walk. As they depart, the other two birders mention some of the enjoyable highlights of the morning: "A lot of good birds" (variety), "beautiful bright day", "hope to see you again". They are pleased and

satisfied. Having presented an account of variety seeking as a source of satisfaction in birding, we turn to a discussion of our results.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Types of Variety Experiences: A Typology

We identify two types of variety-seeking in birding (Table 1). The first type is diversity birding, in which a nearby birding area with a variety of habitats is chosen in hopes of seeing a number of different species of birds. As the number of species seen increases, satisfaction with the field trip increases. The second type is life birding, travel to more distant areas to see birds one has not seen before. Seeing a life bird is enjoyable and a source of satisfaction to birders.

The analytical categories of life and diversity birding are not mutually exclusive. Travel to distant areas can be motivated by both opportunities to see life birds and to experience a variety in terms of a number of different birds both life and familiar birds. Also, travel to a nearby area can be motivated by an opportunity to see a life bird. Sometimes a bird that is quite rare for the area is reported to members of the birding community. Larry Gibson announces to his week night birding class that an Iceland Gull has been seen on a lake in our South Eastern state and asks if we wish to try and drive up on Saturday to see it. The Gull is 700 or 800 miles out of its' usual range. While the categories of life and diversity birding are not mutually exclusive, they are useful in calling attention to the important theoretical idea that variety is sought and experienced in different ways.

Table 1
Types of Variety Experiences, Variety-Seeking and Field Trip Motivation

Variety Experience	Variety Seeking	Field Trip Motivation
Life Birding	Travel to new, distant areas	See Life Bird(s)
Diversity Birding	Travel to nearby areas with diverse habitats	See a variety of familiar birds

Experiencing Variety: An Interpretive Process

Experiencing variety is more than a simple matter of variety-seeking. Variety emerges from a process that is similar in both diversity and life birding as birders interpret what they see. Experiencing variety in both types of birding starts with seeing a bird and observing its' field marks (Figure 1). The field marks are compared to different species until the species is identified (in some instances a bird can not be identified). The species is compared to the birder's "life List" and if a life bird is recognized, a high level of variety is experienced. If the species is not a life bird, often the birder will compare it to the trip list and if it is a new bird for the trip, add it to the trip list. At the end of the trip, birders often review the written or mental trip list, as the number of birds seen increases, the feeling of experiencing more variety increases and satisfaction increases.

Figure 1
Variety Recognition Process Experiencing Variety

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1. Bird is seen ---->
 2. Field Marks Observed ---->
 3. Field Marks Compared to Those of Different Species ---->
 4. Species Identified ---->
 5. Species Matched To:
 - A. Life List ----> IF: new bird - experience high variety
IF: old bird - compare to:
 - B. Trip List ----> If new bird for trip - add to trip list ----> End of Trip:
 - IF: large number of different birds seen - high variety
 - IF: few birds seen - Low variety
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Our findings have implications for the current literature cited earlier on variety seeking behavior by consumers and we suggest that symbolic interaction, a social-psychological theory is applicable our study of recreational/leisure activities.

Symbolic interaction, an approach to understanding human group life, was developed by George Herbert Mead (1934) and extended by Herbert Blumer (1969). It provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding variety in

birding. An important premise of symbolic interaction is that humans live in a world of objects, things to which people may refer, that do not have inherent meanings (Dietz, Prus, and Shaffir, 1994; Prus 1996). The meanings of objects arise from the interpretations that people make of the objects that they encounter. People make sense of their world by using symbols which convey the meaning of objects, and people act toward objects in terms of those meanings. The shared meanings of things arise from the interactions between people as objects acquire qualities by the ways that the actor and others define and act toward them.

The process of recognizing and experiencing variety noted above (Figure 1) is given theoretical import by relating it to symbolic interaction. As the interactionists argue, the meaning of a bird arises out of a number of shared meanings held by people in the birding community. Some critical meanings that "produce" variety in birding include: species, field marks as a way to identify species, and life bird. Symbolic interactionists also call attention to the importance of practices in human behavior. Variety in birding emerges from a number of practices including the practice of listing birds on a field trip, keeping a life list, the interest other birders show when one sees a life bird, and the talk about the variety seen during a field trip.

Implications For Future Research

In a general context, our study suggests that conceptualization and study of consumer variety seeking and satisfaction may be enriched by employing our analytical approach in other settings. Specifically, we found that meanings and practices produce variety in birding. The analysis of other settings may also find that the meanings people assign to things and practices that consumers engage in create variety.

Several additional tasks for future research are suggested. Consumer satisfaction is clearly a product of variety in birding. Oliver's (1997) recent comprehensive model of satisfaction is essentially the familiar disconfirmation approach of individual psychology. We believe that Oliver's work can be extended and offer some suggestions for doing so. Our ideas are not meant as a

critique of Oliver's model as his purpose was to present a very general, context free, psychological model.

In addition to disconfirmation, we suggest that, in some contexts, variety may be a source of satisfaction. Variety itself may well incorporate the "pleasant surprise" dimension of positive disconfirmation treated by Oliver (1997). However, as a very abstract model, Oliver (1997) does not treat the production of surprise, that is variety.

Another extension of Oliver (1997) is to move beyond individual psychology. Variety in birding and possibly in other settings is both a psychological and social process (Holt 1995). What counts as variety to participants is social in that identification is a social process in the sense that the birding community makes identification possible and values variety. Identification, even if done alone by an individual, is social as the "tools" of identification are social including the concept of species, guide books to identify species, information on where to bird and so on.

Finally and most importantly for consumer satisfaction is that current theory has not addressed what we feel is a fundamental issue in satisfaction: how time is spent, especially leisure time. The issue is the dichotomy of excitement, enjoyment, and satisfaction on the one hand compared to boredom, dullness, and dissatisfaction on the other hand. By the analysis of variety we have begun to investigate the excitement, enjoyment, satisfaction half of the dichotomy. Others may wish to consider boredom.

Managerial Implications

The challenge for marketing practitioners is to create a setting whereby customers can create and experience variety. For example, in the travel industry, the promise of seeing new birds, many birds, and unusual birds is used to promote tours, destinations, etc. The creation of variety may give the marketer a differential advantage over the competition.

SUMMARY

Employing an ethnography of birding, we have demonstrated that variety seeking as a process and

the resulting variety obtained leads to satisfaction. Variety is created by finding a number of familiar birds on the same outing and by seeing "life birds" that one has not identified before. Distant travel is a rich source for life birds. The paradox of creating variety by seeing familiar birds is resolved by learning that birders consider the set of different birders identified on the same trip as a source of variety. Satisfaction and variety also results from the first sighting of a familiar bird. Future research will determine the generalizability of our approach to the study of variety and satisfaction in other settings.

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