

ECOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF TOURISM ON BIRDS IN PROTECTED AREAS

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Abstract

Nature-based tourism is a growing sector of tourism and is often directed to protected areas. For example, many national parks in northern Finland have multiplied their visitor numbers during last few decades. However, the ever increasing number of visitors and new type of use of areas with conservational value can cause wear and disturbance to the environment. Recreation can affect wildlife directly by disturbing the animals or indirectly through changing the original environment. Recreation has been determined to have negative impact on bird density, species composition and reproduction. Only few studies have investigated the relationship of the amount of recreation use and impacts on birds and mainly the research focus has been in the response of single species. There is a need for studies concerning recreation induced long-term alterations in bird communities to get essential information for planning and managing protected areas.

We studied the ecological impact of tourism on birds in protected areas at north-eastern Finland. Data on breeding bird pairs were collected in hiking trails and in undisturbed control areas during several breeding seasons with line transect method. In addition, we got information of visitor numbers in protected areas to study the impact of amount of recreation in the hiking trails on birds. We used modelling approach to investigate the importance of tourism related disturbance and habitat modification on bird communities in protected areas. More specifically we were interested: (1) Are some species or groups of species more vulnerable to disturbance than others? and (2) Can some bird species be used as indicators for tourism-related impacts? The preliminary results show that the current recreation pressure has not caused substantial changes in studied bird communities. However, the number of visitors seems to have affected negatively open nesting species nesting on the ground.

Key Words

ecological impacts, protected areas, birds

Key References

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