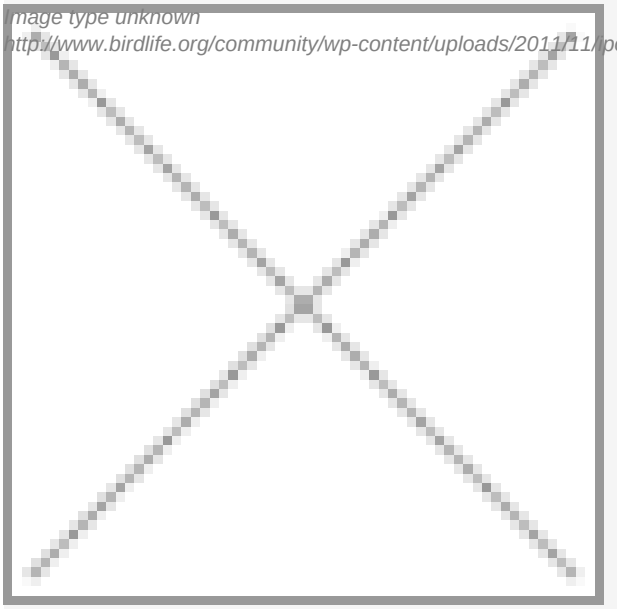
Sustainable birdwatching tourism to grow in Europe

Title
A successful flagship project that has been making birdwatching tourism sustainable in Spain and Portugal has been granted funding in order to expand into more Mediterranean countries. The original pilot project, *iberaves*, developed well-documented training modules that are designed for professionals working in the bird tourism sector.

Iberaves is led by SEO/BirdLife, with SPEA (BirdLife in Portugal) and BirdLife International; and funded by the Leonardo da Vinci programme of the European Commission which encourages innovative field education and training. The new initiative, the International Project on Ornithological Tourism (IPOT), also involves BirdLife Cyprus and HOS (Birdlife in Greece).

Birdwatching tourism is growing. It is increasingly being included in models of sustainable development in areas of high biodiversity importance, because it can provide direct economic contributions to, and raise awareness about, important bird areas. However, with growing numbers of people visiting environmentally sensitive areas, it also has the possibility of detrimentally affecting the very birds and ecosystems people travel to see.

This is why *iberaves* has been important for the industry, and European protected areas (Natura 2000), in Spain and Portugal. *Iberaves* raises awareness and provides training tools, advice and information about the sustainable development of birdwatching tourism for tour guides, local travel employees, hoteliers and travel companies- all available for free online. “In the first two years we have had encouraging results from the different stakeholders in the tourism industry. More than 1,400 people have registered for the online training tool,” says Cristina Sanchez, IPOT manager and coordinator, and Director of SEO/BirdLife Catalunya. Initially designed to be expandable, BirdLife International is thus pleased to announce that the pilot project will be reproduced in other EU countries now funding for IPOT is secured.

The benefits will hopefully be seen by birdwatchers at protected Natura 2000 sites all over Europe in the future. *Much gratitude to the Leonardo da Vinci Agency, part of the European Lifelong Learning Programme for funding the new International Project on Ornithological Tourism and iberaves. More information: www.seo.org/iberaves*

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