



KEY BIRD SPECIES AS DRIVERS OF AVITOURISM GROWTH IN ILARO, OGUN STATE NIGERIA

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Abstract

Flagship species is adaptable, suited to various social, cultural, scientific, and political contexts. Emerging models include "local" flagships, which engage local communities by focusing on regionally important species, and ecotourism flagships, which attract international tourists interested in wildlife observation or conservation participation (Macdonald, et al, 2017). These study serve two key purposes: raising public awareness and attracting financial support for conservation initiatives. This evolving concept continues to reflect modern conservation needs, and this study contributes to the discourse by identifying critical attributes of effective flagship species and, assessing the model's relevance across diverse social groups. The study considers essential bird species attributes such as population size, endemism, physical appearance, and visibility Data collection was carried out over a six-month period, encompassing three months of the dry season and three months of the wet season (June, August, and September) in 2024. The point count method was employed to gather data on bird species diversity and abundance within the Ilaro metropolis. Observations were conducted using 50-meter radius counting zones at each station, with a minimum distance of 200 meters maintained between adjacent counting stations to avoid overlapping observations. A total of 30 counting stations were utilized, distributed evenly across three study blocks with 10 stations per block. The study area was high bird species diversity was evident, with 129 species from 42 families recorded. Notably, 54 bird species from 16 families were identified as flagship species within the area. The Simpson's 1-D diversity index showed that bird diversity was slightly higher during the dry season (0.9921) compared to the wet season (0.9919). The conservation status revealed the identification of 16 Palearctic migrants and 10 intra-African migrants. These findings are consistent with previous research, such as Eckert and Hemphill (2005), which emphasized the importance of factors like appearance, charisma, conservation status, population size. 53 species were identified as flagship species, which have the potential to promote sustainable tourism. To achieve this, it is recommended to establish and enforce protected areas around the key habitats of these flagship species.

Key words: Key, bird species. aviturism, sustainable, development.