

Celebration of Swans 2005

Visitor Survey Analysis

About the Celebration of Swans

Celebration of Swans is a community-driven festival of wildlife viewing and appreciation, artistic, cultural, and family events complemented by contagious delight for the return of spring and all the natural wonders that come with it. The Wildlife Viewing Program of Environment Yukon coordinates efforts in partnership with a myriad of non-profit organizations, local businesses and dedicated volunteers.

The annual celebration began in 1994 as a one-day event and has now grown to nine days.

Events for the 2005 festival included: swan-watching from the Swan Haven Interpretation Centre at M'Clintock Bay (Marsh Lake), interpretive programs for school groups, family weekend events, presentations in Whitehorse and other southern Yukon communities by experts, birding tours in surrounding communities, First Nation storytelling, watercolour, drawing and photography workshops, film showings, a juried exhibit at Yukon Art Society Gallery, and a children's art contest followed by an exhibit at the Cranberry Bistro in downtown Whitehorse. The winning art pieces were made into a wetlands themed calendar by the Canadian Wildlife Service. Private businesses also took initiative by creating displays, murals and specialty desserts.



School programs have always played an integral role in the department's efforts to educate about the importance of M'Clintock Bay to wildlife. Each year nearly 1000 school children in Grades 2 to 6 visit the centre for interpretative programs.

Swan Haven has become one of the most important accessible wildlife viewing sites in the Yukon. Nearly 10 percent of all Yukon residents visit the centre annually. The centre and the Celebration of Swans have become powerful tools for interpreting the spectacle of spring and raising awareness for protecting the area's critical habitat — the link between waterfowl breeding and wintering grounds.

About the Survey

The goal of this survey was to learn more about visitors to Celebration of Swans 2005 by identifying visitor characteristics, measuring economic expenditures and determining activity preferences and participation levels.



Survey Findings

Surveys were completed by 221 visitors.

Q.1. How long have you been watching birds?

Responses to this question broke down into three groups:

- experienced birders (5 or more years) 39%
- relatively new to birding (under 5 years) 18%
- did not respond 43%

Those who did not respond may not consider themselves to be bird watchers, having other motivations to attend Celebration events. This is a significant proportion of the visitors.

Q.2 Including this year, how many years have you been attending the Celebration of Swans?

Of the respondents, 26% had attended Celebration of Swans for more than 5 years and 37% had attended for 2–5 years. The majority (63%) of participants were repeat visitors and just over one third (37%) were first-time visitors.

Q.3 What was your primary reason for wanting to attend the Celebration of Swans?

The most common reason (29%) respondents attended Celebration events was *to learn more about swans*. Other knowledge-based responses included *to photograph swans and other birds* (8.5%) and *to improve my wildlife viewing skills and abilities* (7.5%). These three together total 45% of the responses.

Social-based responses included *to have a social outing with my friends or family* (23%) and *to simply be outdoors* (20%). Thus social- and knowledge based reasons are equally motivating for visitors to Celebration of Swans events.

Looking at these from a gender perspective, men were more likely to give concrete reasons for attending, such as photographing swans and improving wildlife viewing skills. Women were more likely to mention the desire for a social outing and attending events.

Many of the write-in responses under *Other* explained that the visitor attended simply to see the birds. To them, the opportunity to view and be awed by the sheer concentration of wildlife seemed to be motivation enough, without the need to learn, photograph, or otherwise participate.





Q.4. Where are you from?

By far, most visitors to Celebration of Swans events were from Whitehorse (78%) or the surrounding Southern Lakes region (8%) which includes the communities of Marsh Lake, Carcross, Tagish, and Atlin. Most visitors drove less than 60 minutes to participate in Celebration events. This clearly indicates that the primary audience is local residents.

Of those visitor parties from further afield (other Yukon communities: 3, Alaska: 6, BC: 5, Alberta: 4, NWT/Nunavut:3, Manitoba: 2, Ontario/Quebec: 2, US: 6), a party from each of Skagway, Juneau, and Calgary seemed to be dedicated birders who travelled to Whitehorse specifically to see the swans. Others indicated they were business travellers, were visiting friends and family, or had other reasons for being in the territory.

Q.5. Including yourself, how many people travelled with you to the Celebration of Swans?

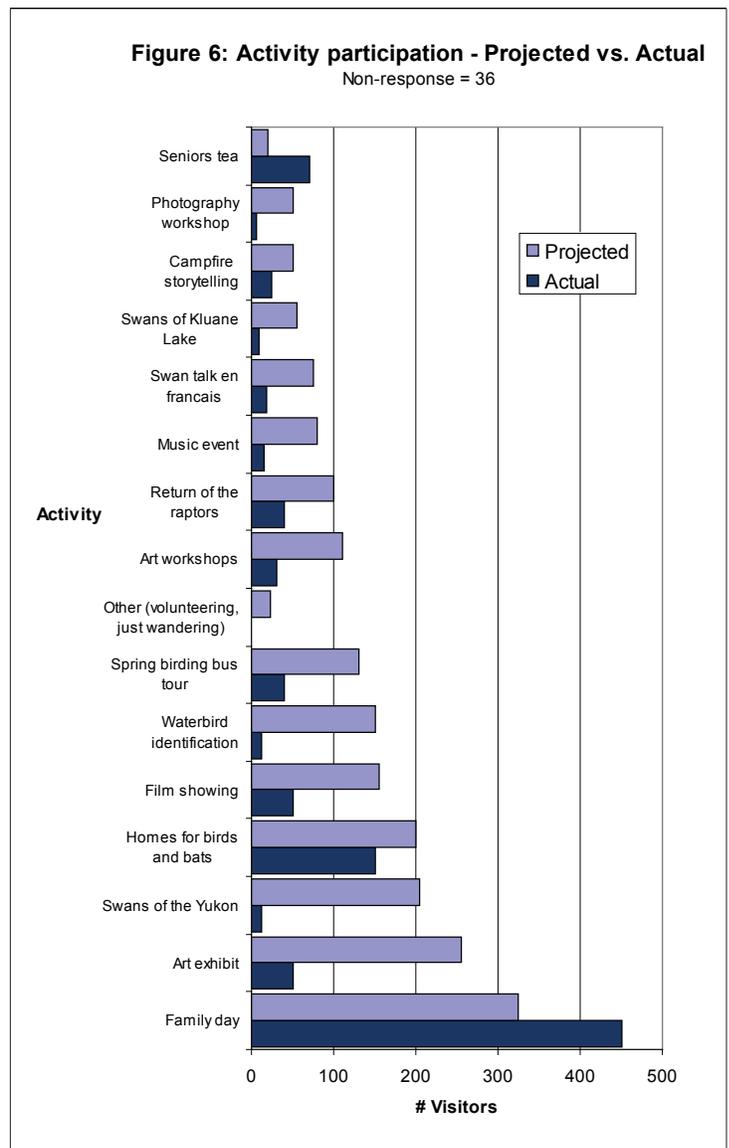
Celebration of Swans events seem to have a strong social component, as only 8% of visitors attended by themselves. Most came in parties of two (30%), three (26%) or four (22%). Another 14% came in parties of five or more.



Q.6. In which of the following Celebration of Swans activities will you participate?

The most popular event was Family Day with 450 participants, followed by Homes for Birds and Bats with 150 participants. The Senior's Tea was also well attended with 70 participants, as were the film showing of *Winged Migration* and the art exhibit opening with 50 participants each.

The chart below contrasts the intended attendance based on survey responses and the actual attendance. The fact that the intention to attend events almost always outnumbered attendance illustrates the broad interest in Celebration of Swans events. Visitors would like to have participated more than they were able. With this knowledge, event organizers can review the scheduling, setting, and promotion of each event to ensure they are as accessible as possible.





Q.7. When will you visit Swan Haven again?

Two-thirds (67%) of survey respondents indicated they intended to visit Swan Haven again within one year. A few (6%) indicated they would come again within three years, the rest (27%) were unsure.

Q.8. What would you like to see at next year's Celebration of Swans?

The following suggestions were received in response to the question, as well as in the Comments section. All are recorded below.

- more for the kids on family day
- workshop for kids on photography of swans and small birds
- more French activities
- documentary film about swans, offered in French.
- family events for all ages
- an adult-only viewing time to allow visitors to enjoy the quietness
- seminars on carving
- more bat and bird identification kits
- longer bat and bird house building (more supplies)
- shorter waits for specific activities, e.g. face painting

Q.9. What did you or will you personally spend on this trip to the Celebration of Swans?

Too few visitors responded to this question to reach any reliable conclusions.

Q.10. How did you learn about the Celebration of Swans?

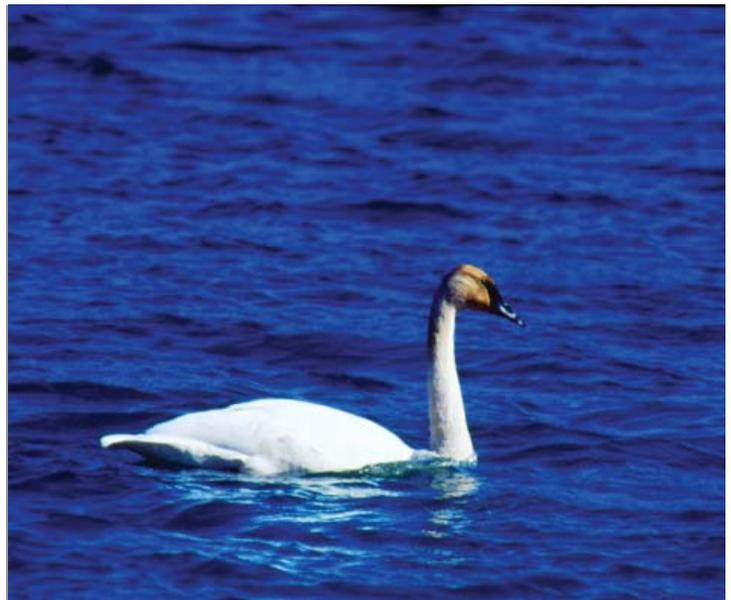
Organizers used radio, newspaper, two types of posters (large collectables and promotional), website calendar of events, word-of-mouth (including emails) and brochures mailed to all Yukon households to promote the Celebration.

Responses may indicate through which medium visitors were made aware of event dates, or through which they got the event details that enabled them to participate.

Given that three out of four visitors had attended at least once before, a basic awareness of the Celebration was established for most visitors. For them, posters, the newspaper, radio and word-of-mouth were equal sources for information. For first-time visitors, word-of-mouth was the most common source of information. These visitors were likely either attending with an experienced visitor, or on the recommendation of an experienced visitor.

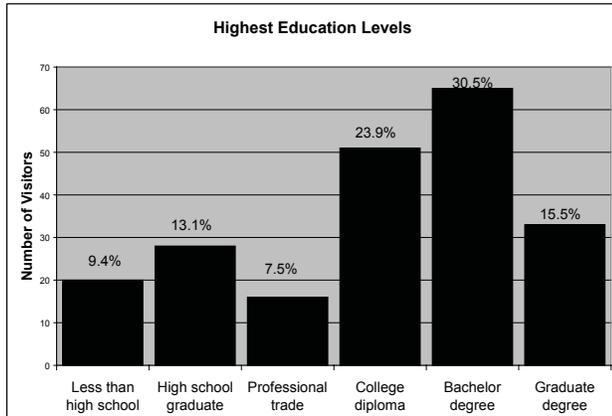
Q.11. What products and services would you have purchased had they been available?

The most popular response to this question was food and drink items, followed by clothing, postcards, pins, books, posters, and other items. Yet, more than half of visitors surveyed did not answer. Results may have been different had the survey offered suggestions.



Q.12. What is the highest education level you have attained?

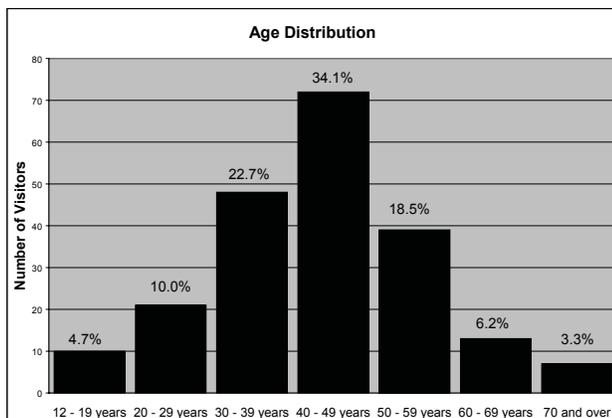
Survey respondents were well-educated, with almost half (46%) holding a bachelor or graduate degree, and another 31% holding a college diploma or professional trade designation. Because surveys were completed by visitors as young as 12, results for the category 'Less than high school' are skewed.



Q.13. What is your age?

Most survey respondents (75%) were adults 30 to 59 years old. Senior citizens 60 and over made up 9.5% of the visitors. Only approximately 15% of survey respondents were under 30, although surveys were not given to children under 12.

Additional data collected by Environment Yukon, however, found that 40% of all visitors to the Swan Haven facility were children, most of whom attended via school programs.



Q.14. What is your gender?

Respondents to the survey were 59% female and 41% male.

Survey Methods

The Yukon Department of Environment contracted Matthew Jenner to develop and tally a survey to be conducted during Celebration of Swans events, April 16–24, 2005. The surveys were distributed and collected by Yukon Department of Environment staff and volunteers. Only visitors aged 12 and older were asked to participate in the survey. Surveys were completed by 221 visitors.

Swan Haven Interpretation Centre

- Workshop: Watercolour Landscapes
- Interpretive Talk: Return of the Raptors
- Workshop: Micro-plant identification
- Senior's Tea
- Workshop: Homes for Birds and Bats
- Family day
- Interpretive Tour: Les cygnes sont de retour
- Workshop: Bird photography

Whitehorse

- Art exhibit Opening Ceremony
- Music night: Definitely Not Your Swan Song
- Film: *Winged Migration*
- Workshop: Waterbird Identification
- Interpretive Tour: Spring Birding Bus Tour, Whitehorse, Tagish, Marsh Lake, Carcross

Surveys were not administered at the following:

- Interpretive Tour: Swans of Yukon, Mayo & Dawson
- Storytelling: Campfire Spring Stories, Tagish
- Interpretive Tour: Swans of Kluane, Burwash Landing.

For more information, contact:

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Visitor Comments

The majority of comments received expressed appreciation to the event organizers. Many people wrote about their enjoyment of the facility/location, the educational programming, and the overall experience. The value of the events as a family outing was expressed by many. The availability of French language services was noted by some, as was the wheelchair accessibility of the Swan Haven viewing facility.

- *“It’s a great and enjoyable event. Thank you for the opportunity.”*
- *“The whole family loves it.”*
- *“Our spring family tradition.”*
- *“This a wonderful annual event for my child and I to share — thank you.”*
- *“It was well worth going to Swan Haven and participating in the activities.”*
- *“Great creative events.”*
- *“The festival is getting better every year.”*

Summary

The 2005 Celebration of Swans was an appealing community event that attracted a range of visitors. The social and educational aspects of the Celebration of Swans are considered by its participants to be of very high importance, which is not only reflected in visitor comments but is also evident in their reasons for attending, their interest in participating in such a cross-section of events, and their willingness to return within one year.



The majority of visitors can be described as living in Whitehorse and the surrounding areas, 30–60 years old, and well-educated. Beyond that, there seem to be several distinct audiences for the Celebration of Swans:

- Experienced birders who attend events regularly, likely to learn more about and photograph the swans and other waterfowl. They tend to be older overall.
- Less-experienced and non-birders who attend events for their value as social outings with friends and family.
- Non-birders who arrive at Swan Haven not to participate in events, but simply to see the spectacle of massed wildlife and enjoy a spring-time outing. These less-experienced and non-birders are more likely to bring children than dedicated birders.
- There are another two small but distinct groups: newcomers to Whitehorse who are exploring the sights and events of their new home, and residents hosting visiting friends and relatives.

The results of this survey will be used to ensure the continued success of Celebration of Swans. This information may also be useful for organizers of other wildlife and conservation events and festivals.

The event organizers would like to thank all those who took the time to respond to the survey questionnaire.

