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Resident Attitude Towards Tourism in Humboldt County California

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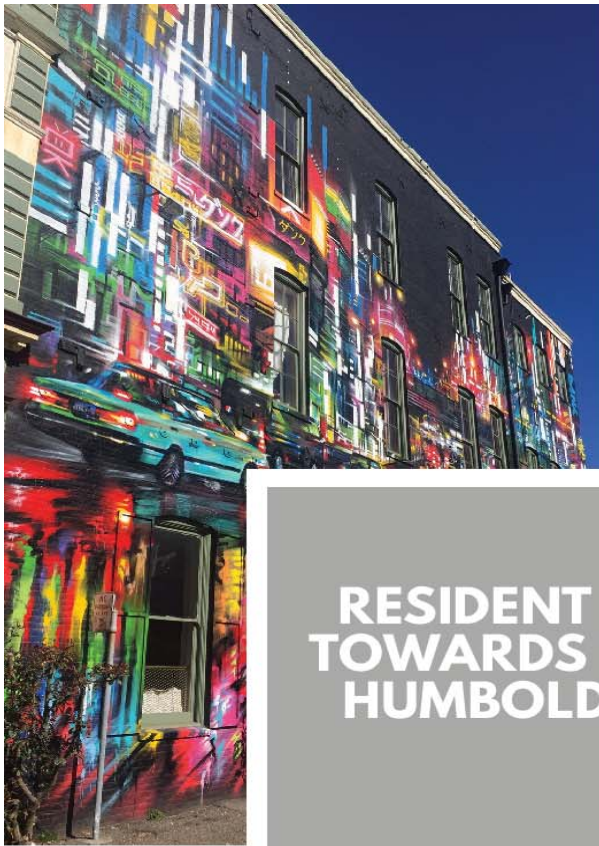
RESIDENT ATTITUDES TOWARDS TOURISM IN HUMBOLDT COUNTY

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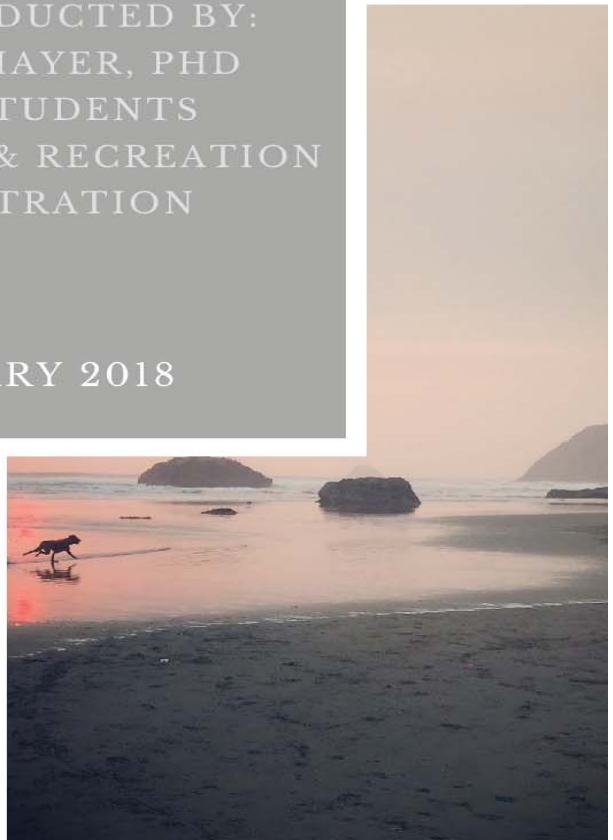
HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY

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* Initially, the study referred to marijuana tourism. Since the start of the study, this has been updated to cannabis tourism.

Cover photos clockwise from upper right: North Country Fair, Arcata; Moonstone Beach, Trinidad; Drury Chaney Trail, Avenue of the Giants; Electric City mural, Eureka

Executive Summary

Study Objectives

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate both resident attitudes toward tourism in general and resident attitudes towards cannabis tourism in Humboldt County, California. The survey was of adult individuals residing in any part of Humboldt County, California. Between March 2017 and August 2017, county residents were targeted to complete the survey either through an in-person or online questionnaire.

Methods

The questionnaire included input on specific variables from appropriate staff. Multiple attitude questions were adapted from a survey designed by Dr. Kathleen Andereck at Arizona State University. Questions to assess attitudes toward cannabis tourism were adapted from a questionnaire designed by Dr. Soo Kang at Colorado State University. Specific areas represented in the questionnaire included:

Demographics	Attitudes towards tourism
Knowledge, involvement and behaviors	Attitudes towards cannabis tourism

The survey was of adult individuals residing in any part of Humboldt County, California between March 2017 and August 2017. Participants were limited to adults residing in Humboldt County, California and potential participants were asked to provide their zip code of residence on the questionnaire. The study included a questionnaire that could be completed in person or through online submission to capture more residents and residents living in more remote areas of the county. In-person surveys were conducted onsite in areas throughout the county in March 2017 and April 2017 (see Figure 1). Diverse sites were selected to capture residents including shopping centers, downtown districts, parks, restaurants and cafes. Permission to survey was sought from the appropriate people in advance of surveying. For onsite surveying, students from the REC365 class at Humboldt State University were trained in random sampling and the survey distribution process. Students completed onsite surveying at one or more of the sites listed in Figure 1.

Special thanks to the REC 365 Data Collection Team

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The online questionnaire was available for residents to complete between May 2017 and August 2017. Using convenience and snowball sampling, a link to the online questionnaire was initially distributed by email to roughly 50 people who were asked to further distribute the link. In addition, the link to the online questionnaire was distributed through local media outlets and press releases.

The majority of questionnaires were completed through the online option. 130 in-person questionnaires were completed by the onsite surveying team. For the online option, 1,008 residents started the questionnaire with 690 residents fully completing the questionnaire and an additional 150 residents mostly completing the questionnaire. Numbers of respondents to each question are referenced in the data figures below (*n=*) and vary due to the stage of completion of questionnaires.

Figure 1. Survey sites and months for onsite surveying

Site	Months
Mad River County Park, Arcata	March 2017
Rohnerville Park, Fortuna	March 2017
North Coast Coop, Eureka	March 2017
Eureka Natural Foods, Eureka	March 2017
Bayshore Mall, Eureka	March 2017 – April 2017
Union Town Shopping Center, Arcata	March 2017 – April 2017
Old Town, Eureka	March 2017 – April 2017
Arcata Plaza	March 2017 – April 2017
College Cove, Trinidad	April 2017
Samoa Dunes Recreation Area, Samoa	April 2017
Woodley Island, Eureka	April 2017
Rays Grocery Store, Fortuna	April 2017
Redwood Curtain Brewery, Arcata	April 2017
Mad River Brewery, Blue Lake	April 2017
Starbucks, Mckinleyville	April 2017
Cher-Ae Heights Casino, Trinidad	April 2017

Results

Results from the questionnaires are presented in this section below. Numbers of respondents to each question are referenced in the data figures below (*n=*) and vary due to the stage of completion of individual questionnaires.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Respondents to the survey were fairly equally split between male and female, with 50.3% of respondents reporting female and 49.7% of respondents reporting male (Figure 2). The average age of respondents was 47.3 years old (Figure 3).

" . . . a surprising unique respite with adventures, arts and activities for everyone"
          -respondent comment on the image of Humboldt County

Figure 2. Gender

Gender	Percent
Female	50.3
Male	49.7

n = 769

Figure 3. Mean Age

Mean age	47.3

n = 762

Length of residence in Humboldt County is reflected in the mean length of residence in figure 5. The mean length of residence in Humboldt County reported by respondents was 19.80 years.

Annual household income of respondents is presented in Figure 4. More than half of all respondents (64.4%) indicated they earned $50,000 or more annually, with 36.6% of respondents placing themselves in the $50,000 - $99,999 income category. Slightly more than 22% of respondents indicated they earned between $25,000 and $49,999 annually and 13.3% indicated they earned less than $25,000 per year. Education level of respondents is presented in Figure 6. 95% of respondents indicated education beyond high school, with 44.9% reporting having a college degree and 24.2% reporting having an advanced degree.

Figure 4. Annual household income

Income categories	Percent
Less than $25,000	13.3
$25,000 - $49,999	22.2
$50,000 - $74,999	21.6
$75,000 - $99,999	15.0
$100,000 or more	27.8

n = 758

Figure 5. Mean length of residence

Mean length	19.80

n = 794

"... a beautiful mosaic where people are not afraid to be themselves; an oasis, separate from the outside world. A true "down the rabbit hole" into paradise sort of place"

-respondent comment on the image of Humboldt County

Figure 6. Education level

Education level	Percent
Less than High School	0.6
High School Graduate	3.8
Technical School Degree	2.1
Some College	24.4
College Degree	44.9
Advanced Degree	24.2

n = 780

Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they received their income from tourism. Most of the respondents (77.2%) indicated they were not employed in the tourism industry at all.

Figure 7. Receive income from tourism

Receive income from tourism	Percent
I am directly employed in the tourism industry	5.5
I am indirectly employed in the tourism industry	17.3
I am not employed in the tourism industry at all	77.2

n = 797

Economic opportunity

Respondents were asked to rank the best opportunities for future economic development in their community. The industries represented in the questionnaire reflect the nine industries referenced in the Prosperity 2012 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy 2013-2018 report. According to the report, these nine industries represent opportunities for Humboldt County to ". . . drive faster growth in jobs, wages and firms" (p. 1). The four industries with the most number one rankings were in order as follows:

- Tourism
- Education and research
- Specialty agriculture and horticulture
- Arts and culture

The one, two and three rankings for the top four industries are presented in Figure 8. For the results for all rankings and industries see Appendix A.

Figure 8. Best opportunities for future economic development
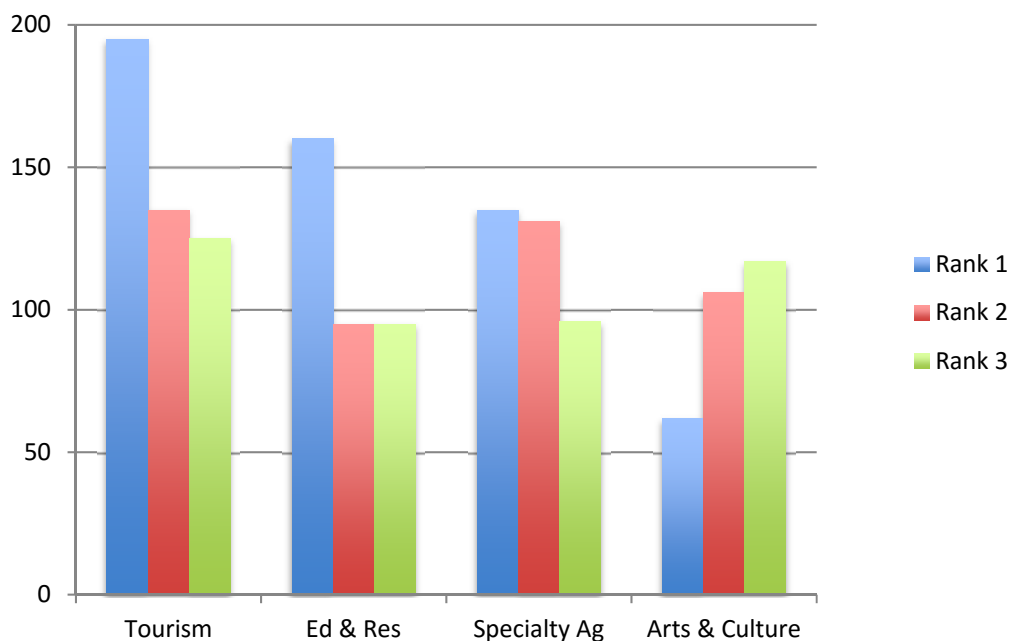
Knowledge, involvement and behaviors

Several questions on the questionnaire asked respondents about their knowledge of the tourism industry and related opinions and behaviors. A majority of respondents (54.1%) indicated they were either moderately or very knowledgeable about the tourism industry with 39.6% of respondents saying they were slightly knowledgeable about the tourism industry (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. Level of knowledge of the tourism industry

Level of knowledge of the tourism industry	Percent
Not at all knowledgeable	6.3
Slightly knowledgeable	39.6
Moderately knowledgeable	40.3
Very knowledgeable	13.8

n = 848

In terms of involvement in tourism decision making, such as attending public meetings or writing letters to tourism leaders in the community, a majority of respondents (67.8%) indicated they were not involved at all or had very little involvement in tourism decision making. Only 10.3% of respondents indicated they had quite a bit or a lot of involvement in tourism decision making.

Figure 10. Involvement in tourism decision making

Involvement in tourism decision making	Percent
Not at all	38.3
Very little	29.5
Some	21.9
Quite a bit	6.5
A lot	3.8

n = 848

Interestingly, a majority of respondents (67.8%) indicated they occasionally participated in tourism-related activities. For this question respondents were able to define for themselves what was meant by tourism-related activities.

Figure 11. Participate in tourism-related activities

Participate in tourism-related activities	Percent
Never	10.0
Occasionally	67.8
Often	22.2

n = 799

Unsurprisingly for our area, the largest percentage of respondents (61.1%) said they often participate in outdoor recreation activities. As well, a large percentage (36.2%) said they occasionally participate in outdoor recreation activities.

Figure 12. Participate in outdoor recreation activities

Participate in outdoor recreation activities	Percent
Never	2.6
Occasionally	36.2
Often	61.1

n = 795

Attitudes towards tourism

Concerning the primary objectives of the study, respondents were asked multiple questions which were designed to reflect their attitudes towards tourism in their communities. Respondents were asked a series of questions about the image of their community they want to project to visitors, how they personally benefit from tourism, and their attitudes towards tourism and cannabis tourism.

Respondents were asked to sum up with one word or phrase that best describes the image they would like visitors to have about Humboldt County when they leave. According to respondents to the questionnaire, the most important words were ones that we can all likely connect to our experiences living in this area (see Figure 13). Additional comments from respondents on this question can be found throughout the report.

Figure 13. Image Word Cloud

How individuals define personal benefit from tourism can vary and may include, for example, tax revenues, income and employment, cultural, social and recreation opportunities, infrastructure improvements and so on. The largest percentage of respondents (39.3%) indicated they received some benefit from tourism with only 23.3% of respondents saying they personally benefitted quite a bit or a lot from tourism in their community (see Figure 14).

Figure 14. Personally benefit from tourism in your community

Personally benefit from tourism	Percent
Not at all	12.3
Very little	25.2
Some	39.3
Quite a bit	16.3
A lot	7.0

n = 799

To examine attitudes more closely, respondents were asked their opinions on a series of questions designed to capture attitudes towards tourism in general and in their community.

In reviewing patterns of responses for the statements regarding attitudes towards tourism in general, the majority of respondents indicated positive feelings about tourism in general by responding they either agreed or strongly agreed with positive statements regarding tourism.

Figure 15. Attitudes towards tourism

Attitude statements	Strongly disagree %	Disagree %	Unsure %	Agree %	Strongly agree %
Tourism can be one of the most important industries for a community	1.7	5.5	6.3	48.3	38.2
Tourism development increases the quality of life in an area	2.0	10.3	23.0	43.0	21.8
Tourism development increases property values	1.6	5.9	20.4	53.5	18.6
Tourism increases a community's tax revenue	1.1	1.7	9.0	53.6	34.5
It is important that community residents are involved in decisions about tourism	1.0	3.3	8.5	50.5	36.8
The overall benefits of tourism outweigh the negatives	2.7	4.8	19.3	44.4	28.8
Tourists are a burden on a community's services	14.8	44.8	21.0	15.5	3.9
Tourists negatively affect my community's way of life	24.8	52.2	11.8	8.2	3.1
Tourism provides incentives for restoration of historic buildings	2.2	3.5	12.0	53.5	28.7
Tourism development increases the amount of crime in my community	17.6	43.8	24.8	8.9	4.9
Native people benefit from tourism	3.0	9.5	41.7	34.7	11.1
Tourism encourages a variety of cultural activities by local residents	1.3	3.6	7.9	58.3	29.0
Because of tourism my community develops more parks and recreational areas	4.3	15.4	26.5	38.6	15.2
Tourism development improves the appearance of my community	2.7	6.1	13.5	51.4	26.3

n = 811

> "Real but clean with lots of art, a few great hotels, easy access to the bay, hiking and walking. I think we have a lot of what it takes we just need to clean up our image. When people come visit me I do everything I can to avoid going up Broadway."
>
>   -respondent comment on the image of Humboldt County

Attitudes towards cannabis tourism

"Eco, authentic, family farms, preserved, the world's best cannabis"
> -respondent comment on the image of Humboldt County

Cannabis tourism is a relatively new topic given the recentness of legal recreational cannabis. The least studied aspect of this new topic is around resident attitudes towards cannabis tourism. While the majority of respondents had positive attitudes towards tourism in general, concerning respondent's attitudes towards cannabis tourism, the results are less certain. A majority of respondents primarily agreed with positive statements regarding the opportunity that cannabis tourism presents to the county. However, many other data patterns in answers reveal that respondents to the questionnaire are unsure about their attitudes towards cannabis tourism and the possible opportunities and challenges cannabis might pose to tourism.

Figure 16. Attitudes towards cannabis tourism

Attitude statements	Strongly disagree %	Disagree %	Unsure %	Agree %	Strongly agree %
I personally benefit from cannabis tourism in my community	30.6	23.4	21.3	12.6	12.0
Some family orientated travelers will not visit Humboldt County due to cannabis tourism	6.7	20.0	23.3	32.5	17.5
Outdoor and recreational tourism will decrease because of cannabis	22.1	37.1	21.3	11.4	8.2
Cannabis tourism benefits Humboldt County	13.1	12.6	23.4	31.0	19.8
Cannabis tourism is a good opportunity for Humboldt County	15.7	12.6	20.3	29.1	22.2
The image of my community will be negatively affected by cannabis tourism	16.3	26.6	21.8	17.0	18.4
Out of state visitors will have a negative perception because of cannabis tourism	15.4	28.3	24.3	17.1	14.9
The image of my community will be positively affected by cannabis tourism	19.6	19.8	30.8	19.1	10.8

n = 806

Conclusions

Of the Humboldt County residents who responded to the questionnaire there are several conclusions we can make regarding their attitudes toward tourism, knowledge of tourism and specific behaviors.

We can be mostly certain that respondents to this questionnaire have generally positive attitudes towards tourism in their communities. Indeed, respondents ranked the tourism industry as the top economic opportunity for Humboldt County. The majority of respondents agreed that, for example, tourism increased property values, increased tax revenue for communities, provided incentives for restoration of historic buildings, encouraged cultural activities of local residents and improved the appearance of their community. We find more support for tourism through the multiple negatively worded attitude statements on the questionnaire. For these attitude statements, the majority of

respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statements. For example, when asked if tourists created a burden on community services, nearly 60% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. In another example of a negatively worded attitude statement, 77% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that tourists negatively affected their community's way of life.

Compared to other parts of California, levels of tourist arrivals in Humboldt County are relatively low. While tourists visit our region throughout the year, tourist arrivals are concentrated in the summer months. Past research has shown that residents tend to have less positive attitudes towards tourism as the level of tourist arrivals grows past a certain threshold for a community. This makes sense as increased numbers of tourists visiting a community can result in increased traffic, crowding at recreational, cultural and entertainment venues, or in more serious cases high levels of tourist arrivals have the potential to overwhelm community services that are not prepared for the influx of people. Tourism is expected to grow in Humboldt County. Recently, Lonely Planet declared the Redwood Coast, of which Humboldt County is a part, as the top place to visit in the United States in 2018. If properly leveraged, this type of international exposure will likely result in some increase in tourist arrivals to our area. If tourist arrivals to Humboldt County increases, we may need periodic assessment of resident attitudes to determine both attitude changes and the direction of change.

Just over 87% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it was important for community residents to be involved in decisions about tourism. Interestingly, nearly 68% of respondents indicated that they had very little or no involvement at all in tourism decision making in their communities. While not a part of the questionnaire, this low level of involvement could be the result of a variety of factors. For example, factors might include:

- residents are not provided with opportunities to be involved
- existing opportunities to be involved do not fit their schedule
- tourism is not (yet) a contentious issue where residents would pursue having a say in tourism decision making

This provides an opportunity for leaders to design ways residents could contribute to tourism decision making. This could range from public meetings, task forces, or calls for public input. By providing residents an opportunity to offer input, a community may direct the path of tourism development to enhance the quality of life of residents. The desires of a community whether for better infrastructure, improved economic conditions or increased recreation opportunities can be heard and addressed.

In reviewing respondent answers to statements regarding their attitudes towards cannabis tourism, we can divide the statements into two broad categories: benefits of cannabis tourism for residents, communities and Humboldt County in general; and potential related impacts of cannabis tourism on image and other types of tourism. Considering the possible benefits from cannabis tourism, respondents to the questionnaire tended towards support of cannabis tourism. For example, when asked if cannabis tourism would benefit residents, nearly 50% of respondents indicated they agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. When asked if they felt cannabis tourism would benefit Humboldt County, just over 50% agreed or strongly agreed. We find the same pattern of responses regarding if residents felt cannabis tourism was a good opportunity for Humboldt County, with 51% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing with that statement. In all statements related to the benefits of cannabis tourism, 20 – 25% of respondents indicated they were unsure about the benefits for them, their community or the county.

In considering respondent's thoughts on potential related impacts of cannabis tourism on community image and other types of tourism, attitudes tended to spread across the agreement scale. For instance, when asked if they thought family oriented travelers would avoid Humboldt County due to cannabis tourism, 50% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, 20% disagreed and 23% were unsure. Regarding the statement that out of state visitors will have a negative perception about Humboldt County because of cannabis tourism, 43.7% of respondents indicated they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, 32% agreed or strongly disagreed and nearly 25% said they were unsure. Lastly, when asked if residents felt the image of their community would be positively affected by cannabis tourism, nearly 31% were unsure. However, nearly 40% disagreed or strongly disagreed with another 30% agreeing or strongly agreeing.

This uncertainty about cannabis tourism among the respondents to the questionnaire suggests that communities interested in pursuing cannabis tourism might be right to focus on education of residents. Education could center on for example:

- what is cannabis tourism
- what will the structure of cannabis tourism look like in a community
- what types of cannabis tourists a community would try to attract
- what are the potential positive and negative impacts of cannabis tourism

Cannabis tourism is a potential complement to Humboldt County's existing tourism resources, which includes scenic coastlines, beaches, redwood trees and a variety of local businesses providing unique products and experiences. Looking to the experiences of other US states, according to the Colorado Tourism Office, the number of out of state visitors to Colorado reporting that they were more likely to visit the state due to cannabis has increased by 10% since the legalization of cannabis. Another study found that after legalization in 2014, tourists made up 44% of recreational sales in Denver and 90% of recreational sales in mountain tourist areas. The potential tax revenue for communities is tremendous. Due to the international reputation of cannabis production in Humboldt County, many believe that the county can become the Napa Valley of cannabis.

We anticipate that stakeholders can utilize the information on resident attitudes to determine specific resident concerns and devise ways to address concerns and promote tourism and cannabis tourism in a way where resident satisfaction is also considered.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Best opportunities for future economic development

Industry	Response rates according to rank								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Education & Research	160	95	95	95	86	73	53	52	37
Dairy & Dairy Processing	21	48	78	100	111	102	112	92	61
Arts & Culture	62	106	117	97	92	76	79	63	63
Lumber & Wood products	50	54	47	67	75	94	102	124	111
Tourism	195	135	125	67	63	44	53	39	34
Fisheries, Processing & Aquaculture	30	76	95	97	114	117	93	84	57
Manufacturing	47	51	48	78	85	82	118	129	109
Information & Technology	52	62	66	68	74	88	88	107	142
Specialty Agriculture & Horticulture	135	131	96	89	67	59	51	41	81