Tourism can support the protection of natural resources when local residents realize the value of their assets and want to preserve these resources. Tourism can also help the sustainable management of protected areas as an alternative for the growing number of travellers who are looking for different experiences to enjoy the natural environment. It is now accepted that despite problems tourism often creates opportunities for protected areas, tourism should be supported if its negative impacts are under controlled (WWF, 2011). Therefore, visitor impact management is ever more important as the number of tourists increases, and their distribution is often concentrated in major tourism destinations in ecologically vulnerable areas (Aloisi, 2002).

In Turkey, natural and biodiversity-rich areas are protected by several different statuses such as national park, nature park, nature reserve, nature monument, wildlife reserve, specially protected area, biosphere reserve and Ramsar site. As a result of the diversity of protection statuses, protected areas are managed under different laws, regulations or international conventions and by different authorities. Currently, about 7.24% of Turkey’s land area is protected mainly and these designations focus on forest, wetland and mountain habitats and include 40 national parks, 31 nature reserves, 184 nature parks, 80 wildlife reserves, 14 specially protected areas, 14 Ramsar sites and 1 biosphere reserve.

Most of these areas are recognized as tourism destinations in Turkey. Recently, the government has been encouraging ecological and cultural tourism in protected areas as a part of the National Tourism Strategy 2023 document in order to reduce pressure on the coastal environment and create alternative income resources for the least developed regions by diversifying tourism products and locations.

In this context, this study aims to provide clues for understanding recreational uses of national parks in Turkey by focusing on trends of visitors in national parks.