



The Call of the Wild: Opportunities, Practices and Dilemmas of Wildlife Tourism

Making the most of biodiversity

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Overview

- What is wildlife tourism
- Human dimensions of wildlife tourism
- Why animals capture our imagination
- Wildlife tourism experience spectrum
- Media and drama
- Management implications
- The future: dilemmas and opportunities



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Biodiversity crisis

Biodiversity crisis

Number of species we are losing?



But rapid loss estimated to be between 1,000 and 10,000 times higher than the natural extinction rate.* (WWF, 2016).

The 2016 Living Planet Index (produced by the Zoological Society of London and the Global Footprint Network), uses the global LPI as a measure of the health of 14,152 populations of 3,706 species.

58% decline between 1970 and 2012. This means that, on average, animal populations are roughly half the size they were 42 years ago.

Visit: http://www.panda.org/about_our_earth/all_publications/lpr_2016/

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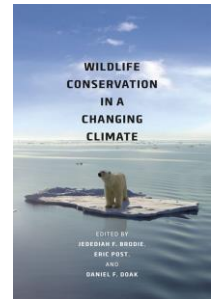
The Anthropocene versus the wonders of the natural world

A proposed epoch dating from the commencement of significant human impact on the Earth's geology and ecosystems.

Since the 1950s:

- Human population growth
- The transformation / development of land
- Habitat loss
- Plastics
- Increased consumption of fossil fuels and Co2 emissions.

Living in a age of turbulence and new political climates.



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Conservation is all about managing human behaviour

We have over exploited the earth's resources.

How do we see nature?

Do we see it as having an instrumental value which leads to a valued end product?

Or do we see it as having an intrinsic value which exists in its own right?



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Valuing nature

Every creature is better alive than dead, men and moose and pine trees, and he who understands it will rather preserve its life than destroy it.

Henry David Thoreau



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Sentience

Our task must be to free ourselves... by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature and its beauty.

Albert Einstein



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Consumptive v non-consumptive use of wildlife?



- There is a lot of anecdotal evidence that there has been a shift away from viewing animals in captivity to wanting to see them in the wild.
- Consumptive WT (hunting, fishing, zoos v non-consumptive forms (watching, photographing).
- However this dichotomy questionable:
 - Safaris can be seen as semi-captive – i.e. African reserves
 - And wildlife watching can be vicariously consumptive.

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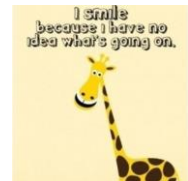
What is non-consumptive wildlife tourism?

- Wildlife is a general term that technically covers both flora and fauna, although in popular use, wildlife is mostly used to refer to animals in the wild including all kinds of insects, and marine life.
- Watching wildlife and animals is essentially an observational activity, although in some cases it can involve interactions with the animals being watched, such as touching or feeding them (UNEP, 2016).
- Morrison (1995:3) claims it "principally involves people visiting areas in order to see and gain an understanding of a wide variety of species and doing so in a manner which is environmentally responsible". (But sustainability highly debatable in 2017).
- "is about increasing the probability of positive encounters with wildlife for visitors whilst protecting the wildlife resource" (Reynolds and Braithwaite 2001:31).
- From an economic impact viewpoint: "only those visitors who identify themselves as being influenced to visit a destination to see native wildlife" (Fredline and Faulkner 2001).

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Economic impact?

- Although there are no reliable global measures of the economic impact of wildlife tourism, it is the leading foreign exchange earner in several countries (Shaffer, 2015).
- The global size of the wildlife industry is an estimated 12 million trips (UNEP/WTQ, 2006)
- Thought to be growing by 10% per annum (Mintel, 2008; UNEP, 2006).
- Attending wildlife tourist attractions (WTAs) is a prime tourist motivation (Moorhouse et al., 2015).
- Some studies exist re economic benefit. See: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2014/11/economic-benefits-protecting-wildlife/> and <https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/rspb-news/news/282239-whitetailed-eagles-help-scottish-economy-soar>

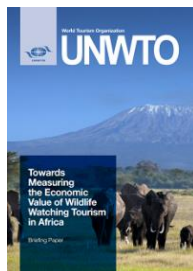


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Focus on Africa

(UNWTO Briefing paper:
<http://cf.cdn.unwto.org/sites/all/files/docpdf/unwtowildlifepaper.pdf>)

- The survey findings confirm that wildlife watching is a very important segment of tourism for most African countries, representing 80% of the total annual trip sales to Africa for the participating tour operators.
- Visitor receipts to protected areas reveal how a total of 14 African countries are generating an estimated US\$ 142 million in entrance fees.
- A typical wildlife watching tour involves on average a group of six people, lasts 10 days, has an average daily price per person of US\$ 433 and captures an additional US\$ 55 in out-of-pocket expenses per person, per day.



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Relationship to other nature-based tourism products

- Can be an educational and emotional activity .
- Affective and cognitive motives underpin and shape the tourist experience (Curtin, 2010).
- Wildlife tourists are a complex, non-homogenous sector.



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Time spent v location

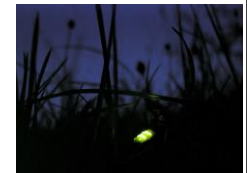
- Wildlife watching activities can range from informal visits to nearby countryside to see local wildlife.
- day trips whilst on a rest and relaxation holiday.
- highly organised, high-end, tour itineraries to see exotic wildlife in diverse and often remote settings (Knight, 2009).



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Target species

- WT has a wide product spectrum.
- Focused on large, charismatic mammals such as polar bears, elephants, lion, tiger plus iconic marine wildlife including, dolphins, dugongs, turtles, sharks.
- Also includes
 - Birds
 - Flowers, trees and plants
 - Butterflies and moths
 - Dragonflies
- not always 'cute, cuddly, human-safe orientated, charismatic or necessarily attractive such as reptiles, amphibians and other insects.



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Product spectrum

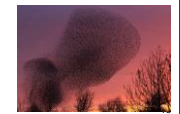
- Specialist mammal watching,
- habitat specific tours,
- floral and butterfly tours,
- thrill and adventure seeking activities,
- safaris and cruises,
- conservation or research orientated trips,
- direct embodied experiences such as feeding wildlife or 'swim-with' (snorkelling) tours with charismatic marine mammals and other large marine fauna
- Endless possibilities
- Linked to other activities
- Wildlife + concept
- Wildlife tourism trails



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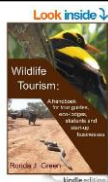
Prerequisites for development

- Destination marketers often focus on attractive wildlife icons which support socially constructed ideas of what constitutes an appealing 'zoological gaze'; usually based on animals' appearance, charisma and behaviour (Tremblay 2002).
- Certain conditions are favoured:
 - For the mass market, focal species are more sought after if they are rare, exotic, charismatic or flagship.
 - Habitats must be relatively accessible.
 - The most successful WT takes place where the wildlife has predictable behaviour which occurs within a relatively small spatial area:
 - E.g. watering hole, migratory routes, nesting sites.



Why the growing interest?

- What has come first? A contemporary quest for wildlife encounters or the business interests and marketing that correspond with it?**
- What influences the 'phase before the 'gaze'?
- Media representations?
- Tourists' desire for "intellectual, physical, and spiritual stimulation" from their travels (Mintel, 2008).
- Identities / lifestyles, interests and activities spilling over into holiday behaviour (Curtin, 2009).
- Social representations of animals?
- Biophilia?



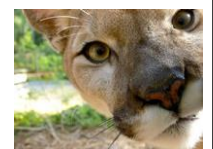
The eyes have it!

Berger (1980: 2) claims that when we gaze upon animals, we hold a mirror up to ourselves.

Wild animals are a source of fascination because they are more than mere objects.

Animals are subjects that provide "a window into which we can look and from which someone looks out" (Rolston 1987:26).

As animals cannot reveal their thoughts to us, we impose our own interpretations of their world. Therefore, we tend to understand animals in terms of our own human experience, language and emotions (Anthropomorphism).



Human fascination of wildlife



- A wild animal is the very 'embodiment of 'otherness' being both outside human society and inside human culture' (Beardsworth & Bryman, 2001:85).
- "Both like us, but not us" human-like characteristics usually refer to the extent to which tourists can empathise with animal behaviour or attributes. (Franklin, 1999:9).
- Animal performance and theatre is thus linked to the concept of memorable wildlife encounters and anthropomorphism in so far as the place (habitat) is the arena and the animals are the actors (Curtin, 2010b.)

Brings performance to an otherwise still landscape

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The fight for life.....the hunt and the chase of the everyday



Wildlife as a barometer

The canary in the coal mine.

Migrations – arrivals and departure of signature species.

A sign that the universe is still working; there is still order.

Important in this anthropogenic era; something that we can rely on...some ray of hope.



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Interest in wildlife

- Greater urbanisation
- Stress
- Interest in the natural world
- Media attention
- The psychological benefits of nature



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Human benefits of wildlife watching

- The human relationship with nature is one of individual, intimate communication, often beyond accurate articulation.

- 'At-one-ness'
- Eye to eye moments
- Connection with other life forms
- Empathy – shared behaviour and instincts
- Survival – life's challenges
- Peak experiences / transcendence (Maslow, 1974)
- Moments of 'flow' (Csizszentmihalyi, 1990)
- Self development – skills, tracking, photography, identification etc (Curtin 2009)



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Wildlife Tourism and conservation

- Literature is divided on the symbiotic relationship between conserving species and wildlife tourism.
- In principle tourism can provide financial contributions to conservation and local communities (Pennings et al., 2004; Tisdell and Wilson, 2002, Walpole and Leader-Williams, 2002).
- And also through non-financial contributions, socio-economic incentives and education (Higginbottom et al., 2001; Orams, 1995).
- However the negative impacts regarding habitat destruction, disturbance, food provisioning, photography, noise and habituation dominate the literature on impacts.

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Increased visitor numbers and pressures on iconic sites/disturbance

Natural environment and wildlife belongs to everyone and therefore often perceived as a 'free good'.

Open to anyone at any time.

- 1) can make disturbance difficult to manage.
- 2) Does not directly financially contribute to the sector or to conservation.

According to operators: "their sheer numbers and tourist behaviour is where most of the threats regarding disturbance are coming from".



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Increased visitor numbers and pressures on iconic sites/disturbance

Perceptual and physical carrying capacities – some places have reached saturation

The fragility of some species and habitats which are visited

The lack of strategic vision or overall management plan for wildlife tourism destinations



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Management options – Ecological and human

Physically separating visitors from the natural environment or by influencing the spatial distribution of visitors

First, physical controls to "harden" the natural environment, such as barriers, boardwalks, paths, and carefully placed tourist facilities and no-go zones.

Direct controls such as rules, regulations, permits and charges to prohibit or restrict detrimental human behaviour e.g. licenses for operators

Indirect mechanisms are used to seek appropriate behaviour on a voluntary basis via environmental education programmes



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Managing wildlife tourism



➤ Just being there has a direct impact on the wildlife (Green and Giese 2004; Reynolds and Braithwaite 2001; Tremblay 2001).

➤ Balancing act

➤ How to incorporate, plan for and manage the human dynamic of wildlife tourism to reap the benefits whilst mitigating for the negative impacts of visitation? (Morrison, 1995; Kazmierow et al. 2000).

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Visitor management

1. Visitor **numbers can be restricted** to cause the minimal amount of disturbance as possible.
2. Altering the **spatial and temporal distribution of visitors** (Higginbottom *et al.* 2003).
3. Tourism activity can be **reduced or restricted during sensitive phases** of an animal's lifecycle, at breeding sites, haul-out sites and at feeding, watering and resting stations.
4. Visitor behaviour can be modified through **direct instruction and supervision** by a tour leader; particularly aspects such as noise, proximity, disturbance, flushing, feeding, spotlighting and flash photography (Boren *et al.* 2009; Curtin, 2009).

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The convenience principle: making wild places accessible (Higginbottom, 2004)

- E.g. Commodification of nature (i.e. Japanese monkey parks) – moral and practical dilemmas

Negative impacts

- Food provisioning
- Creating car parks / roads / infrastructure
- Raises concerns regarding feeding
- Reliance / dependency / over-population
- Disease transmission
- Loss of habitat

Positive impacts

- Use of zones protects wider habitat
- Easier to maximise revenue
- Easier to manage human interaction
- Opportunities for interpretation
- Greater opportunity to engage public awareness / education / web cams



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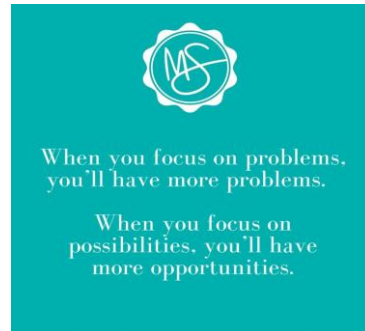
How could/should financial contributions be used?

- Higginbottom and Tribe (2004) set these out:

 1. Deliberate wildlife management and supporting research
 2. Direct contributions to fund conservation projects / initiatives
 3. Provision of socio-economic incentives to operators or communities creating an incentive to act sustainably
 4. Education of visitors encouraging emotional connection, voluntary contributions, enhanced political support.

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The future: dilemmas and opportunities



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Increasing wider knowledge and appreciation of nature: 'The reawakening'

- Creating more diverse nature reserves
- Using interpretation to widen interest away from the purely iconic and charismatic
- Creating emotional responses to nature
- Engendering relationships of care
- Use nature's events to showcase conservation



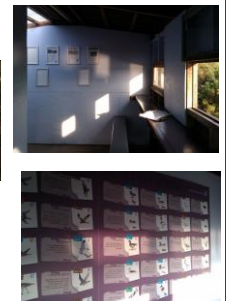
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Opportunities

Reserves provide (sometimes comfortable) hides and interpretation



..... and also help to widen interest away from the usual charismatic or flagship species



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Meeting market demands



1. The experienced and knowledgeable who need very little intervention or assistance;
2. The fairly experienced but in need of direction, interpretation and signposting; and finally,
3. The novices who are relatively inexperienced who need help identifying locations that ensure positive experiences – i.e. the post Spring Watch WTs.

See also Duffus and Dearden (1990)

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Mediating and managing the experience by using guides

- Guides are a fundamental mechanism for protecting species against disturbance.
- Act at the interface between visitor behaviour and the wildlife and can therefore educate tourists and modify unwanted behaviours such as trampling and creating noise (Curtin 2009b).
- Guides are difficult to recruit, career prospects are often very limited and poorly paid, and the guiding industry has a poor status.
- DIY tourists need to engage with the wildlife guiding sector as this will enhance their experience whilst avoiding disturbance.



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Non-consumptive wildlife tourism is a useful vehicle for (a) re-engaging people with nature, and (b) understanding why nature is so significant to people

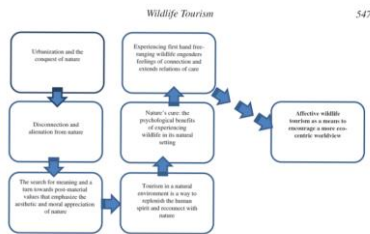


Figure 1. Wildlife tourism as a way to reconnect people with nature.

See Curtin & Kragh, (2015): <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10871209.2014.921957>

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Case study 1: Maximising access and revenue

- [The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds](#)



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Case study 2: Wild Scotland, wildlife tourism association

- [Wild Scotland](#)



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Summary

- Wildlife tourism is here to stay and will continue to grow.
- Tourists are seeking greater meaning to their touristic experiences – searching for authentic and memorable interactions with people, places and wildlife.
- We have to find ways of reducing negative impacts and increasing positive outcomes.
- We must be careful of how places and species are marketed, not concentrate on just the iconic and charismatic.
- We shouldn't be afraid of regulation, demand pricing, policing and curbing capacities and adopt a limits to growth policy.
- We should use it as a vehicle to engender care for our biodiversity especially in this age of political uncertainties.

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