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2017 Symposium: Wildlife Tourism in Japan

Sunday April 9th Meiji University's Global Hall

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Although modern life restricts our daily connections with nature and wild animals, the inherent desire to see animals in both wild and captive settings has instigated a flourishing wildlife tourism industry estimated to total 12 million trips annually at a growth rate of 10% per year (Curtin & Kragh, 2014; Newsome and Roger, 2013). The intrusion of humans into the lives of these animals, however, presents many challenges with regards to minimizing disturbance of species and habitats, managing tourist expectations and behaviour (Curtin, 2010), and promoting sustainability and conservation. This symposium outlined i) why animals capture our imagination; ii) how the lives and performances of animals become agents and co-constituents of tourist experiences; iii) the spectrum of wildlife tourism opportunities; and iv) the dilemmas of managing these touristic encounters with wildlife (Moorhouse et al., 2015).

The symposium brought together an Anglo-Japanese panel with expertise across both applied and academic fields. First was a keynote by Dr Susanna CURTIN (Bournemouth University) entitled “The call of the wild: opportunities, practices and dilemmas of wildlife tourism.” Next, case studies were introduced from Hokkaido, Amami Oshima and the Nagano snow monkeys to give insights into the current management practises, opportunities and dilemmas surrounding wildlife tourism. First, Dr Tetsuya AIKOH (Hokkaido University) talked about “The current state of wild animal feeding and visitors attitudes in suburban forests” in Sapporo. Next, Dr Takahiro KUBO (Japan’s National Institute for Environmental Studies) introduced “Wildlife tourism in Amami Oshima: Conservation promotes sustainable tourism.” After the interval, Ms Haruko MASUO (NIGN / Shinshu University) explained the growing fame of the “Onsen-loving snow monkeys: Jigokudani wild monkey park.” Lastly, there was a panel discussion, facilitated by Prof Makoto NAGAHATA (Meiji University) with Dr Thomas JONES (Ritsumeikan APU).

