



# Emerging Voices for Animals in Tourism

Edited by Jes Hooper and Carol Kline



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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library, London, UK.

ISBN-13: 9781800625242 (hardback)  
9781800625266 (ePDF)  
9781800625259 (ePub)

DOI: 10.1079/9781800625259.0000

Commissioning Editor: Claire Parfitt

Editorial Assistant: Emma McCann

Production Editor: James Bishop

Typeset by Exeter Premedia Services Pvt Ltd, Chennai, India

Printed and bound in the UK by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CRO 4YY

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# Acknowledgements

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We express our gratitude to the many scholars, animal advocates, artists, journalists and non-governmental organizations who have contributed to – and continue to grow – the Emerging Voices for Animals in Tourism (EVAT) community and for all the work they do to improve the lives of animals in tourism.

Thank you to our reviewers who spent time carefully reviewing the chapters enclosed in this volume. Their questions and suggestions were invaluable to making this a stronger body of work and contribution to the field of animal ethics: Emily Höckert, Erica von Essen, Azade Özlem Çalık, Chris Hurst, Kate Marx, Leah Joyner, Adam Keul, Mikko Äijälä, Meghan Muldoon, Valerie Sheppard, Susan McHugh, Kate Dashper, Caroline Schuhmacher, Katja Guenther and Thomas Aiello.

And certainly, we offer our love and gratitude to the non-human animals we are fortunate enough to share our lives with: Olly, Tiggy, Graeme, Ursa, Booker and Dean.

## Photographs

**Page xii** - Ora grooming a rescued chimpanzee at the Chimpanzee Sanctuary and Wildlife Conservation Trust, Ngamba Island, Mukono District, Uganda. Credit: Jo-Anne McArthur/We Animals Media.



**Page 192** - Ear tags and bones next to a quarantine site in Israel. Credit: Jo-Anne McArthur/Israel Against Live Shipments/We Animals Media.



# **In the Beginning ...**

**Gordon Meade**

We are fur.  
We are fin.  
We are skin.  
We are scale.

We are wing.  
We are feather.  
We are common.  
We are rare.

We are plain.  
We are mountain.  
We are ocean.  
We are mire.

We are earth.  
We are wind.  
We are water.  
We are fire.

# 1 Emerging Voices for Animals in Tourism – The Humans, Animals and Academic Inquiry at the Frontier of Tourism’s ‘Animal Turn’

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© CAB International 2024. *Emerging Voices for Animals in Tourism* (eds J. Hooper and C. Kline)

DOI: 10.1079/9781800625259.0001

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Despite the lengthy history of animal tourism across the globe, the ethical, moral, social and philosophical consequences of tourism for animals have only recently been emphasized to any great degree in tourism scholarship. By following other fields such as geography and anthropology, each of which have undergone the ‘animal turn’ (Ritvo, 2007; Kirksey and Helmreich, 2010), animal representation in tourism literature has begun to get traction. However, the disparate fields

addressing animal tourism remain largely separate, siloing the voices both inside and outside of tourism academia. Furthermore, many of the published works about animals in tourism in all disciplines are predominantly focused on tourism in economically developed nations, and the voices of those working on the ground to increase awareness and to improve the lives of animals can often be absent from scholarly debate. Therefore, an inclusive platform to discuss the ways tourism is impacting animals in all regions of the world has been missing.

The Emerging Voices for Animals in Tourism (EVAT) community was established in 2022 with the aim to fill this void. Through a series of networking opportunities, including a biennial conference and this book volume, we seek to provide a platform for the voices whose progressive ideas, innovative methods and daring outreach can inspire real-world change for animals in tourism. EVAT brings together the works of early career researchers, scholars from less-represented demographics, and those from varying academic and creative fields. In doing so, we hope to challenge the systemic power dynamics that are all too inherent to academic systems which have traditionally silenced marginalized communities through disproportionate opportunities and representation. Thus, EVAT serves the voices of early career scholars, artists, activists and professionals who have thus far found themselves without a platform to share their ideas, experiences and fresh perspectives on issues concerning the lives of animals impacted by tourism. Through EVAT we aim to enable long-term capacity building and we hope to see collective projects form (and evolve) between the various individuals, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and institutions that have contributed to this growing community, including those whose work is represented in this volume. This volume provides an insight into the research which is being conducted as the frontier of the animal turn in tourism. Our use of the word 'frontier' here is to say that we hope EVAT will help to blur the 'borders' or boundaries between segmented groups who bring animals into the debates concerning ethical and sustainable tourism.

To highlight the various modes of emergence within this multidisciplinary space, we have arranged this volume into four sections: (i) Emerging Motivations; (ii) Emerging Narratives; (iii) Emerging

Cultures; and (iv) Emerging Reflections. Each section encompasses a range of topics that involve animals in tourism, from animal ethics, welfare, politics and history, to theoretical explorations that seek to bring in the animal to human-dominated discourses within the tourism and leisure space. Our contributors explore human–animal relationships across different geographic locations, species and contextual settings. As you read through this book, you will journey between zoos, sanctuaries, shelters and ‘the wild’, as our contributors will introduce more-than-human encounters in the urban and suburban, to the tropics, snow-capped mountains and into the ocean. Each section of this volume thus serves as an example of the depth of knowledge and understanding still to be explored, as we collectively bring animals to the fore of tourism discussion.

## **Emerging Motivations**

In Section 1 Emerging Motivations, our contributors look at the tourist perspective, and ask why there is a desire to engage with animals when travelling. This section includes chapters that explore tourist motivations to interact with and view animals in tourism and how this impacts the lives of the animals involved.

First within this section, Rie Usui, Thomas E. Jones and Takahiro Kubo investigate the human–rabbit relationships on Ōkunoshima Island, also known as ‘Rabbit Island’ in Hiroshima, Japan. Here the authors witness the phenomenon of rabbit feeding, and ask why people travel to Rabbit Island specifically to feed the feral rabbits that inhabit it. Tourists speak of their desire to feed the rabbits, to get close to them, and to assist them in survival. Yet as Usui, Jones and Kubo encounter, not all motivations to feed animals in tourism are altruistic in nature. The findings they present in Chapter 2 ‘Travelling to Feed Animals: Identifying Motivations of Tourists on ‘Rabbit Island’, Japan’ stand in contrast to the prevailing academic interpretations of tourists’ motivations to feed animals in which they reveal the interplay between animal feeding, egotism and objectification.

Chapter 3, 'Fighting Animals in Tourism' by Zuzana Velenska, takes us on a journey through time and location to explore the global fascination with animal fighting, a topic that has received scant attention within the academic literature. In a bold and provocative chapter, Velenska explores the motivational drivers of tourists to watch and orchestrate animal fighting, and delves into the tense intersections between tradition, culture, heritage, aggression, spectacle and animal welfare.

Providing a respite from the insidious self-serving motivations of tourists, Chapter 4 'Volunteer Tourism and Dog Rehoming: Collaborating for Interspecies Cultures of Care' by Nora Schuurman reflects on the rising phenomenon of animal-based volunteer tourism. In a lateral approach to volunteer-tourism research, however, Schuurman highlights the relationship between voluntary work, animal rescue and travel as she investigates the motivations of volunteers from Finland working with and travelling to rescue centres in host countries. Her research approach reveals the reasons why volunteering for animal rescue involves travel and how this in turn can be assessed through the lens of tourism academia.

Finally, the Emerging Motivations section closes with Jacqui Sadashige's research which engages with a shift in tourism operator approach to tourist–elephant interactions in one of Thailand's elephant sanctuaries. In a move that has emerged from the recognition of elephant agency and welfare, in 2018 the Burm and Emily's Elephant Sanctuary in Thailand adopted a new 'hands-off policy', which revoked the rights of visitors to physically touch the elephant residents. In 'Hands Off the Herd: Negotiating Tourist Desires and Animal Welfare at a Thai Elephant Sanctuary', Sadashige takes a closer look at the motivations of elephant sanctuary tourists, asking if a hands-off policy might detract or enhance the tourist experience.

## **Emerging Narratives**

Section 2 Emerging Narratives is dedicated to researchers whose work illustrates the often conflicting perspectives surrounding animal-based

tourism. The chapters in this section either reveal alternative narratives or critique the dominant one to reveal the ways that animals and the environment are impacted by social discourse.

The section opens with Chapter 6, 'Elephants and NGOs: the Complex Intersection of Advocacy and Tourism in Nepal' by Michelle Syzdlowski who comments on the political nature of stakeholder narratives that concern the treatment of working and retired elephants. Drawing from over 120 participant interviews with elephant owners, mahouts (elephant handlers) and personnel from a variety of national and international NGOs, Syzdlowski highlights the conflicting narratives that can inhibit cooperation and can act as a neocolonial mechanism by which the marginalization of Nepalese people is promoted. However, Syzdlowski demonstrates that narratives of understanding and respect have the potential to foster enhanced multispecies welfare.

The second chapter in this section is presented by Paul Tully and Neil Carr who focus on a poorly represented species within tourism literature. Chapter 7 'Contemporary Coexistence at the Seaside: Social Narratives of Gulls Living Alongside Tourism' takes the reader to a typical seaside setting on the English coast, where seafront restaurants and the ocean attract both visitors and kittiwake and herring gulls. In a review of social narratives surrounding the portrayal of gulls by local residents, holidaymakers and tourism operators, Tully and Carr navigate the conflicting and competing interests of tourists and gulls while centralizing gulls as a species worthy of more ethical consideration.

Chapter 8 'Trick or Treat? The Dilemma of *Ceva* in North Pantanal Wildlife Tourism' by Eveline Baptistella closes the Emerging Narratives section by taking us back to the phenomenon of animal feeding. Unlike Usui, Jones and Kubo, whose research in Chapter 2 focuses on the tourist motivations behind animal feeding, Baptistella explores the varied ways that tour operators feed wildlife as a form of enticement or provisioning. The feeding of wildlife to encourage closer proximities with tourists does, however, cause political and even life-threatening complications. Through her ethnographic observations, Baptistella reveals the various discourses and ethical implications surrounding the act of *ceva*.

## **Emerging Cultures**

Section 3 Emerging Cultures is dedicated to the new ways that human and animal cultures are being formed in the tourism space. This section also provides a nuanced examination of the social cultures of animals who find themselves the focus of tourists, and so brings in the animal to what had traditionally been viewed as a human-dominated cultural space.

This section opens with Chapter 9 ‘Humano–Cat Cultures and Tourist Attitudes Towards Local Free-living Cats of the Costa del Sol’ by Kristine Hill whose research focuses on the liminality of free-living domestic cats within urban tourist hot spots on the south coast of Spain. Hill combines personal observations, participant interviews and thematic content analysis of TripAdvisor reviews to gain insight into the tourist perceptions of free-living cats, though most notably by doing so the cultures of the cats are brought to the fore as the reader learns of individual cats and their experiences.

In Chapter 10 ‘A ‘Day-dog’ Afternoon – Turkish Street Dogs as Hiking Companions’ Orsolya Barna immerses readers in the multispecies cultures emerging in Turkey’s rural hiking trails. Accompanied by street dogs, though rarely the same dog twice, hikers find themselves traversing the political, social and cultural intersection of human–animal relations in rural Turkey. Here, hikers and their transient dog companions face together the differing species’ expectations as they cross landscape boundaries.

The final chapter in this section is Chapter 11 ‘Red Fox Sociality in Japanese Captive Wildlife Tourism: a Multispecies Storytelling Approach’ by Émilie Crossley. Here we see how emergent methodologies are being applied to explore animal-based tourism. In a creative and captivating insight into fox lives, Crossley weaves together stories of the personal histories and current experiences of foxes involved in Japanese captive wildlife tourism.

## **Emerging Reflections**



In the final section, Section 4 Emerging Reflections, our contributors showcase the ways animals are represented in tourism. Chapters in this section utilize a variety of disciplinary lenses from media and linguistic studies to messages inherent in captive-animal interpretation to regenerative tourism.

In Chapter 12, ‘Mapping the North with Reindeer in 1930s British Travel Writing: Olive Murray Chapman’s *Across Lapland with Sledge and Reindeer* and Halliday Sutherland’s *Lapland Journey*’, Jopi Nyman explores the multispecies depictions of the north and the iconic nature of reindeer. Through a qualitative literature analysis, Nyman uncovers an entanglement of romanticization and appreciation for northern landscapes, people, cultures and animals, alongside a colonial, racialized and orientalist depiction of Otherly worlds that pervaded travel literature at the time. As reindeer and dog sledding lead the way for human–animal experiences in the region in the present day, Nyman’s reflections on past writings offer insight into the journeys which have carved this flourishing yet contentious touristic space.

In the second chapter in this section, ‘Meet and Greet’ Animal Experiences in Zoos: Are They Sending the Right Message?, Polly Doodson, Lucy Dumbell, Amanda D. Webber and Vicky Melfi analyse one of the most widely recognized modes of animal-based tourism: the zoo industry. Chapter 13 not only serves to represent the countless animals housed in zoos worldwide, but in doing so it asks for further consideration of the ever-popular ‘meet and greet’ animal encounters where visitors can obtain close-contact interactions with captive animals. Thus, Doodson, Dumbell, Webber and Melfi bring attention to the wider implications of human–animal interaction within tourism and the way these encounters are marketed and promoted.

Continuing with the theme of animal portrayals and media, in Chapter 14 ‘Poster of a Hyperreal Monster and the Evolving Eras of White Shark Image’, Raj Sekhar Aich demonstrates the real-world impact of popular media on the imaginaries and treatment of animals via the example of the great white shark. In this chapter readers will accompany Aich as he reflects on his immersive ethnographic research journey and the journey of the shark’s hyperreal image.

The last chapter of this section and this volume, Chapter 15 ‘Conclusion and the Way Forward’, is written by Pauline Sheldon, who provides an insightful review of the book’s contributions. Pauline brings together common themes that emerged from each chapter while emphasizing the importance of these investigations to the scholarly field of regenerative tourism.

We hope that in journeying with our contributors, the readers of this volume will continue to support the valuable contribution that emerging voices are bringing to this exciting interdisciplinary space.

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# 2 Travelling to Feed Animals: Identifying Motivations of Tourists on ‘Rabbit Island’, Japan

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DOI: 10.1079/9781800625259.0002

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## Abstract

Animal feeding is a popular activity among tourists despite its negative consequences that have raised concerns among conservationists and ecologists. There is a lack of knowledge regarding the underlying motivations of individuals who feed animals. This research aims to identify the drivers that underpin tourists' inclination to feed animals using the free-ranging feral rabbits that inhabit Ōkunoshima Island in Hiroshima, Japan as a case. A self-administered structured questionnaire survey was employed to explore the motivations behind animal feeding among tourists. In total, 138 responses were collected and the findings disclosed four primary motivations for feeding rabbits: (i) 'to get close to rabbits'; (ii) 'because rabbits are cute'; (iii) 'to make rabbits happy'; and (iv) 'to see rabbits eat'. Conversely, the drive to regulate the behaviour of rabbits scored the lowest. The present study's findings reveal that the primary motivations for feeding among tourists visiting Ōkunoshima Island can be characterized as egotistic and

instrumental in nature. This stands in contrast to the predominance of altruistic motivations typically observed in feeding behaviour outside of tourist contexts.

## Introduction

The ability to experience close interactions with animals positively influences tourists' satisfaction (Moscardo and Saltzer, 2005) and their emotional connection with them (Newsome and Rodger, 2008). One way to attract wildlife that may otherwise be indifferent to tourists is through feeding. It denotes many forms of activities and according to Newsome and Rodger (2008), four distinctive forms of feeding exist: (i) inadvertent feeding; (ii) feeding through habitat modification; (iii) structured feeding; and (iv) unstructured feeding. The first two are unintentional feeding, which includes animals obtaining food from trash cans or feeding on the grass or fruits that are planted for other purposes.

Structured and unstructured feeding are both intentional. Structured feeding is practised in a managed environment, where feeding is deliberately used by wildlife tour operators and park staff to attract wildlife (Newsome and Rodger, 2008). In tourism, provisioning is commonly used to increase the chance of viewing animals or to have closer interactions with them (Orams, 2002). Examples include scheduled feeding of wild monkeys in Japan (Knight, 2010) and using baits during shark cage diving (Becerril-García *et al.*, 2020).

Tourists also participate in structured feeding, which is provided as a tourist activity. For instance, dolphin feeding activity is offered to tourists at Monkey Mia in Australia in the presence of management staff (Smith *et al.*, 2008).

Unstructured feeding occurs in the absence of any formal management or informed supervision (Newsome and Rodger, 2008). It can take place in public spaces such as ponds, lakes and parks, as well as private properties, such as one's own backyards and gardens. Where tourist–animal interactions are not strictly regulated, feeding animals by tourists seems to be a common phenomenon throughout the world, including but not limited to Nigeria (Akinyemi, 2015), Morocco (Maréchal *et al.*, 2016) and South Africa (Barrientos *et al.*, 2020).

Many studies have reported various negative effects of structured and unstructured animal feeding (e.g. Badiella-Giménez *et al.*, 2021; Penteriani *et al.*, 2021; Smulders *et al.*, 2021). Potential negative impacts vary by species, but generally they are associated with the increase in animal population, behavioural alteration and health concerns. In unstructured feeding, there is often little control over the food given to wild animals (Newsome *et al.*, 2004), and this could have a direct and detrimental impact on animals' health. The consensus among researchers and wildlife management officials has been that the feeding of wildlife ought to be discouraged or prohibited, especially in non-captive settings. 'Do not feed wildlife' seems to have become the norm in many protected areas; however, violating the rule does not seem uncommon (Mallick and Driessen, 2003; Hockett and Hall, 2007).

Ōkunoshima Island in Hiroshima, Japan – the case we introduce in this study – is one such place where tourists frequently feed free-ranging feral rabbits inhabiting the island. In a previous study conducted about the island, Usui (2021b) revealed that feeding was one of the key elements for tourists' experiences on the island. Many tourists bring rabbit food to the island and feed rabbits freely. This unregulated feeding has generated a range of issues that have resulted from the proliferation of the rabbit population (Chugoku Shikoku Chihou Kankyō Jimusho, 2019).

While recognizing the potential negative effects of feeding animals, we are also interested in answering why tourists want to feed them – a question that has received scant attention. Usui (2021b) has pointed out that feeding was a goal as well as a means to manipulate rabbits' behaviours for human interests. She further referred to Tuan (1988) who claimed that people feel superior over animals when they can make animals beg. However, the study was limited in finding conclusive evidence, as it relied on analysis of tourists' reviews from online comments. While netnography has been acknowledged to offer several advantages, including compensating for prior knowledge (Winter, 2018) and enabling the collection of natural perspectives of tourists without influencing their behaviours or opinions (Wu and Pearce, 2014), it may not be sufficient to provide answers to all research inquiries such as

tourists' feeding motivations. There are few studies that have analysed people's motivations to feed animals (Howard and Jones, 2004; Ishida, 2013). Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to identify the motivations of tourists for feeding animals by drawing on a case from Ōkunoshima Island.

## **Motivations to Feed Animals**

Motivations to feed animals are a complex phenomenon (Maréchal, 2015). A wide range of factors presumably affect one's motivations to feed animals, including the context in which human–animal interactions occur, species of animals and people's personalities. The motivation for structured feeding by tour operators is typically driven by economic purposes (Maréchal, 2015). This not only increases the chances of spotting wild animals but also enables tourists to have closer and more intimate interactions with them (Orams, 2002; Newsome and Rodger, 2008). Such an experience would increase tourists' satisfaction (Moscardo and Saltzer, 2005), which may influence tourists' intentions to revisit the site or their opinions about tourism activities. Thus, for wildlife tour operators, the probability of viewing wildlife would affect their customer satisfaction (Dell'Eva *et al.*, 2020).

Conversely, unstructured feeding is more likely to be motivated by psychological reasons. It has been found outside the tourism context that many individuals who engage in backyard feeding experience pleasure from the activity (Howard and Jones, 2004). Furthermore, Erastova *et al.* (2021) reported that individuals engage in feeding birds to satisfy their human desire to observe or photograph them. These studies also revealed that certain individuals hold the view that feeding could compensate for natural food shortages because of land clearings and habitat degradation (Howard and Jones, 2004; van Heezik and Hight, 2017; Erastova *et al.*, 2021), which may be characterized as an empathetic/compassionate motivation. Similarly, people's motivation for wildlife feeding in cities is often driven by empathy and welfare concerns for birds (Jones, 2011; Cox and Gaston, 2018).

In the context of tourism, tourists are believed to benefit emotionally through feeding. While no study has systematically synthesized tourists' motivations to feed animals, Ishida's (2013) study provides a comprehensive basis for possible motivations for tourists to feed animals. Based on his own observations of visitors at zoos over the course of his research, Ishida categorized 14 possible motivations. Of these, 11 are relevant to unstructured tourists' feeding, namely: (i) *to draw attention from animals*; (ii) *to have close interactions*; (iii) *to see happy animals*; (iv) *to respond to begging animals*; (v) *empathetic reasons*; (vi) *to see animals eating*; (vii) *to facilitate human interactions and conversations through feeding*; (viii) *to show kindness to animals and people*; (ix) *to control animals*; (x) *to share food with others*; and (xi) *to rediscover one's inner self* (see Table 2.1).

Another study also identified motivations based on a quantitative case study from a macaque tourism site in Morocco. Maréchal (2015) identified *getting closer to monkeys*, *sense of responsibility*, *empathy* and *means to control monkeys*, which were addressed by Ishida (2013) as well as *cultural*, *religious*, *educational* and *entertainment* purposes. *Interacting with animals* and *entertainment* were also found to be the major motivations for tourists who visited the University of Ibadan Zoological Garden in Nigeria (Akinyemi, 2015). The study further found that the feeding behaviour of visitors to the park was influenced by other visitors' *social contagion*. In other words, their reason for feeding animals is because others do so.

In the case of Ōkunoshima Island, understanding tourists' needs to feed rabbits is essential as it encompasses the important element in their experience on the island. Recognizing and comprehending tourists' inclination to feed rabbits can aid tourism-management policy makers in making a balanced decision to maintain the quality of visitors' experiences and to facilitate efforts to safeguard the quality of life for the rabbits. Moreover, the investigation into the rationale behind individuals' travel to feed rabbits is a valuable pursuit, considering their ubiquitous nature and potential lack of novelty as compared to in-demand tourist activities, such as the observation of charismatic megafauna (Mariyam *et al.*, 2022).

**Table 2.1.** People’s feeding motivations identified from literature. From Howard and Jones, 2004; Ishida, 2013; Akinyemi, 2015; Maréchal, 2015; van Heezik and Hight, 2017; Cox and Gaston, 2018; Erastova *et al.*, 2021

Feeding motivations
1. To draw animals’ attention
2. To have close interactions
3. To see happy animals
4. To respond to begging animals
5. Empathetic reason
6. To see animals eating
7. To facilitate human interactions and conversations through feeding
8. To show kindness to animals and humans
9. To control animals
10. To share food (sharing is caring)
11. To rediscover the inner self
12. Cultural and religious reasons
13. Educational reasons
14. For entertainment
15. Collective reasons (I feed animals because others do so)

## Methodology

### Research design and data collection

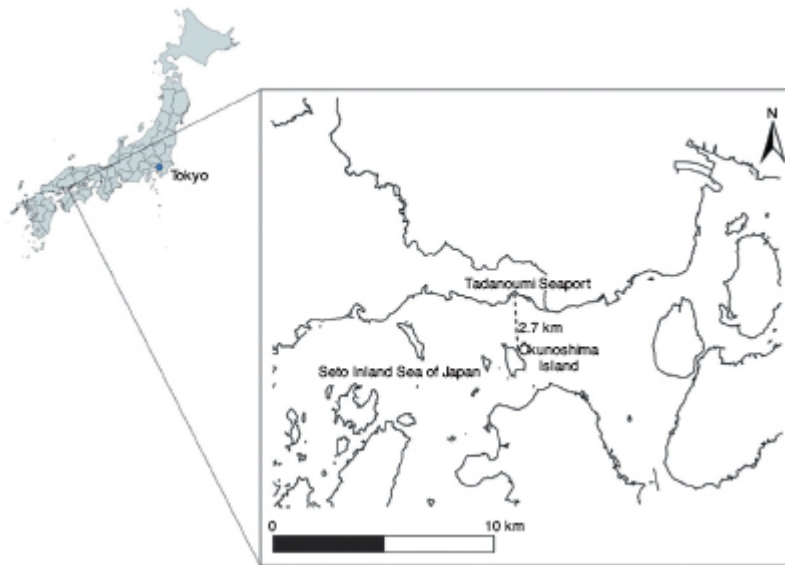
This research is a single case study in which a phenomenon is described from direct observation for the purpose of exploring new theoretical linkages and to challenge established ones (Yin, 2009). According to Lobo *et al.* (2017), a single case study can be designed to have strong internal validity for assessing the causal relationships between interventions and outcomes. Despite disadvantages related to transferability, a stand-alone case study is less time consuming but still allows the researcher to explore the data in depth (Kennedy, 1979).



A self-administered, semi-structured online questionnaire survey was conducted via Google Forms on the island around Ōkunoshima ferry port from December 2021 to March 2022. A QR code linked to Google Forms was accompanied by on-site collection days (12 December 2021 and 9–10 January 2022) to boost the response rate and observe the actual state of the visitors' responses. The survey was offered in English or Japanese language versions that were cross-checked and back-translated to ensure consistency of wordings.

### **Study site**

The study was conducted at Ōkunoshima Island (0.7 km<sup>2</sup>) in Hiroshima, Japan. The island is located in the Seto Inland Sea, 2.7 km from the mainland (Fig. 2.1). Tourists typically take a ferry or speedboat from the Tadanoumi Seaport, which runs approximately every hour. During World War II, the island was used as a secret military base for producing poisonous gas. The entire island has belonged to Setonaikai National Park since 1950, but the ruins of the poisonous gas factories and related facilities remain on the island. Almost the entire island is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Environment (MOE); however, its maintenance is consigned to the Kyukamura hotel on the island (Chugoku Shikoku Chihou Kankyō Jimusho, 2021).



**Fig. 2.1.** Map of Ōkunoshima Island. Adapted from Usui, 2021a.

The rabbits on Ōkunoshima Island are European rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), which is considered an invasive alien species in Japan (MOE, 2021). The presence of these rabbits has been reported on various Japanese islands (<https://www.nies.go.jp/biodiversity/invasive/DB/detail/10040e.html>); none the less, Ōkunoshima Island presents a distinct characteristic as the sole location experiencing a surge in tourist influx. Although the true origin of Ōkunoshima Island's rabbits remains unknown, the first population was probably introduced by humans. The island has witnessed a significant rise in its international tourist arrivals since 2014, attributed to its ubiquitous presence across social media platforms, subsequently elevating it to a popular destination for both international and Japanese tourists seeking to engage with the free-ranging rabbit population (Usui *et al.*, 2018).

The tourists at this site enjoy feeding rabbits (Usui, 2021b), which is likely to have contributed to the proliferation of the rabbit population. Since before the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak, numerous visitors have been observed feeding the rabbits, with some individuals even bringing along sizeable bags of pellets to distribute to the rabbits. Additionally, some tourists leave excess food behind for the rabbits when departing from the island. Feeding by tourists, coupled with

the rabbits' lack of natural predators, has led to a dramatic increase in the rabbit population, which was estimated to be 1000 prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (Chugoku Shikoku Chihou Kankyō Jimusho, 2019). The growth has triggered a host of issues related to the explosion of the rabbit population, including health problems among the rabbits (DeMello, 2019).

Moreover, the situation surrounding the rabbits inhabiting Ōkunoshima Island is complicated by the fact that the species is non-native to Japan. According to the Japanese Wildlife Protection and Hunting Law, the rabbits on Ōkunoshima Island should be eliminated. Despite the need to manage the rabbits, there is a divergence of opinion regarding who bears responsibility for their management and how such a measure should be implemented. While signage on the ferry informs visitors of the rules for interacting with the rabbits, these interactions are not subjected to strict regulation. The rules merely serve as an encouragement and do not hold any legal authority. Previously, the sole hotel on the island sold rabbit food and provided a water station for the rabbits, but it has since ceased selling rabbit food. Instead, small bags of pellets are sold by the ferry ticketing office at Tadanoumi Seaport, with the amount of pellets per bag adjusted according to season. Despite the availability of rabbit food, the national park has prohibited feeding the rabbits, with interpreters discouraging such interactions. Nevertheless, they are reluctant to prevent visitors from feeding the rabbits, leading to unregulated and often excessive food.

While the aforementioned issues were prevalent on the island, the advent of the pandemic has reset the challenges associated with the management of the rabbit population, given the marked decline in their numbers. The more recent rabbit population, counted in December 2021, was estimated to be 330 (R.H. Hirashima, 2021, unpublished data). The sharp decline observed in the population of rabbits is plausibly attributable to the reduced visitation rate as a consequence of the pandemic, though this is speculation.

## **Questionnaire Design and Development**

The survey questionnaire consisted of five sections, which addressed: (i) respondents' demographic characteristics; (ii) information regarding their visit; (iii) feeding practices; (iv) perceptions and knowledge pertaining to the rabbits; and (v) their intentions to revisit the island. The questions related to feeding motivations were developed based on a literature review and observations conducted at the research site between 2016 and 2021. The direct observations, particularly those related to tourist–rabbit interactions, informed the selection of relevant items for the feeding motivation questions. To assess tourists' motivations for feeding rabbits, 11 questions were presented, in which respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement on a five-point Likert-type scale. The questionnaires also captured socio-demographic variables along with the respondents' motivations, interactions and frequency of feeding. Egotistical tourist urges such as 'attention' and 'physical proximity to animals' were monitored along with more altruistic motivations such as feeling pity or empathy for wildlife (Knight, 2010).

The questions related to the participants' perceptions and knowledge of the island's rabbits were developed following the direct observations conducted over the years by the first author. Likert-scale questions were also employed as a tool for quantifying and gauging these cognitive facets.

## **Data Analysis and Results**

### **Profile of respondents**

A total of 138 responses were collected between 12 December 2021 and 14 May 2022. Descriptive statistics were computed to show the overall respondents' demographic information. Respondent demographics are shown in Table 2.2. Among the 138 valid responses, 73 (52.9%) were females and 62 (44.9%) were males. Three respondents (2.2%) chose not to specify their gender. Most respondents were aged between 18 and 39 years ( $n = 79$ , 57.3%), followed by those aged 40–49 years ( $n = 34$ ,

24.6%), 50–59 years ( $n = 19$ , 13.8%), 60–69 years ( $n = 5$ , 3.6%) and above 70 years ( $n = 1$ , 0.7%).

Almost all respondents ( $n = 136$ , 98.6%) resided in Japan during the research. Of all the respondents, 132 (95.7%) were Japanese citizens. A significant proportion of the respondents were from different regions of Japan, with a majority of 37% originating from the Chugoku region, situated approximately 100 km from the island. Furthermore, 19.6% of the respondents were from the Kansai region, located approximately 200 km away, and 18.8% were from the Kanto region, situated at a distance of approximately 600–700 km from the island.

Table 2.3 shows the information regarding respondents' visits during the survey. More than half of the respondents were first-time visitors ( $n = 77$ , 55.8%) and nearly a quarter of them were repeat visitors who had visited the island more than four times ( $n = 34$ , 24.6%). Most tourists spent no more than 4 hours on the island ( $n = 78$ , 56.5%), and 25.4% stayed overnight on the island. Twenty-six (18.8%) respondents travelled to Ōkunoshima Island alone. The group size ranged from two to 50. Most respondents ( $n = 60$ , 43.5%) travelled in pairs. In responding to who they travelled with (respondents were asked to select all options that apply), 65 respondents came with family, 24 came with partners and 19 came with friends. Most of the respondents visited the island to interact with rabbits ( $n = 127$ , 90.1%).

### **Important travel-decision factors**

Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement on a five-point Likert-type scale regarding the factors that influenced their decision to visit Ōkunoshima Island. Table 2.4 presents the means and standard deviations for seven travel-decision factors by number of visits (first visit, second visit, etc.). 'Health condition of rabbits' was scored highest, except for the second-time visitors, yet it was rated the second highest after 'freedom to feed rabbits' (see Table 2.4). A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to determine whether the factors influencing respondents' decisions to travel to Ōkunoshima Island vary

based on the number of visits. The respondents were categorized into four groups: (i) first-time visitors; (ii) second-time visitors; (iii) third-time visitors; and (iv) repeat visitors (i.e. four or more visits). The MANOVA results revealed that there was a significant difference among the groups, Pillai's Trace = 0.001,  $F(21, 390) = 2.27$ ,  $P < 0.005$ , multivariate  $\eta^2 = 0.109$ . Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted on each dependent variable as a follow-up test for the MANOVA. 'Importance of being able to pet rabbits' was significantly different among the four groups,  $F(3, 134) = 4.86$ ,  $P < 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.098$ . The Tukey honest significant difference (HSD) post hoc analysis revealed that first-time visitors ( $n = 77$ ,  $\mu = 4.17$ ) rated significantly higher than repeat visitors ( $n = 34$ ,  $\mu = 3.29$ ).

**Table 2.2.** Respondents' age and gender

Age (years)	Gender			Total (%)
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Prefer not to answer (%)	
18–29	17 (12.3)	21 (15.2)	2 (1.4)	40 (29.0)
30–39	18 (13.0)	21 (15.2)	–	39 (28.3)
40–49	18 (13.0)	15 (10.9)	1 (0.7)	34 (24.6)
50–59	7 (5.1)	12 (8.7)	–	19 (13.8)
60–69	1 (0.7)	4 (2.9)	–	5 (3.6)
Above 70	1 (0.7)	–	–	1 (0.7)
Total (%)	62 (44.9)	73 (52.9)	3 (2.2)	138 (100)

**Table 2.3.** Information about visits to Ōkunoshima Island

Characteristics of the visit(s)	n (%) <sup>a</sup>
Number of visit(s)	
Once	77 (55.8)
Twice	19 (13.8)
Three times	8 (5.8)
Four or more times	34 (24.6)
Total time spent on the island	

Less than 2 hours	27 (19.6)
From 2 hours to less than 3 hours	35 (25.4)
From 3 hours to less than 4 hours	16 (11.6)
From 4 hours to less than 5 hours	10 (7.2)
More than 5 hours	15 (10.9)
Overnight stay	35 (25.4)
Who did you visit the island with? (select all that apply)	
Family	65
Friend(s)	19
Colleague(s)	3
Alone	26
Partner	24
Other	7
Purpose of visit (select all that apply)	
To interact with rabbits	127
To see islands and sea	44
To spend time in nature	43
To relax	40
To study history	37
To stay at Kyukamura hotel	20

<sup>a</sup>Percentages are only provided for categories where respondents could select only one option.

Table 2.5 shows the results of respondents' knowledge about Ōkunoshima Island's rabbits. When asked whether respondents knew the rabbits on Ōkunoshima Islands were considered invasive alien species, half of them answered 'No' ( $n = 70$ , 50.7%). Only 34.1% of the respondents were aware of this fact.

### **Perceptions about rabbits and interactions with them**

Respondents were asked to rate ten statements regarding interactions with Ōkunoshima Island's rabbits using a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). The results are shown in Table 2.6 by number of visits group. All groups scored highest on 'safety is important when interacting with animals such as rabbits'. A MANOVA was conducted to compare the four visit-number groups. Results indicate that there were significant differences with visit number [Pillai's Trace = 0.428,  $F(30, 381) = 2.11$ ,  $P < 0.005$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.143$ ]. Univariate ANOVA and Tukey's HSD post hoc test were conducted as follow-up tests. The ANOVA results indicate that 'Ōkunoshima Island's rabbits are like pets' [ $F(3, 134) = 5.21$ ,  $P < 0.005$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.105$ ], 'Ōkunoshima Island's rabbits are happy' [ $F(3, 134) = 8.61$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.162$ ], 'I feel superior over rabbits when they beg me' [ $F(3, 134) = 5.43$ ,  $P < 0.005$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.108$ ] and 'I avoid injured rabbits' [ $F(3, 134) = 7.33$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.141$ ] significantly differ. Tukey's HSD post hoc results indicate that repeat visitors scored significantly lower than first- and second-time visitors on two statements: 'Ōkunoshima Island's rabbits are happy' and 'I feel superior over rabbits when they beg me'. The second-time visitors scored significantly higher than the repeat visitors on 'Ōkunoshima Island's rabbits are like pets'. While respondents' overall score was low, repeat visitors scored significantly lower than first-time visitors on the statement 'I avoid injured rabbits'.

**Table 2.4.** Means (M) and standard deviations (SD) for travel-decision factors by number of visits (first visit, second visit, etc.) scored using a five-point Likert-type scale: from 1 = *not important at all* to 5 = *very important*<sup>a</sup>

Travel-decision factors	Number of visits							
	First (n = 77)		Second (n = 19)		Third (n = 8)		Repeat <sup>b</sup> (n = 34)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Health condition of rabbits (with no injury or disease)	<b>4.48</b>	0.788	4.37	1.12	<b>4.25</b>	0.707	<b>4.53</b>	0.825



Freedom to feed rabbits	4.03	1.04	<b>4.42</b>	1.02	4.13	0.991	3.85	1.13
The abundance of rabbit population	4.05	0.916	3.84	0.958	<b>4.25</b>	1.10	2.65	1.18
Being able to pet rabbits	4.17 <sup>c</sup>	0.894	4.00	1.29	3.75	1.04	3.29 <sup>c</sup>	1.47
Location as an island	3.88	1.01	3.63	1.38	3.13	0.641	3.44	1.16
Few tourists	3.53	1.05	3.58	0.961	3.25	0.707	3.62	1.33
Little regulation for interacting with rabbits	3.51	1.17	3.16	1.50	4.00	0.926	3.68	1.27

<sup>a</sup>Bold indicates the highest mean score for each group.

<sup>b</sup>Repeat means four or more visits.

<sup>c</sup>The mean difference among the four visit-number groups is significant at  $P = 0.05$ .

## Knowledge about Ōkunoshima Island's rabbits

**Table 2.5.** Knowledge about Ōkunoshima Island's rabbits

Do you know that Ōkunoshima Island's rabbits are considered 'invasive alien species'? (n = 138)	n	%
Yes, I already know	47	34.1
I don't know much detail, but I've heard about it	21	15.2
No, I don't know	70	50.7

## About feeding

The respondents' answers regarding feeding are summarized in Table 2.7. Of the 138 respondents, 118 (85.5%) reported that they brought rabbit food. The food was often brought from home ( $n = 64$ , 50.8%). Tourists brought pellets ( $n = 64$ , 35.6%), carrots ( $n = 43$ , 23.9%) and cabbages ( $n = 39$ , 21.7%). The majority spent 30–500 Japanese yen (JPY) ( $n = 48$ , 61.5%) on rabbit food. Surprisingly, four repeat visitors

spent more than 10,000 JPY, and the highest amount reported was 20,000 JPY.

The money spent on rabbit food was further compared among the four visit-number groups using the one-way ANOVA. Table 2.8 shows the results of the ANOVA. The main effect results revealed that the money spent was significantly different among the four visit-number groups,  $F(3, 91) = 5.18, P < 0.005$ . Tamhane's post hoc test was conducted to determine to what degree the groups were significantly different in money spent. The results reveal that money spent by repeat visitors is significantly higher than that spent by first-time visitors (Table 2.9).

**Table 2.6.** Means (M) and standard deviations (SD) for perceptions about rabbits and interactions by visit group<sup>a</sup>

Perception	Number of visits							
	First (n = 77)		Second (n = 19)		Third (n = 8)		Repeat (n = 34)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Safety is important when interacting with animals such as rabbits	<b>4.42</b>	0.767	<b>4.58</b>	0.769	<b>4.00</b>	0.120	<b>4.41</b>	0.892
I want to feed as many rabbits as possible	3.58	1.28	3.79	1.40	3.88	1.13	3.76	1.37
I feel loved when rabbits approach me	3.36	1.33	3.58	1.43	2.88	1.36	2.76	1.50
Ōkunoshima Island's rabbits are happy	3.44 <sup>b</sup>	1.06	3.68 <sup>c</sup>	1.00	2.63	0.744	2.53 <sup>bc</sup>	0.992
I feel trusted when rabbits approach me	3.34	1.30	3.32	1.57	3.00	1.31	2.79	1.59
I feel disappointed when rabbits don't eat my food	3.14	1.34	3.42	1.43	2.75	1.39	2.76	1.42

I feel superior over rabbits when they beg me	2.78 <sup>b</sup>	1.39	3.21 <sup>c</sup>	1.44	2.88	1.46	1.85 <sup>bc</sup>	1.10
Ōkunoshima Island's rabbits are like pets	2.96	1.34	3.53 <sup>b</sup>	1.43	2.00	1.31	2.24 <sup>b</sup>	1.28
I feel popular when many rabbits approach me	2.94	1.41	3.00	1.70	3.00	1.31	2.35	1.39
I avoid injured rabbits	2.53 <sup>b</sup>	1.47	2.16	1.34	1.38	0.744	1.38 <sup>b</sup>	0.779

<sup>a</sup>Bold indicates the highest mean score for each group.

<sup>b</sup>The mean difference is significant at  $P = 0.005$ .

<sup>c</sup>The mean difference is significant at  $P = 0.005$ .

Table 2.10 presents the respondents' motivations to feed rabbits by number of visits. 'To get close to rabbits' was rated highest among all groups except for the third-time visitor group. Both the first-and second-time visitors had a mean score higher than 4.00 for 'to get close to rabbits', 'because rabbits are cute', 'to make rabbits happy' and 'to see rabbits eat'. For the third-time visitors, the mean scores higher than 4.00 were 'because rabbits are cute' and 'to make rabbits happy'. Repeat visitors tended to score lower than the other groups. However, a MANOVA conducted to test whether the vector of 11 different mean scores differed between the four visit-number groups showed no statistically significant difference (Pillai's Trace = 0.292,  $P = 0.236$ ).

**Table 2.7.** About feeding the rabbits

Questions concerned with feeding	n	%
Did you bring rabbit food? (n = 138)		
Yes	118	85.5
No	20	14.5
Where did you bring food from? (n = 94)		
Home	64	50.8

Tadanoumi port	29	23.0
Convenience store	20	15.9
Other	13	10.3
Type of food (n = 93)		
Pellets	64	35.6
Carrots	43	23.9
Cabbages	39	21.7
Other	34	18.9
Money spent on rabbit food (n = 93)		
None	10	12.8
30–500 JPY	48	61.5
600–800 JPY	10	12.8
1,000–3,000 JPY	19	24.4
5,000–10,000 JPY	2	2.6
More than 10,000 JPY	4	5.1

### Intention to feed rabbits

Hypothetical questions were asked to determine tourists' intention to feed rabbits under monitored conditions. The rationale for addressing this question was based on Usui's (2021b) finding that tourists who visited Ōkunoshima Island enjoyed the freedom to feed rabbits without any supervision. Of the 138 respondents, 83% reported that they would feed the rabbits even if feeding was regulated and they were required to pay for the activity. The respondents were further asked how much they would willingly pay for one feeding session. The average price for the four different groups based on the number of visits is shown in Table 2.11. Although the one-way ANOVA analysis revealed that the four groups did not differ on the amount of price they were willing to pay [ $F(3, 114) = 1.95$ ,  $P = 0.125$ ], the average price repeat visitors were willing to pay almost doubled the amount other groups were willing to pay.

## Revisit intention

When asked about their intentions to revisit Ōkunoshima Island, 131 respondents (94.9%) answered ‘Yes’. However, when hypothetical questions were asked, such as ‘if feeding was prohibited’ and ‘if there were fewer rabbits’, the number of respondents who selected ‘Yes’ decreased to 82 respondents (59.4%) and 101 respondents (73.2%), respectively.

## Discussion

Most respondents in the present study were Japanese; the majority were between the ages of 18 and 49, and they represented males and females relatively equally. Although Ōkunoshima Island attracted a considerable number of international tourists prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (Usui *et al.*, 2018), almost no international tourists visited the site at the time of the survey due to the strict restrictions on international arrivals by the Japanese government, and this was reflected in the respondents’ profile. Therefore, it is important to note that the present findings are based largely on Japanese views.

**Table 2.8.** One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) summary<sup>a</sup>

Source	SS	df	MS	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Between groups	118,067,429	3	39,355,810	5.18	< 0.005
Within groups	690,840,343	91	7,591,652		
Total	808,907,772	94			

<sup>a</sup>SS, sum of squares; df, degrees of freedom; MS, mean sum of squares; *F*, *F* value; *P*, *P* value.

**Table 2.9.** Means and standard deviations for money spent on rabbit food by four visit-number groups

Money spent on rabbit food (n = 93)	First visit (n = 43)	Second visit (n = 14)	Third visit (n = 7)	Repeat visits (n = 31)

Mean	276 <sup>a</sup>	581	2014	2719 <sup>a</sup>
Standard deviation	257	1047	4502	2933

<sup>a</sup>The mean difference is significant at  $P = 0.005$ .

**Table 2.10.** Motivations to feed rabbits<sup>a</sup>

Motivation	Number of visits							
	First (n = 77)		Second (n = 19)		Third (n = 8)		Repeat (n = 34)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
To get close to rabbits	<b>4.37</b>	0.825	<b>4.26</b>	1.15	3.88	0.991	<b>3.97</b>	1.28
Because rabbits beg me	3.92	1.05	3.47	1.26	3.63	1.19	3.84	1.22
Because otherwise they would die	3.01	1.23	3.26	1.49	2.88	1.36	3.16	1.48
To control rabbits' behaviour	2.26	1.91	1.89	0.809	1.88	1.13	2.06	1.22
Because everyone does	2.40	1.30	2.63	1.34	1.50	0.758	1.78	1.31
Because I feel sorry that rabbits are hungry	2.82	1.28	3.11	1.37	3.00	0.926	3.06	1.41
Because rabbits are cute	4.26	0.850	4.11	1.20	<b>4.38</b>	0.744	3.88	1.10
To make rabbits happy	4.25	0.969	4.16	1.12	4.13	0.835	3.84	1.14
To see rabbits eat	4.26	0.943	4.16	1.26	3.75	1.17	3.50	1.37
To show people and rabbits that I am a nice person	2.52	1.42	2.21	1.51	1.75	1.04	1.94	1.44

To connect with people	2.71	1.43	2.95	1.39	2.25	1.83	2.25	1.61
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<sup>a</sup>M, mean; SD, standard deviation; bold indicates the highest mean score for each group.

Consistent with previous research (Usui *et al.*, 2018; Usui, 2021b), the majority of respondents reported that their reason for visiting Ōkunoshima Island was to interact with the rabbits. More than 85% of the respondents said they brought rabbit food from home, indicating that feeding was planned prior to making a trip to Ōkunoshima Island and it also confirmed the previous finding that feeding is an essential component of interactions with the rabbits (Usui, 2021b).

**Table 2.11.** Price respondents are willing to pay for one feeding session on average

Number of visits	n	Average price (JPY)
First	68	425
Second	16	438
Third	8	525
Repeat	26	954

Furthermore, 11 motivations in the survey can be thematically classified into three larger groups based on whether they are primarily driven by self-interest and personal gain or concern for the well-being and interests of rabbits: (i) egotistic/instrumental motivation (i.e. *because rabbits are cute, to see rabbits eat, to get close to rabbits, to control rabbits' behaviour, to show people and rabbits that I am a nice person and to connect with people*); (ii) altruistic/empathetic motivation (i.e. *because rabbits beg me, because otherwise they would die, because I feel sorry that rabbits are hungry, to make rabbits happy*); and (iii) collective motivation (i.e. *because everyone does*). Based on the mean scores for each motivation, the overall motivations of tourists to feed rabbits are egotistic and instrumental motivations. First-and second-time visitors showed stronger motivation for these. The third-time visitors also scored higher on two statements on egotistic motivation. This finding is similar to the motivation of visitors to the University of Ibadan Zoological Garden in Nigeria, where interactions with animals and personal entertainment were found to be strong

motivations (Akinyemi, 2015). In the same study, only a few respondents selected collective motivation.

There is a clear difference between the motivation of tourists at Ōkunoshima Island and outside of a tourism context, such as feeding animals in one's backyard or in urban areas. Altruistic/empathetic motivation was scored relatively low among tourists who visited Ōkunoshima Island while such motivation was reported to have primarily driven people to feed birds in their backyards (Howard and Jones, 2004; Jones, 2011; van Heezik and Hight, 2017; Cox and Gaston, 2018; Erastova *et al.*, 2021). While the altruistic/empathetic motivation did not seem to be a strong motivation in Ōkunoshima Island's tourism context, tourists at macaque tourism sites felt sorry for the wild, harsh environmental conditions that monkeys were in (Maréchal, 2015). Consequently, tourists felt the need to feed wild animals.

We did not find statistically significant differences among groups with different numbers of visits and motivations to feed rabbits. Although little is known about feeding motivation, some factors, such as age and culture, are believed to affect one's attitude towards feeding wildlife (Orams, 2002; Zhao, 2005; Fuentes, 2006). In the present study, we were unable to test whether these factors influence the motivation to feed animals because of the small and unequal sample sizes for age groups and the lack of diversity in respondents' nationality. Conducting the survey mainly through an online questionnaire made the probability sampling procedure difficult. One possible selection bias in web surveys is under-representation of the elderly population (Bethlehem, 2010). The respondents' profiles in the present study showed that 60 year olds or older were less than 6%. However, comparing the present data with other surveys (face-to-face) conducted by the MOE in 2019 showed some similarities in respondents' compositions (i.e. more than 70% of all the respondents were aged between 10 and 40 years, and the proportion of males and females were 53 and 46%, respectively). This indicates that our respondent profile may closely represent the actual visitor population to Ōkunoshima Island. Furthermore, similar to the MOE's 2019 survey, first-time visitors consisted of more than half of the respondents in the present research.



In adopting this single case study, generalization of the results is limited and the findings may be unique to Ōkunoshima Island or to the Japanese. The subjects of the present study were rabbits, which are typically described as cute and cuddly. Animals that have such characteristics attract people (Kellert, 1996; Moscardo and Saltzer, 2005). This explains why 'to get close to rabbits' was rated high. In contrast, animals in the opposite spectrum to rabbits, such as crocodiles and sharks, may not be aesthetically appealing and people may feed them with different motivations.

While this study identified tourists' motivation to feed rabbits, the factors identified are what respondents think are their reasons for feeding. Since these are self-reported via questionnaire surveys, they may not have revealed the underlying motivation. One statement in the motivation response was 'to control rabbit behaviour', and although this was scored lower on average, it cannot be concluded that there was no dominant motivation at work. Tuan (1988) argues that kindness to or caring for others is possible when there is an unequal relationship such that one is dominant over the other. Even if this is the case, tourists may not be aware of such a motivation, as it is likely to work at an unconscious level.

## **Conclusion**

The primary objective of this research was to identify why tourists feed animals. We employed a single case study and administered a questionnaire survey at Ōkunoshima Island. Whether unstructured or structured, feeding wildlife is a common behaviour across the world and its negative impacts are well documented in the literature. We know little about why people feed animals, and this research attempted to fill this gap by identifying tourists' motivations for feeding rabbits at Ōkunoshima Island. Based on the findings in the present study, the main feeding motivations of tourists who visit Ōkunoshima Island can be described as egotistic and instrumental motivations. These findings align

with Usui's (2021b) study that Ōkunoshima Island is commonly perceived as an entertainment space.

In principle, the MOE has jurisdiction over the management policy on the island. They have assembled a committee to discuss and agree with various stakeholders on the future of the island (MOE, 2022). One of the two possible future paths is to completely ban rabbit feeding. This would probably result in losing some tourists as it is evident in our findings on their intention to revisit under regulated feeding conditions, but the reduction in the overall number of tourists may mitigate the issues associated with overcrowding on the island. Oda *et al.* (2022) estimated the amount of food brought to the island to be 27 t/year in 2017, which is more than three times the amount of grass available on the island annually. They also assumed that there was a positive correlation between the number of tourists and the rabbit population.

The other management direction is to regulate tourists' rabbit feeding. Supervised feeding can monitor what is being fed to the rabbits, control how much food is given to the rabbits and determine when the food is given. The results of our survey found that tourists are willing to participate in supervised feeding with charges. Controlling the amount of food would help reduce the amount of excess food that is left on the island, which attracts other wildlife such as rats and crows. Rabbits can also get appropriate food. The challenge is who should monitor tourists on site, as national parks in Japan are known for shortages of park rangers who actively manage on-site natural resources (Take, 2021). In 2022, the MOE introduced a new system at Ōkunoshima Island called, Ōkunoshima Island's Future Supporter System (MOE, 2022). These volunteer supporters could potentially manage tourists' rabbit feeding if structured feeding policies were implemented.

## **Acknowledgements**

This research was conducted as a part of the Animals and Tourism Research Group's project funded by the Japan Institute of Tourism Research.

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# 3 Fighting Animals in Tourism

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© CAB International 2024. *Emerging Voices for Animals in Tourism* (eds J. Hooper and C. Kline)

DOI: 10.1079/9781800625259.0003

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## Abstract

This chapter deals with animal fighting in tourism. First the scope of animal fighting in tourism is discussed. This section introduces concepts such as cultural omnivorousness and cultural tourism in postmodern consumer-centred societies dominated by sensation seeking. The text goes on to discuss the issue of collision between the two cultural patterns and of differing norms and values between the tourist and the local population. Ethical considerations of animal use in tourism are also considered. In addition to the theoretical literature conceptualizing animals in tourism, case studies dealing with specific instances of animal fighting in different parts of the world are presented. The second part of the text deals with the question of why animal fighting is attractive to people. Biological, neurological, sociological and psychological approaches to explaining aggression and voyeuristic fascination in humans are presented. The third part of the text presents a classification of human-initiated animal fights, focusing on dogfighting, bullfighting, animal-baiting, cockfighting, horse fighting, camel wrestling and orangutan boxing. The last part of the chapter looks at what could be done to improve the situation of animals that are abused, objectified and commodified by the interests of the tourism industry.

## Introduction

Animal-fighting sports represent a specific type of entertainment that uses the natural aggression of animals as a spectacle. Animal fighting in the context of tourism is a controversial phenomenon. Though widely condemned for their gruesomeness and widely outlawed, animal fights are still surreptitiously practised in some countries and at times animal fighting is celebrated as a popular tradition or protected as local cultural heritage (Cohen, 2018). Additionally, various forms of animal fighting are promoted as an attractive tourist spectacle. For the locals, the interest of tourists represents an economic opportunity. Most animal fights are associated with betting and gambling, which also adds to their attractiveness. The locals benefit from the animal fighting, while few people give much thought to the living conditions of the abused animals.

This chapter intends to provide a brief description of terms related to animal fighting and to raise awareness of animal fighting in tourism. This commentary provides a descriptive overview of the current knowledge base on animal fighting in tourism and advocates for further research to identify and hopefully prevent animal fighting worldwide. Despite legislative efforts by international agencies (such as World Animal Protection, the Humane Society International, The World Society for the Protection of Animals or Four Paws) to eradicate animal fighting on animal welfare grounds, the problem remains pervasive.

Academic research on animal fighting remains limited and more scholarly attention is needed to address this matter. In line with many other animal-use industries, the ethics of animal entertainment must be questioned. Animal ethics is concerned with the moral position of individual animals, and maintains that animal sentience and interests should be taken into consideration by humans in their interactions with them (Shani and Pizam, 2008; Sneddon *et al.*, 2016; Young and Carr, 2018; Fennell and Sheppard, 2019, 2020; Winter, 2020). Animals are a significant part of the leisure industry, however, as sentient beings, animals also have rights and welfare needs, and may also have their own leisure desires and requirements (Carr, 2009; Young and Carr, 2018).

The recent proliferation of publications on human–animal relations and animals in tourism (e.g. Franklin, 1999, 2008; Markwell and Cushing, 2009; DeMello, 2012; Fennell, 2012; Bertella, 2013; Markwell, 2015; Sneddon *et al.*, 2016; Fennell and Sheppard, 2019) does not pay



systematic attention to the broad variety of human-initiated animal fights, though some authors investigate bullfighting, camel wrestling or cockfighting. Based on gaps in the literature, future research directions are suggested.

## **The Scope of Animal Fighting in Tourism**

Blood sports in general can be traced back to the Roman Empire (Auguet, 1994). For more than 450 years the public slaughter of animals (and people) was a popular form of entertainment in the Roman Empire (Kalof, 2007; Yilmaz *et al.*, 2015b). Today, millions of animals are exploited for sport, performance and entertainment, for work and draught or as bait for hunting (Fennell, 2013; Markwell, 2015). Additionally, tourists are interested in sociocultural attractions such as festivals and spectacles. Some traditional events and festivals (such as the Bo Son Buffalo Fighting Festival in Vietnam, cockfighting in the Philippines or bullfighting in Spain) that include animals have targeted tourist markets and become an essential part of cultural tourism (Smith and Forest, 2006).

Malchrowicz-Moško *et al.* (2020) present an impact of cultural omnivorousness on controversial animal tourism. Warde *et al.* (2007) describe cultural omnivorousness as a trend in Western society for the experience of a wide variety of forms of culture. Cultural omnivorousness has stimulated to a considerable degree the development of cultural tourism (Toivonen, 2019). This trend away from general to more individualized patterns of cultural consumption is an evident feature of the postmodern leisure market characterized by a hunger for new experiences. The constant search for new, extraordinary and shocking holiday adventures is typical of tourists living in postmodern consumer-centred societies dominated by sensation seeking (Pine and Gilmore, 2011). Another reason why controversial tourism is developing in a very dynamic way can be found in the eagerness of individuals to distinguish themselves from the masses and to impress others (Malchrowicz-Moško *et al.*, 2020). Similarly, Carder *et al.* (2018)

interprets interest in animal tourism through the prism of selfie tourism. As such, tourism becomes a part of self-identity.

Any form of tourism that exploits animals for human entertainment can be considered controversial. Whether it is animal fights, animal shows or, for example, photographing tourists with baby wild animals, all of these practices can be considered unethical and denying the moral status of animals. Malchrowicz-Moško *et al.* (2020, pp. 6–7) concludes that controversial animal tourism originates from the need for 21st-century cultural travellers from wealthy countries to visit exotic destinations and, as they believe, ‘undiscovered’ cultures. Postmodern tourists want to experience unusual and exciting holiday adventures which they may boast about to impress those in their own social environment with a view of increasing social return. In the age of widespread social media use, particularly in the context of travel, social return can be conceptualized as the amount of positive social feedback that one’s social media posts will generate (Moran *et al.*, 2018).

If there is a difference in norms and values between the tourist and the local population, such as in the case of animal fighting, there is the potential risk of a collision between the two cultural patterns (Malchrowicz-Moško *et al.*, 2020). This problem particularly applies to intercontinental tourism (Reisinger and Turner, 2003), therefore a unicultural perspective is worthwhile supplementing with an intercultural approach based on comparison and the bridging of differences between cultures. Malchrowicz-Moško *et al.* (2020) particularly point out Western ethnocentrism in the interpretation of using animals in tourism. Representatives of Western cultures very often describe these practices as unethical, inhumane and barbaric. However, some local communities who are often extremely poor and are simply trying to make a living have different attitudes to animal welfare: for some of them, animals are simply economic resources to be used. In fact, Westerners are heirs of many cultural practices that cause suffering to animals too (such as the corrida in Spain, the slaughter of carp at Christmas in Central Europe and the abuse of geese and ducks for pâté de fois gras in France).

Fennell (2012) discusses the ethical considerations of animal use in tourism. He discusses baiting and fighting with clear links to the contemporary tourism industry. These sports are practised as part of the cultural tradition and ritual of many places, but the inclusion of the tourism industry has provided clear economic benefits that help to substantiate the value of these activities in some cases. Animal-fighting events are usually advertised in the mainstream media and in tourist guidebooks alike. Orbiting the event are several small-scale entrepreneurs offering handicrafts, clothes and music. The small-scale commercial activities have been documented in reference to cockfighting, where suppliers of cockfighting equipment have been joined by a number of peddlers selling T-shirts, hats, and a range of other souvenirs (Maunula, 2007; Fennell, 2012). The motivation for participation in these activities appears to be the pursuit of psychological and social pleasure. Participants use several neutralization techniques to justify this deviance, which allows for the degree of social acceptance that allows these events to carry on (Fennell, 2012).

In addition to the theoretical literature conceptualizing animals in tourism, there are many case studies dealing with specific instances of animal fighting in different parts of the world. Donlon *et al.* (2010) and Çalışkan (2010) analyse social and economic impacts of camel wrestling in Turkey and its potential as a heritage resource within this animal-based tourism enterprise. These traditional animal-fighting events attract foreign visitors because of curiosity and desire to have what they believe to be an authentic cultural experience. The impacts of festival tourism on events have been considerably documented in literature (Prentice and Andersen, 2003; Son, 2004). Traditional events of local societies are especially influenced by cultural commodification, one of the most frequently quoted side effects of tourism (Timothy and Boyd, 2003). According to Özgüç (2003), these impacts lead to changes in the structure and values of the society. These changes can potentially have positive results for animal welfare.

The power relationship between humans and fighting animals is a central theme in studies on animal fighting (Forsyth and Evans, 1998; Kalof and Iliopoulou, 2011; Harding, 2014; Yilmaz *et al.*, 2015a; Yilmaz,

2016). In comparisons with human combat sports, a frequently heard argument pertains to free will and rational choice. The assumption is that martial arts practitioners make their own decisions, while animals are manipulated and coerced by humans (Siegel and van Uhm, 2021).

## **Why Is Animal Fighting Attractive?**

It is impossible to deal with the issue of animal fighting without considering why fighting is attractive to people. Human aggression and a fascination with violence has long been studied within the fields of biology, neurology, sociology and psychology. According to the instinctive theory, aggression represents a basic organic trait. This theory considers aggression as an offensive activity associated with nutritional goals, and it cannot be eliminated but must be controlled for the good of society. Instinctive theory supports the contentious notion that sport acts as a catharsis providing a safe and socially acceptable outlet for aggression (Kent, 2007). From this perspective, watching animals struggle then allows the human, who must constantly regulate his own aggression, to give vent to this instinct. Although aggression within society is deliberately suppressed to achieve an overall level of security, behaving in a somewhat aggressive, dominating manner is advantageous according to recent research (Stangor *et al.*, 2014). Also more aggressive individuals are often considered more competent and have higher social status, partly because they can use their aggression to assert themselves (Salmivalli *et al.*, 2000).

Next to biologically determined instinctive theories of aggression as presented by Freud (1990) and Lorenz (2002), psychological approaches to aggression offer a suitable approach to studying animal fighting, especially in the form of social learning theory (Berkowitz, 1962; Bandura, 1965). Bandura (1965) has demonstrated that aggressive responses can be learned by reinforcement, by imitation or by modelling. Cohen (2018) suggests that attending a cockfight or a dogfight holds for such individuals a voyeuristic fascination. Voyeurism violates dominant moral codes in many societies. As in the case of erotic webcam, reality

television, slum tourism and mixed martial arts, it is also true for animal fighting that millions of visitors are driven by the possibility of witnessing something authentic (Calvert, 2004). Voyeurism is grounded in 'the desire to look upon something that is forbidden' (Lisle, 2004, p. 16). Participating in voyeuristic practice may trigger negative emotions alongside the positive ones. This mix of positive and negative emotions generate the desirable emotional response essential to feeling the distinctive experience (Ruebottom *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, viewing violence increases cognitive accessibility of violence and aggression. It changes our schemas and attitudes about aggression (Anderson, 1997). Watching animal fights pushes the boundaries of human sensitivity to animal suffering. Some studies point to a link between animal fighting and violent behaviour towards humans (Ensminger, 2010). There exist significant cultural variations in conflict resolution (Fry and Björkqvist, 1997). Norms and manners of behaviour, including norms concerning the regulation of violence within society and the treatment of animals, are transmitted through social practices (Boehnke, 2001).

The theoretical approaches concerning the relationship between animals and humans vary from a focus on animal fighting as a commodity and a source of wealth, to viewing animals as a source of symbolic meaning of the relationship between humans and animals. To anthropologists and psychologists, animal fighting has signified a confrontation between culture and nature, or a symbolic exposition of gender, sexual or filial relations (Beirne, 2007; Harding, 2014).

Most indigenous animal-fighting events represent rural festivals that engage with fertility rites and the reaffirmation of gendered behaviour and identity and similar cultural constructs (Kalof, 2007). Animal fighting as male-focused rituals and masculine values (sexual potency, assertiveness, independence) frame the entire events in traditional cultures, but partly also today (Geertz, 1973). Cohen (2018) claims that animal-fighting practices are heavily gendered, in terms of the composition of their membership, the machismo of their sub-cultural values and even the gender of the fighting animals.

Just as in traditional cultures, today animal fighting signals belonging to a specific social environment. Reputation, status and trust feature prominently in the communications of dogfighting organizers and dog

owners (Kalof and Taylor, 2007; Harding, 2014; Yilmaz *et al.*, 2015b). On the other hand, according to Çalışkan (2010), camel wrestles in Turkey attract visitors from a broad variety of professional backgrounds, ranging from diplomats to the unemployed. Thus, it seems that, unlike local visitors who are motivated to attend these matches out of a fascination with violence or for status- or economy-oriented reasons, tourists attend these events primarily: (i) out of curiosity; (ii) a desire to experience the local culture; and (iii) a desire to distinguish themselves in an effort to be interesting.

## **Classification of Human-Initiated Animal Fights**

While Malchrowicz-Moško *et al.* (2020, pp. 2–6) distinguish *animals in contests*, *animal slaughters* and *animals as tourist commodities*, Cohen (2018) divides human-initiated fights into fights with multiple participants and binary fights. The latter can be further divided into three categories: (i) *human-to-human fights*; (ii) *human-to-animal fights*, such as bullfighting (Marvin, 1994; Douglass, 1997), but also alligator wrestling (Riordan *et al.*, 2020), crocodile wrestling, steer wrestling (Cole, 2022; Hanshew and Nance, 2022) and hog or pig wrestling (Bolgiano and McCulloch, 2007); and (iii) *animal-to-animal fights*. The last of these, animal-to-animal fights, fall into two sub-categories: (a) *intraspecies fights*, such as fights between domestic animals (dogs, camels, buffalos, cocks, rams or horses) and elephants; and (b) *interspecies fights*. Cohen's valuable study (2018) presents comparative analysis of four specific case studies of dog-to-dog, camel-to-camel, buffalo-to-buffalo and cock-to-cock fights. He points out the historical decline of these fights from a high-class entertainment to a preoccupation of lower class or marginal groups, in which the animals serve as surrogates for their owners, bringing them honour in victory and shame in defeat.

Although various types of animal fighting differ in many ways, they share several significant commonalities. They all have deep historical roots and, except for dogfights, in the past most of them played some religious or ritual roles. For example, during the 19th century attending

a dogfight came to be considered a rite of passage into manhood for wealthy young men (Forsyth and Evans, 1998), not unlike shooting a tiger in colonial India (Cohen, 2018). However, in most instances all these animal fights have gradually been severed from their roots, became secularized activities, and in some cases underwent commercialization. For example, with the increased coverage of camel wrestling in mainstream media and in travellers' guidebooks, these cultural performances have become another of the many threads in the tapestry of attractions Turkey offers its visitors (Donlon *et al.*, 2010).

According to Cohen (2018) the legal prohibition of animal fights in virtually all Western and many non-Western countries clashed with long-established local animal-fighting traditions. In some instances, the conflict was resolved by the exemption of such localities from the application of the law, while in others the practice was protected by allotting it the status of a national heritage. Attendance at animal fights varies from a limited number of involved practitioners or aficionados (as in dogfighting or cockfighting in Western countries) to a huge local and domestic audience. Cohen (2018) claims that foreign tourists play, if at all, only a limited role in the attendance at such events or the modification of their practices. Paradoxically, the very traits which the domestication of animals by humans sought to suppress, namely their natural wildness and ferocity, have been re-cultivated for the single purpose of winning human-induced animal-to-animal fights. Betting by the public is one of the factors keeping the industry alive or even expanding (Cohen, 2018). According to Cohen (2018) human-initiated animal fights are arguably ethically less acceptable than bullfighting or big game hunting. The latter contain some marks of 'equal chances' or of a 'fair play' in the sense that both human and animal are exposed to a degree of danger (although not in all cases, such as in canned lion hunting). In human-initiated animal-to-animal fights, the animals may have equal chances of survival, but their human owners are not exposed to any mortal danger. Animal-to-animal fights are thus marked by a manipulative trait: humans reviving or enhancing the natural ferociousness of an animal and turning it into an instrument for the achievement of their owners' goals.

The savage or ‘uncivilized’ character of animal-to-animal fights might have led to their gradual prohibition in Western, and many non-Western, countries. In contrast to the considerable (though presently declining) interest tourists have shown in Spanish bullfighting, their attendance at animal fights, even where these are legally and openly practised, does not seem to be remarkably strong (Cohen, 2018). Moreover, the moderate kinds of animal fights, such as those between camels or buffalos, seem to have been more attractive to foreign tourists than the more extreme ones, such as cockfighting (or dogfighting would be, if it were accessible). However, most reports on tourist attendance at such events seem to relate to Western tourists in non-Western settings (Cohen, 2018).

## **The Most Documented Animal-Fighting Sports in Tourism**

Animal fighting in most cases belongs to the category of blood sports. It represents a type of sport or entertainment that involves bloodshed. The most common forms of animal fighting include animal baiting and animal fighting. We will take a closer look at specific places in the world where these animal fights are sought-after tourist attractions.

### **Dogfighting**

One of the most well-known animal-fighting sports is dogfighting. As with all other blood sports, dogfighting involves the abuse, suffering and neglect of animals. Dogfighting is a type of blood sport where dogs fight each other for the purposes of gambling or to entertain the spectators (Drabble, 1948; Cohen, 2018). After the fight, both dogs are usually critically wounded. Generally, the loser of a match dies or is killed by inhumane methods such as shooting or beating. These dogs generally never see a veterinarian, because the vet would recognize the injuries from dogfighting and report the owner to the authorities (Gibson, 2005).



Dogfighting has been found all over the world (Fleig, 1996; Kalof and Taylor, 2007; Harding, 2014). In most Western countries dogfighting is forbidden. However, this does not stop the organization of illegal dogfights (Yilmaz, 2016; Malchrowicz-Moško *et al.*, 2020). Countries where dogfighting is legal or semi-legal include China, Japan, Morocco and Afghanistan. In Europe illegal dogfights take place, for example in Germany, the UK, Russia, the Netherlands and in nearly every state of the USA (Yilmaz, 2016; Senoussi, 2018; Siegel and van Uhm, 2021).

Dogfights are popular among tourists in Japan (Malchrowicz-Moško *et al.*, 2020). Unlike pitbull fighting, which is illegal in Japan, the fighting of Japanese Tosa-Inu dogs is a legal and celebrated part of Japanese culture (Siegel and van Uhm, 2021). Although the organizers are fond of saying that in Tosa dogfighting the dogs do not fight to the death, there is no doubt that this is cruel treatment of animals, regardless of the cultural narrative. Despite this, 700,000 tourists visit Tosa-Inu matches in the city of Kochi annually (Wofford, 2016).

## **Bullfighting**

Bullfighting is a physical contest that involves a bullfighter attempting to subdue, immobilize or kill a bull, usually according to a set of rules, guidelines or cultural expectations. There are only a few countries throughout the world where this practice still takes place: Spain, France, Portugal, Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru and Ecuador (Marvin, 1994; Douglass, 1997). A specific kind of bullfighting is popular also in Korea, Japan and some countries of the Middle East, but this form pits bull against bull. Bloodless bullfights, in which the bull is caped but unharmed and their death only simulated, are popular in many countries and in several US states.

Although the event is advertised to tourists as a fair competition between human and animal, it is anything but fair. Before the event, bulls are weakened by severe beatings, sandbags, debilitated with laxatives and drugged. Increasingly bullfighting has become a commercial enterprise

and promoted to lure in tourists for a taste of the exotic in efforts to bolster local economies (Fennell, 2012).

As a national sport, bullfighting is one of the basic elements of Spanish identity. It is also an integral part of the tourist imagination related to Spain (Malchrowicz-Moško *et al.*, 2020). In Spain and many Latin American countries, numerous bullfights are regularly televised, and bullfighters become highly paid media stars. Partly because of tourism and television there are many more corridas today than in the past. There are several bullfighting clubs in the UK and a dozen in the USA, who organize trips to Mexico, Spain, France and Latin America to see their favourite matadors perform (Barnaby, 2022).

Approximately 250,000 bulls are killed in bullfights annually (Humane Society International, n.d.). Bullfighting's defenders often point out that the corrida employs hundreds of thousands of people worldwide. Most Spaniards have no interest in bullfighting (Duggan, 2016). Even the crowd has changed. Bullfighting is now mainly for tourists looking for a glimpse of the exotic (McCormick, 1997; Fennell, 2012).

### **Animal-baiting**

Animal-baiting is a blood sport where an animal is worried by or pitted against another animal, for the purpose of entertainment or gambling. Baiting sometimes refers to baiting wild animals with dogs. This activity is illegal in most countries with varying levels of enforcement. It is still practised in some parts of the world, including Europe (e.g. the UK), the USA and Central Asia (Fennell, 2012).

In *badger-baiting*, badgers are baited with dogs. Despite the activity being illegal, badger-baiting has continued throughout Britain and Ireland until the present day (Mooney, 2009; Barkham, 2012). Thousands of badgers are killed this way every year in Britain alone (Fennell, 2012).

*Bull-baiting* is a blood sport involving pitting a bull against dogs (Homan, 1999). Baiting and dogfighting is extremely common for

instance in India. Although the practice is illegal, dogfighting rings are becoming increasingly popular and have grown into a pastime for India's rich (Archana, 2019).

*Bear-baiting* is a blood sport in which a chained bear and one or more dogs are forced to fight one another (Storer and Tevis, 1996). Today, bear-baiting most commonly refers to the practice of using edible bait to lure bears into an area for hunting, which is still common, for example, in the USA (Humane Society International, 2012). This sport is legal in some states such as Alaska, Idaho, Maine and Michigan.

Bear-baiting is still practised also in Pakistan, where it is organized predominantly by local gangsters who own the fighting dogs (Joseph, 1997; Fakhar-i-Abbas, 2007). Bear-baiting is illegal in Pakistan and wildlife authorities are working with animal welfare groups to eradicate the events, with some success (BBC News, 2005).

## **Cockfighting**

Cockfighting is said to be the world's oldest spectator sport (Fennell, 2012; Hawley, 1993; Dundes, 1994). As with other blood sports, cockfighting is closely connected to other crimes such as gambling, drugs and acts of violence (ASPCA, n.d.). Advocates of this sport often list cultural and religious relevance as reasons for perpetuation of cockfighting as a sport (Lansang, 1982). Cockfighting is on the rise also in Western countries, such as the USA (PETA, n.d.).

Although cockfighting is banned in many countries, it is still practised in some areas of the world as a mainstream event, such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Venezuela, Andalusia and Puerto Rico, where it is a popular tourist attraction. In Bali, cockfighting is still a socially significant event (Eiseman, 1990; Couteau, 2005) and also in Puerto Rico (Dundes, 1994). Cockfighting has become a casual social activity enjoyed by locals and has become an attraction to curious tourists. This controversial tradition is considered something of a national pastime (Mazzei, 2019). Cockfighting is also a popular tourist attraction in the Philippines (Dundes, 1994) and Cuba (Marsh and Meneghini, 2017).

## Horse fighting

Horses currently play a leading role in many leisure events worldwide (Monterrubio and Pérez, 2020). The popular event of *horse wrestling* is organized in Spain. At the celebration, young people from Sabucedo (Galicia) head for the mountains at dawn. Their aim is to find the wild horses, drive them to the village and cut their manes. Each year, the festival attracts more and more visitors because of the spectacular nature of the battle between man and beast (Malchrowicz-Moško *et al.*, 2020). In some countries, tourists can visit organized *horse fighting* which is a blood sport between two stallions (Treu, 2014). Fights often take place in a fenced ring, which prevents the more submissive stallion from retreating, as it would do in a naturally occurring contest. Two stallions and a mare in heat are brought into the ring. Horse fights often result in significant injuries or death of the stallions. Although combat between horses occurs naturally in the wild, death or serious injury is almost always avoided by ritualized behaviours or the withdrawal of one of the combatants (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1961). Despite laws enacted in 1998 that ban the sport in the Philippines, many communities still participate in the long-time tradition (*New York Post*, 2014).

## Rodeo

Rodeo is a different type of mastering a wild animal by man. It includes events such as calf roping, steer roping, steer wrestling, bareback horse riding or bareback bull riding. Rodeo is popular not only in the USA, but also in Mexico and other Latin American countries (Monterrubio and Pérez, 2020).

To make cowboys look brave, the animal must be provoked into displaying wild behaviour by using electric prods or 'hotshots' that induce pain, fear or aggression. While cowboys volunteer to participate in these activities, animals have no choice (Regan, 2004). Rollin (1996) analysed the social world of these human athletes, where individuals are

raised and socialized in the values and norms deemed acceptable in this activity.

### **Camel wrestling**

Camel fighting (or camel wrestling) is presently practised mainly in Western Turkey but is also found in Afghanistan and Pakistan. According to some authors, the custom has a thousand-year history in Turkey, but it is uncertain where and how camel wrestles originated. For residents, contemporary camel wrestling offers economic, social and cultural advantages, and it has undergone increased commoditization (Cohen, 2018). A camel is declared the winner if its competitor falls to the ground or flees from the fight (Whiting, 2000).

### **Orangutan boxing**

In recent years, orangutan boxing has become increasingly popular among tourists in Thailand. Dressed in shorts and boxing gloves, orangutans are forced to fight each other in boxing rings as a spectacle for tourists. The orangutans are usually taken from the wild when they are just babies after their mothers have been killed. According to World Animal Protection (2016), it is common that orangutans are caged, beaten, starved and bullied into performing in these matches day after day. The most popular tourist destination for orangutan boxing is Safari World, a tourist attraction in Bangkok, which has received significant negative press from the international non-governmental organization (NGO) community due to its animal welfare abuses (Nagesh, 2015; Ardehali, 2017).

### **Moving Forward**

What can be done to improve the situation of animals that are abused, objectified and commodified by the interests of the tourism industry? Malchrowicz-Moško *et al.* (2020) suggest that sustainable solutions for controversial animal tourism have to be found by raising tourists' awareness by means of information and education. The persistence of the phenomenon is due to a significant extent to cultural omnivorousness which incites tourists to eagerly enjoy animal attractions and cultural events during their travel. Can traditions be a justification for the cruel treatment of animals? It is also questionable if some cultural rituals involving animals could still exist in their current forms if they were not attractive to tourists (Malchrowicz-Moško *et al.*, 2020). It is sometimes impossible to take into consideration both animal welfare and local needs. It is to be feared that faced with a growing demand for shocking attractions the tourism industry will offer more and more controversial products related to animal tourism unless animal welfare or animal rights NGOs, backed by the outcomes of research on animal tourism, succeed in creating awareness about existing bad practices among all involved parties. Given that this is an area that has so far been very poorly conceptualized in terms of solutions, inspiration can be drawn from another sector that is strongly intertwined with tourism: human trafficking. As in the case of animal abuse, human trafficking also relies upon the commodification, objectification and exploitation of marginalized others.

Similar issues are also addressed by ecofeminist discourse which draws on the concept of gender to analyse the relationships between humans and the natural world (Gaard and Lori, 1993). Ecofeminism emerged from the explorations that uncovered the linked oppressions of gender, ecology, race, species and nation. This perspective points out the analogies between discrimination against women and nature and contributes to the creation of a harmonious society that will perceive both genders, as well as other natural components, as equal parts of the global ecosystem (Gaard, 1993, 2011; Gaard and Lori, 1993).

The desire to overcome the abuse of animals in tourism is an important ethical and moral issue that should attract the interest of researchers. If the moral compass used to guide appropriate and decent

behaviour does not exist or is broken, individuals may lose the ability to treat animals (and humans) with respect, equality and compassion (Bales, 2004). This lack of empathy and unresponsive mentality is detrimental to the social development of individuals and society (Vejar and Quach, 2013).

Animal fighting is a multifaceted problem, with a solution that is just as complex. There are five main ways to address the problem of animal abuse, including animal fighting, in tourism: (i) *policy and legislative solutions*; (ii) *establishing a uniform international benchmark* for the level of dealing with animal abuse in the country; (iii) *educational solutions*; (iv) exerting pressure to *introduce ethical benchmarks on tourism operators*; and (v) exerting pressure on *tourists to take personal responsibility* (based on findings of Vejar and Quach, 2013).

Many countries have taken legislative steps in recent years to criminalize and suppress animal fighting, as this chapter has illustrated. Some governments initially made good progress to try and combat animal fighting in the country and a variety of policies and programmes have been enacted, including criminalizing animal fighting. Yet there is still a long way to go to improve the conditions of the animals that suffer worldwide. Governments and NGOs should continue educational outreach efforts because the cure for animal welfare or rights issues begins with knowledge, which this chapter seeks to deliver.

By continually conducting analyses of animal-abuse issues in other countries, it may be possible to find culturally sensitive interventions and strategies that could be more effective in changing the societal values and norms regarding this issue. The main objective is to cultivate and foster a new set of beliefs regarding animal fighting and animal abuse. It is important to explore this issue from an international perspective.

Travel agencies should inform their customers about animal rights and welfare. They should make them aware of their individual responsibility and develop guidelines based on the 'Five Freedoms' for animals: (i) freedom from hunger or thirst; (ii) freedom from discomfort; (iii) freedom from pain, injury or disease; (iv) freedom to express normal behaviour; and (v) freedom from fear and distress (Animal Humane Society, n.d.).

Regarding watching blood sports in tourist destinations where the legal systems are less vigilant against animal cruelty or tolerate such

cruel practices, it is necessary to appeal to tourists not to support such events in any way, nor to attend them out of curiosity. The interest of tourists contributes significantly to the fact that some of these traditions survive to this day. Responsible animal tourism means intentionally avoiding destinations involving the abuse of animals and endeavours to stop the exploitation of animals in the tourism industry. Despite the increasing awareness of animal welfare issues, many tourists still do not realize the impact of their conduct on animals at the destinations they visit (Malchrowicz-Moško *et al.*, 2020).

An increasing number of animal advocates have expressed concern that demands of the animal rights movements for the immediate abolition of animal exploitation are simply unrealistic (Francione and Garner, 2010). Instead, these advocates support the pursuit of incremental welfarist reform as a realistic means of reducing suffering and eventually achieving abolition. According to this 'new welfarism', it is possible to endorse a rights position and ultimately seek the abolition of animal exploitation (Velenska, 2022). We must endorse the moral orthodoxy of animal welfare that includes the necessary steps towards animal rights (Francione, 1997). Unlike other types of animal abuse for entertainment and spectacle, such as various animal parks with domesticated or companion animals (which can be considered ethically acceptable under certain conditions; Velenska, 2022), animal fighting is completely morally indefensible. The ultimate goal of all efforts should be to try to free all animals involved in animal fighting.

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# 4 Volunteer Tourism and Dog Rehoming: Collaborating for Interspecies Cultures of Care

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© CAB International 2024. *Emerging Voices for Animals in Tourism* (eds J. Hooper and C. Kline)

DOI: 10.1079/9781800625259.0004

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## Abstract

In transnational practices of animal rescue and rehoming, homeless animals are brought to shelters and subsequently made available for rehoming through charities in other countries. This chapter explores experiences of volunteer tourism within transnational dog rescue practices in Romania, Bulgaria and Russia, based on interviews with volunteers from animal rescue charities in Finland. The chapter focuses on how animal rescue work is experienced as tourism by volunteers from Finland collaborating with actors in another country, caring for homeless animals in the host communities. In Finland, the charities involved operate on a voluntary basis, and the volunteers travelling to the host country do not participate in a specific programme. The role of travel combined with the rewarding experiences gained by volunteers assisting with transnational animal rescue, however, place these practices within the realm of volunteer tourism.

## Introduction

Since the late 20th century, a form of international volunteer tourism has emerged that contributes to the lives and welfare of homeless non-human animals (hereafter ‘animals’). In transnational practices of animal rescue and rehoming, homeless animals, mostly dogs, are brought to shelters in Southern and Eastern Europe and subsequently made available for rehoming through animal rescue charities in Northern and Western Europe. In Finland, the rehoming of homeless dogs from abroad is organized by charities that almost exclusively operate on a voluntary basis. The volunteers who run the charities regularly travel to the dogs’ countries of origin to support local volunteers, groups and charity organizations responsible for rescuing the animals and organizing their care in the shelters. They assist in the daily care of the dogs and choose the ones to be rehomed based on the dogs’ health and perceived ability to cope with life as a companion animal.

In tourism studies, scant attention has been paid to free-roaming domesticated street animals such as dogs (Blaer, 2022). In this chapter, I explore experiences of volunteer tourism within transnational dog rescue practices in Romania, Bulgaria and Russia, based on interviews with volunteers participating in these practices from animal rescue charities in Finland. I ask, how is animal rescue work experienced as tourism by volunteers from Finland collaborating with actors in other countries, and what is the significance of volunteer tourism for maintaining transnational animal rescue practices. Throughout this research I paid close attention to encounters between the volunteers and the dogs as well as the situated care practices evidenced in dog shelters, where homeless dogs found in the street, local animal advocates and volunteers from another country meet. In this context I further ask, what kind of meaning volunteers give to interspecies encounters and interactions in these practices.

This chapter builds upon literature concerning volunteer tourism (e.g. Wearing, 2001; Wearing *et al.*, 2017), human–animal relations (e.g. Despret, 2008; McFarland and Hediger, 2009), and interspecies care (e.g. Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012, 2017). In the analysis, the emphasis is on the



volunteer's experiences of interspecies care practices within transnational animal rescue and rehoming, in the wider frame of international volunteer tourism and the dynamics of how the experience of volunteering abroad may or may not become a tourist activity. I also pay attention to how the volunteers: (i) interpret the dogs' agencies and needs situationally (i.e. how their observed expressions and actions are given meaning in a specific spatial context); and (ii) understand the dogs as individuals with their own life history and ways of responding to care and other actors.

## **Volunteer Tourism and Animals**

Volunteer tourism, sometimes also called voluntourism or alternative tourism, is a phenomenon that brings together leisure travel and voluntary work for the benefit of different social or environmental causes in communities that are most often located in the Global South (Wearing, 2001, 2003; Wearing and McGehee, 2013). According to Wearing (2001), volunteer tourism includes:

those tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments, or research into aspects of society or environment.

(Wearing, 2001, p. 1)

A specific purpose of voluntourism is to provide the tourists 'a critical means towards self-actualisation' (Jakubiak and Iordache-Bryant, 2017, p. 213), that is, enlightening experiences that are supposed to promote their personal growth but also further their career. Smith (2014, p. 31) thus characterizes volunteer tourism as 'a form of moral consumption' through which:

the ethics of care can and should be extended beyond people we have existing contact or relationships with, such as friends and family members, towards 'different and distant others', who we have no personal connection with and who are dispersed in time and space.

(Smith, 2014, p. 32)

Despite its good intentions, volunteer tourism has been heavily criticized for its inherent consumerism and for being centred on the self-

development of the volunteer instead of on the benefit of the host community (e.g. Guttentag, 2009; Sin, 2009; McGehee, 2014). Blaer (2022, p. 3) draws attention to voluntourists' 'egotistic' motivations and the ways in which voluntourism may 'reinforce rationalisations of colonialism and poverty in less-developed countries'. Moreover, Wearing *et al.* (2017, p. 512) argue that voluntourism can be 'seen to reinforce the dominant paradigms associated with development aid whereby rich Westerners help the poor communities of the majority world', noting further that some voluntourism operators are primarily focused on generating profits and thus taking advantage of the tourists and the communities who ought to benefit. Some critics suggest that the negative impact of volunteer tourism on the host communities could be overcome by benefits brought by long-term relations of collaboration, including interspecies interaction (e.g. McGehee, 2014; Blaer, 2022).

Animals have always played a role in tourism: they have been observed, interacted with and consumed (Kline, 2018a, Kline, 2018b; Winter, 2020). It is no wonder, therefore, that animals have been central in the growing sector of volunteer tourism from the 1990s and, similarly to ecotourism during the 1980s and 1990s, animals have been part of discussions concerning the ethics of volunteer tourism (McGehee, 2014; Taylor *et al.*, 2020). Most of the cases of voluntourism involving animals have focused on wildlife conservation, with large carnivores being especially popular (Lorimer, 2009; see also Rattan *et al.*, 2012). While several studies have explored wildlife in captive settings such as zoos, aquaria and circuses, less attention has been paid to domesticated animals (Winter, 2020). Taylor *et al.* (2020), however, suggest that volunteer tourism may have potential to challenge the objectification of all animals and, in so doing, enhance animal welfare.

To describe practices that focus on rescuing animals and improving their welfare, for example including visitors helping with the rescue of injured and ill street animals needing medical care, Blaer (2022, p. 7) proposes the term **animal rescue tourism**. What sets animal rescue tourism apart from other animal-related tourism, Blaer argues, is the hands-on experience of interacting with and caring for animals, sought after by many tourists who look for opportunities to help animals abroad. In programmes that focus on wild animals this is not always possible

because of the harmful effects of touching the animals (see also van Tonder *et al.*, 2017). Such practices have the possibility to place ‘animals’ sentience and interests above those of the visitor’ (Blaer, 2022, p. 12), even though the volunteers may have other, more egotistic, motivations. In any case, for the volunteers these interactions with individual animals provide another, situated dimension of voluntourist experience, becoming an essential part of the relational moral engagement of volunteer tourism (Bertella, 2014; Taylor *et al.*, 2020).

## **Interspecies Relations and Care**

Encounters and relations between humans and individual animals, such as those in animal-related tourism, are affected by the spaces in which they are produced and experienced (Philo and Wilbert, 2000). For companion animals, the primary space they share with humans is usually the home but, for homeless animals rescued from the street (and later rehomed as companion animals), animal shelters are transient spaces of interspecies interactions that are usually experienced at some point during their lifetime. The ways in which these spaces are experienced by humans and animals are intertwined and, therefore, it can be argued that the spaces are co-produced by both through their mutually affecting agencies (Schuurman and Syrjämaa, 2021).

By the agency of animals I refer to the ways in which animals act, respond to the actions of others (humans and animals), convey to others their subjective experiences including feelings, emotions and perceptions, and shape the actions of others (McFarland and Hediger, 2009). With their actions and communication with humans, animals thus contribute to their relationships with humans and other animals (Schuurman, 2021b). Whether and how the agency of an animal is acknowledged and appreciated is defined situationally, in relation to prevailing norms, discourses and practices. Dogs that live on the street, separate from but in close proximity to humans, cannot be understood as purely wild or domestic but occupy a liminal position between the two categories (Srinivasan, 2019). For homeless dogs, therefore, their agencies have

been situationally shaped by their past interactions with other dogs and humans and this affects any understanding of their individual experiences and needs (Schuurman, 2021b, 2022).

To a large extent, interaction between humans and animals consists of care, the core of their mutual relationships. A major part of interspecies care relies on embodied interaction including, for example, touching, feeding and caressing as well as providing housing and company. As such, care is always relational and situational (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012), and it is practised in specific spaces with their own responsibilities, norms and values, ethics and morals, as well as social, emotional, physical and material aspects of caring (Milligan and Wiles, 2010). In these spaces, the social, political and cultural dimensions inherent in care relationships and practices (Tronto, 1993) can further be understood as distinct ‘cultures of care’, a novel concept coined by Greenhough *et al.* (2022, p. 2) and defined as the:

norms of caring behaviour, practices of care and modes of relating which promote and enable effective care and implicate the display and exchange of what are seen as ‘appropriate’ affect and emotional responses for a particular institution or social group.

(Greenhough *et al.*, 2022, p. 2)

The niches of interspecies care that can be found in volunteer tourism can be considered specific cultures of care, illustrating also how care is not restricted to local communities or proximity between the carer and the cared for but can reach over long distances (Milligan and Wiles, 2010). One example of this is the practice of volunteering for transnational dog rescue.

## **Transnational Dog Rescue and Rehoming**

In Finland, there are currently 21 charities rehoming homeless animals from abroad, in collaboration with local actors in the animals’ countries of origin: (i) animal advocates; (ii) volunteers; (iii) shelter workers; (iv) non-governmental organizations; and (v) veterinarians. According to the interviewees in this study, the Finnish charities almost completely operate on a voluntary basis, most of them under the umbrella

organization Responsible Rescue (RR), with standard practices regarding animal welfare, ethical guidelines and biosecurity. The members of RR have been operating for years, even decades, but there are also smaller, more recently established charities that operate independently. The charities in Finland follow an international trend, but what is special to the Finnish context is that, for as yet unknown reasons, there are no free-roaming dogs in the country itself. Thus, the term **rescue dog** solely refers to homeless dogs imported transnationally. For cats, the situation is different: there are large free-roaming cat populations, and animal welfare organizations have declared a cat crisis in Finland (Animal Welfare Finland, 2022). Therefore, the scale of importing homeless cats from abroad is minimal compared with dogs. The charities importing rescue dogs do not have shelters of their own and, after arriving in Finland, the dogs either go directly to their new home or to a temporary foster home. It is notable that not all dogs end up in shelters in the host communities, and of those that do, many cannot be rehomed because of poor health, old age or difficulties in interacting with humans.

Against this larger background, the attraction of volunteering for transnational dog rescue, with the travelling involved, becomes understandable as an opportunity to do good deeds for animals in a foreign cultural environment. However, this travelling for voluntary work differs from what is usually understood as volunteer tourism (see Wearing *et al.*, 2017). The volunteers in transnational dog rescue practices do not participate in a specific programme nor do the charities advertise for any. Instead, the practice of rehoming homeless dogs to Finland as a whole is run by the volunteers, and the people who volunteer transnationally are those who run the charity in Finland – as volunteers. Moreover, most of the host countries are located in Europe instead of the Global South. Yet, the activities the volunteers participate in are part of their leisure and involve travelling internationally for the sake of supporting a cause and, at the same time, creating relationships between actors in the destination communities. Thus, transnational dog rescue can create a sense of contributing to social change but, as the volunteers organize their activities collaboratively with the host communities, they also become aware of the challenges involved.

## Methods

This chapter is part of a larger study of transnational rehoming practices of homeless animals in Finland (see also Schuurman, 2022). The materials analysed here include eight interviews with volunteers from Finnish animal rescue charities visiting Romania, Bulgaria and the Vyborg region in Russia, close to the Finnish border. In these countries, the numbers of free-roaming dogs are high; People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) (2018) estimates there are over 600,000 homeless dogs in Romania alone, with several charities involved in rescuing and rehoming dogs to other countries. It is difficult to obtain figures for the other two countries, but in the Bulgarian capital Sofia, with approximately 2 million human inhabitants, there have been estimated to be around 10,000 free-roaming dogs (The Youth, 2021).

Respondents for the interviews were chosen from the webpages of dog rescue charities in Finland (where the volunteer staff are publicly listed), with the aim of including different charities in terms of size, history, location in Finland, and country where dogs were rehomed from. The interview questions focused on the practices of rehoming dogs transnationally: (i) what happens before rehoming; (ii) what is the rehoming process like; and (iii) what happens afterwards. There were also questions about the personal experiences of the interviewee, and the answers to these questions form the basis for this chapter.

The interviews were conducted in Finland in March 2020, at the beginning of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, and thus reflect pre-pandemic practices. All charities have continued their visits to the host countries within the limits set by the COVID-19 restrictions and, in the case of Russia, the Russia–Ukraine war. Due to the restrictions, however, a second phase of the project focusing on the views of the local actors was cancelled and therefore remains to be conducted. The interviewees were all women, reflecting the gender demographics observed in the charities, and their ages varied from late 20 s to late 40 s. All had more than one year's experience of volunteering in transnational dog rescue, with more than one visit to the host country; the most experienced interviewees had participated close to 10 years, with dozens

of visits. The interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim and anonymized.

The interviews were then analysed thematically, with a contextualist focus on revealing how people make meaning of their experiences (Braun and Clarke, 2006). For the purposes of this chapter, I coded the whole material according to themes related to experiences of volunteering in the host country, transnational collaboration, human–animal encounters, understanding animal agency, and interspecies care. After re-checking these themes throughout the whole material, I created a data set for this chapter, including eight of the nine interviews conducted, as one interviewee did not travel. In the analysis, the dogs' actions and interactions with the volunteers are interpreted according to the volunteers' understandings of these actions as part of the dogs' agencies and subjective experiences (Schuurman, 2021a).

In the following sections, I present the results of the analysis, focusing on the following three themes: (i) being a voluntourist in transnational dog rescue; (ii) experiences of encounters with dogs at shelters abroad; and (iii) collaboration between volunteer tourists and the host community.

## **Becoming a Volunteer in Transnational Dog Rescue**

The shelter is a space with a distinctly temporary character. The international volunteers as well as most of the dogs are not supposed to stay there for long, which affects and shapes their mutual encounters and sets them apart from many other human–dog encounters. In this section I focus on the backgrounds of the volunteers I interviewed and their activities at the shelters they supported. For many volunteers, their personal involvement with dog rescue often starts with rehoming a homeless dog themselves, into their own home. For others, the inspiration for volunteering may come from seeing free-roaming dogs or visiting shelters while travelling abroad:

I travelled in Thailand and there I saw that the dog problem was really drastic, it opened my eyes really a lot to how big these problems truly are in the world. After that, in Finland, I

started following all information on rescue charities about how I could do something about the situation and ended up volunteering for [the charity].

(Interviewee 7/Romania)

Transnational dog rescue is thus closely tied to touristic experiences, and many of those involved in volunteering are already motivated to travel to contribute to the cause of homeless animals. Many of the volunteers are also equipped with previous experience of acting in other cultural environments and interacting with animals, skills that are necessary for creating contacts with local grass-root animal advocacy groups and caring for animals in a foreign country. Establishing collaboration with these groups is possible after familiarizing oneself with dog shelters and their specific rescue operations and cultures of care (Greenhough *et al.*, 2022), as explained by one volunteer:

The networks started emerging through these first two animal advocates. We got to know more Romanian animal advocates and supporters and vets [...] We explored carefully, as we didn't know people. For example, we tried out the rehoming scheme with two dogs, how it worked, and then we tried with five dogs, and then we tried with ten dogs, and if it worked we went on and expanded, and if it didn't we stopped.

(Interviewee 6/Romania)

The Finnish volunteers typically commit themselves to dog rescue for several years, visiting the shelters on a regular basis, learning about the practices, and participating in caring for the dogs. Some charities organize regular visits to the shelters for their own regular volunteers:

I've visited the shelters ever since I started, about twice a year. I got to like it when we do advocate trips there from [the charity] every couple of months and, as I've had fairly flexible schedules as I work part-time and still study, it's been fairly easy for me to go and visit.

(Interviewee 7/Romania)

The role of travelling is a central part of volunteering for dog rescue practices in Finland, but it appears in the interviews that visiting dog shelters is not primarily experienced as a tourist activity. The charities support the shelters long term and, during the visits on site, the focus is on the dogs and their care, based on the needs expressed by the shelter staff. This can be demanding for someone not used to street dogs. The volunteers need good skills and experience of interacting with dogs that may not have any background in communicating with humans. One of



the interviewees clarifies why visiting the shelters is not possible for everyone:

We don't recommend that anyone goes there on their own, you should always come with us. We have people who come there and then just cry in a corner somewhere. We don't actually want such people there. You have to be able to cope with the dogs. There are 250 dogs there. [...] You mustn't be afraid of them. Almost all the dogs there are ok. Then there are those dogs that you just don't go to. It's for that reason too that you can't go wandering there on your own, because it's not nice at all to get bitten.

(Interviewee 2/Russia)

The example illustrates how the dogs at the shelter set limits for interspecies interaction and, in consequence, the possibility that their care could be framed from a purely human perspective, as a touristic experience. For the volunteers, this suggests an unstable dynamic of transnational dog rescue as tourism and, therefore, limits to understanding the space of a dog shelter as a touristic space (see MacCannell, 1973).

At the shelters, the Finnish volunteers take part in everyday care practices such as cleaning pens, feeding and worming dogs as well as clipping their nails: 'we clip nails, one after another, dozens of dogs per visit' (Interviewee 3/Russia). With donations received by the charity, the volunteers pay bills and purchase materials for the shelter – dog feed, towels and sheets for bedding, as well as equipment such as nail clippers and brushes. One of the tasks is to take dogs to the clinic. The volunteers also spend time with the dogs, something that the local shelter staff often do not have time for, taking dogs for walks and getting them used to being with humans:

We always try to take as many dogs as possible on walks on leash, just for the sake of the dogs themselves and that they get used to walking on leash, if they've been taken to the shelter as puppies.

(Interviewee 5/Russia)

The visits are usually short, lasting only days, or in the case of Russia, day trips are made on a more frequent basis. Some volunteers, however, establish relationships with local actors and spend longer periods in the country, as in this example from Bulgaria:

As a family, we have usually spent a week there in May. The shelter people, they have the shelter at their farm. The family are friends with us [...] Mostly the day is spent at the shelter. If you get to eat out twice during the week that's fine. But we make use of the time we're in the country. I think it's important that the shelter people have a breather, at least that one week. So they can maybe relax a bit when there's someone else there doing something.

(Interviewee 8/Bulgaria)

Bringing the whole family is not common practice in volunteer tourism which is dominated by adults seeking, for instance, experiences that would be valuable in the job market (Germann Molz, 2017). The example above, however, highlights the possibility of sporadic visits to develop into long-term collaboration, including personal friendships based on shared values, something that can have real potential for contributing to the cause in the host community. It is, therefore, interesting how the interviewee distances herself from more conventional touristic experiences such as 'eating out' by emphasizing the ways her family supports the locals by participating in the work at the shelter.

## **Meeting the Dogs**

The homeless dogs that the volunteers meet at the shelters have usually arrived there after being found in the streets, woods or abandoned buildings. Some of them have been born in the street and lived there all their lives; they can therefore be understood as feral – not completely wild but not tame either (Schuurman, 2022). Others have lived with humans as companion animals, although not necessarily in a similar way to most companion animals in the West but often residing in an outbuilding, a doghouse or a backyard. These dogs have nonetheless had an owner once and have later been abandoned for a variety of reasons. One of the most common is the abundance of puppies – in many areas dogs are allowed to move around freely and neutering is often not possible because of the cost involved (see Brown, 2018). The situation is well known by the local actors, as explained by a volunteer: '[shelter workers] regularly go to the countryside to feed dogs, and they know these typical places, old factory yards, where dogs are taken. They are by the motorway and people abandon dogs there' (Interviewee 4/Romania). In addition, dogs are

sometimes brought to shelters directly; this may typically be a litter of puppies:

In Romania there are millions of homeless dogs and, of course, there are so-called feral dogs among them who have been homeless for many generations and who were born without human contact. [...] But the dogs in the shelters we collaborate with, most of them are previously owned dogs or their close descendants and these are abandoned dogs, they are dogs that were left on streets and roadsides, or dogs that were born there.

(Interviewee 5/Russia)

The dog's background plays a central part in whether they will be rescued and brought to the shelter or left to live in the street. Crucially, this depends on what is known about the dog: dogs get priority if they are not likely to survive in the street (i.e. old and sick dogs, puppies and recently abandoned dogs). Those that were born in the street are left alone if they are seemingly able to take care of themselves and find something to eat. These dogs have often had no human contact during their lifetime and the shelter environment would probably be difficult for them to cope with. As the dogs living in the street are known to the local actors, it is easy for them to identify newcomers and those that cannot fend for themselves: 'The [local] shelter manager knows every single street dog' (Interviewee 7/Bulgaria).

The abandoned dogs entering the scene remain outsiders and subsequently become a target for rescue operations. Those that are rescued end up at the shelters, where the volunteers observe the dogs and try to make contact with them. The purpose is to find out how the dog is coping but also whether they might be suitable for rehoming in Finland. At the time of their arrival at the shelter, the dogs are typically fearful, but they are expected to settle with time. While interacting with them the volunteers try to read the dogs' actions and expressions and thus seek to understand how they feel and whether they are afraid of or interested in humans. Experiences of successful interaction with the dogs can be very rewarding for the volunteers:

When I arrive, they're all in a big pen at the centre. When I last came, a shelter worker had left all the doors open and they were in the street, in front [of the shelter]. When they saw me the whole group followed me to the pen in the middle. I thought that was pretty great.

(Interviewee 2/Russia)

For homeless dogs, the change from street life to a life in a home with a human or multispecies family requires considerable potential for adaptation (Schuurman, 2022). Not all dogs with a background in the street can be rehomed, and those that are considered more vulnerable will stay at the shelter permanently. For the volunteers, one of the aims of encountering dogs and observing them at the shelter is to find out what kind of individual care the dogs need and whether they can be rehomed:

I visit the pens, check which ones let me touch them [...] When you sit for a while they calm down and then you see how the dog [behaves], what their energy levels are and so on. When you go there, same as when you go into a cage, they might just jump and bounce for a while and want your attention.

(Interviewee 1/Bulgaria)

By interpreting the dogs' feelings, emotions, experiences and individual needs in their mutual interaction within the care practices, the volunteers and dogs co-produce the culture of care at the shelter (Greenhough *et al.*, 2022). This is illustrated in the following example about a volunteer encountering two young dogs. As soon as the dogs have the courage to approach her the volunteer makes contact with them and, eventually, takes them out for walks:

There were these two brothers. As soon as I went to the shelter [...] I went to them right away and they were kind of shy and terribly kind but they circled me and didn't dare come over. Next time, they came and took treats from my hand, and the third time they let me scratch them. And then they were transferred to a smaller pen [...] by the outer edge of the shelter so they could be taken for walks. We took them out every single time and I spent a lot of time with them.

(Interviewee 2/Russia)

Managing space is an integral part of the care practices that the volunteers participate in at the shelter. To avoid conflicts between the dogs in the pens, intraspecies interaction is controlled by choosing the right pen for each dog as well as the correct size and social composition of the group within it. For this purpose, the dogs have to be observed so that any challenges to their well-being can be noticed and understood. As one volunteer explains, 'the ones at the shelter that are in really bad shape, many of them gain weight and get better. But there are those that end up being bullied by other dogs; they have a worse time of it'

(Interviewee 2/Russia). By tinkering with the care practices, that is, adjusting them to changing situations (Mol *et al.*, 2010), the volunteers come to know the dogs as individuals with their own needs and ways of responding to care, spaces and other actors. For those dogs with a possible future as a companion animal, the shelter serves as a transitory liminal space, but for others, it becomes a permanent home. The volunteers frequenting the shelter know these dogs: 'There are old dogs that have been at the shelter many, many years, they live there freely and will always be there' (Interviewee 1/Bulgaria).

## **Collaborations and Hierarchies**

The support that the Finnish charities provide the local actors is diverse, ranging from fundraising and rehoming dogs in Finland to voluntary work at the shelters and campaigning for the neutering of homeless dogs in the host countries. There are also special projects including, for example, building new shelters for local actors. The volunteers see the locals as dependent on this support, but in caring for the dogs, the volunteers themselves rely completely on the expertise, experience and contacts of the local actors who are familiar with the situation in the area, manage the shelters, and do most of the rescuing work. There are also practical challenges that arise from the logistics of operating in two countries:

Usually they've been contacted about a homeless dog with puppies somewhere, [they've been asked] if they can help out. They then take up the issue with their own volunteers. They catch the dogs and try to get them to a foster home somewhere [...] But we are here [in Finland] and there's also the language barrier. We ask a lot but, of course, we don't know much about their origins, we're not there to see them caught. Pretty soon we're there at the shelter, though, we see that this is a new dog, ask where it's come from and maybe get a few photos of where they've been.

(Interviewee 3/Russia)

One of the challenges is to find the actors to collaborate with. Reliable contacts are valued highly, as one interviewee explained: 'I am really grateful that I've found them because they're just the kind of local actors who report the shelters that abuse animals [...] The local actors do lots,

lots, lots of work on these issues' (Interviewee 8/Bulgaria). Despite mutual trust and interdependency, however, the relationship between the local actors and the Finnish volunteers is not equal. The homeless dogs are in one country and the foreigners from another have taken the role of helpers, donating money, time and other resources for promoting their welfare. Although the host countries are situated in Europe, the resemblance to development aid and neocolonialism is clearly visible. For example, the situation is rarely compared to the volunteers' home country – only one respondent makes the connection between free-roaming dogs in the host country to feral cats in Finland.

As a consequence, in mutual collaboration the line between control and care may be thin. In the interviews, abandoning animals is sometimes seen as a problem rooted in local culture, something that cannot be erased. A few of the interviewees talk about the negligence of animal welfare in the host country: 'Myself, I've also found a few dozen little puppies in the street there and seen that they are probably offspring of dogs that are owned by somebody' (Interviewee 1/Bulgaria). The volunteers try to assess the situation from the viewpoint of the free-roaming dogs, based on what is known about them in each context. Returning to the notion of street dogs as transgressing the boundaries between wild and domestic (Srinivasan, 2019), it can be asked if removing free-roaming dogs from the streets completely is a viable motivation for voluntourism in transnational dog rescue and rehoming. Ultimately, it is a question of whether the dogs are seen as a 'natural' population of a species living alongside humans – to be left alone – or if they are defined by their shared background with and present dependency on humans, an argument in favour of active care and control.

Some answers can be found in what the interviews tell about the street as a place for the dogs to live. Because of their varied backgrounds, the dogs have different potential for survival – they are not a homogeneous population, nor are all free-roaming dog populations the same. Apart from their inherent dynamics, the populations are shaped by their shared history and present relations with humans. Each population has developed differently; street dogs in one place are different from street dogs in another in terms of, for example, how and where puppies are

born, how they are treated by humans, and whether the population is managed by humans by removing or rescuing dogs. There are mutual agencies, boundaries and power hierarchies to be taken into account, on multiple levels and between different categories – within humans, within dogs, as well as between humans and dogs (Despret, 2008). As canine and human lives are intertwined in such situationally complex ways, it is doubtful whether leaving the dogs alone in any given context would represent ethical care. Following Puig de la Bellacasa (2017, p. 6): ‘the “ethics” in an ethics of care cannot be about a realm of normative moral obligations but rather about thick, impure, involvement in a world where the question of how to care needs to be posed.’

For the volunteers, the ways in which they understand the situation and possible future of homeless dogs in the host countries contributes to their own motivation for participating in the rescue work. These vary between saving individual animals to give them a better life and helping the situation of homeless dogs in the country as a whole. The volunteers emphasize that although they see the rehoming of a rescue dog as an ethical way to acquire a canine companion, for the dog populations it will not change much:

For the individual dogs it's crucial, it changes their lives, but the rehoming practices don't solve anything. Neutering is everything. Especially in the countryside, people are being made aware, so that there wouldn't be unwanted puppies born if they were neutered.

(Interviewee 4/Romania)

For many volunteers, their motivation ultimately comes from the tangible results of the care practices, where the survival and welfare of homeless dogs result from the collaboration between the host communities and the international volunteers: ‘you don't just make believe that you're changing the world, but you can really, visibly, do it. To me that's really rewarding’ (Interviewee 8/Romania). Despite all the differences in their organization, therefore, here is an argument for placing transnational animal rescue practices within the realm of volunteer tourism.

## **Conclusions**

In this chapter, I have analysed the case of volunteering for transnational dog rescue, centred on the care of homeless animals, as a possible form of international volunteer tourism. To conclude, there are some points to make concerning the components of voluntourism within these practices.

The volunteers in transnational dog rescue do not necessarily see themselves as tourists, as the volunteering they do includes independent decision making in collaboration with the actors in the host community. There is also no clear difference between the volunteering they do in Finland and in the host country. The biggest difference concerns their interaction with the animals in the shelters, which is different from managing the rehoming in Finland. At the shelters, interaction with the dogs may sometimes be demanding and requires experience but, at the same time, it can be very rewarding when communication is successful and the dogs contribute to their own care and, further, to the wider cultures of care in transnational animal rescue (Greenhough *et al.*, 2022). These practices thus epitomize how connections between animal welfare and volunteer tourism can emerge through experiences that are able to evoke empathy, compassion and feeling (Taylor *et al.*, 2020).

Wearing *et al.* (2017, p. 518) suggest ‘a future for volunteer tourism as a partnership between volunteers and destination communities which seeks to provide opportunities for rich intercultural exchanges and intercultural understanding.’ The type of voluntourism studied in this chapter may already be part of that future. Despite the hierarchies between volunteers and the local actors they collaborate with in the rescuing of homeless dogs, there are aspects that contribute to such intercultural benefits. The volunteers typically dedicate themselves for the care of the dogs for several years, learning to know local actors personally, creating friendships and a feeling of responsibility. As a consequence, they gain experience and understanding about the local situation that enable them to collaborate with the local groups in a productive way. As such, transnational animal rescue and rehoming practices provide an alternative to mainstream voluntourism.

This study widens the understanding of volunteer tourism in the 21st century by providing an example of the different ways in which volunteering and tourism can intertwine in order to contribute to a cause



that is not in the radar of established programmes. The tourism involved in transnational animal rescue practices suggests the emergence of international networks of interspecies care cultures that are, in part, shaped by animals in interaction with humans. These networks are flexible yet long-standing and include proximate and distant care encounters as well as collaborative relationships and practices. Moreover, they accumulate expertise on understanding, interacting with, and caring for animals with situationally specific experiences and needs.

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# 5 Hands Off the Herd: Negotiating Tourist Desires and Animal Welfare at a Thai Elephant Sanctuary

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© CAB International 2024. *Emerging Voices for Animals in Tourism* (eds J. Hooper and C. Kline)

DOI: 10.1079/9781800625259.0005

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## **Abstract**

An elephant ride has long been viewed by many tourists to Thailand as a ‘bucket-list’ experience, but alternative forms of elephant tourism have emerged in the form of sanctuaries housing elderly and injured elephant rescues. Such sites offer visitors the opportunity to stay and work on site through a form of ‘voluntourism’. In late 2018, Burm and Emily’s Elephant Sanctuary (BEES) – a small elephant sanctuary in Thailand – adopted a new ‘hands-off’ policy banning all physical contact between volunteers and elephants. A small-scale study assessing attitudes towards the new policy suggests that even well-intentioned visitors may have trouble balancing their own desires for animal intimacy against the ‘greater goods’ of elephant welfare and conservation.

## **Evolutions in Elephant Tourism**

Elephants have been woven into the fabric of Thailand's culture and economy for centuries. From the sacred white elephants of royalty to the elephant battle of the 16th-century Burmese–Siamese war, Thai elephant history has all too often been synonymous with captivity. The contemporary use of elephants has its roots in the 19th century, where it is estimated that 100,000 elephants laboured in the Thai logging industry (Laohachai boon, 2010). Under contemporary Thai law, elephants are classified as livestock due to the Draught Animal Act of 1939 (Godfrey and Kongmuang, 2009). Consequently, elephants are seen as assets whose labour is expected to bring profit to their owners. As the result of heavy logging, however, Thailand lost approximately 50% of its forest cover between 1961 and 1991 (Hvenegaard and Dearden, 1998; Trisurat *et al.*, 2010). In an effort to curtail the rate of deforestation, the Thai government instituted a national ban on commercial logging in 1989, effectively transforming the majority of captive elephants into an economic liability (Godfrey and Kongmuang, 2009; Laohachai boon, 2010; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2018). As the logging industry dissipated, however, Thailand experienced a boom in international tourism, prompting the transfer of many former logging elephants into the burgeoning tourism industry (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009; Koldowski *et al.*, 2020).

Elephants were used in activities ranging from street begging to circuses (Godfrey and Kongmuang, 2009; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009; Malikhao and Servaes, 2017). In fact, the elephant ride came to be viewed by many tourists to South-east Asia – and Thailand in particular – as a 'bucket-list' experience (Turesson, 2014, pp. 14–15). The most recent estimates suggest that roughly half of Thailand's approximately 4000 elephants live in captivity, and nearly all are working in the tourist industry – mostly at elephant 'camps' offering attractions such as elephant trekking, bathing, feeding and performance (Malikhao and Servaes, 2017; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2018; Taylor *et al.*, 2018). Such venues employ what Cui and Xu (2019, p. 7) refer to as a 'work for care cycle', in which a portion of the profits derived from elephant labour are used to feed and care for them.

Despite the popularity of elephant camps, Thailand has received severe criticism on the issues of animal rights, animal welfare and conservation.

Film-maker Jennifer Hile catalysed this movement in 2002 when she captured footage of *phajaan*, a traditional elephant-training method that involves isolating and restraining young elephants and subjecting them to intense deprivation and physical and emotional abuse (King, 2005; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009; Laohachai boon, 2010; Turesson, 2014) in order to break the elephant's will. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and animal-interest groups were the first to respond (Duffy and Moore, 2011; Koldowski *et al.*, 2020), but by 2018, over 100 travel companies and tour operators removed elephant riding from their packages (Intrepid Travel, 2018).

Although Western activists and organizations exerted pressure on tour companies, it would be misleading to argue that changes in tourism practices were due solely to external pressure. Alternatives to traditional elephant tourism began to emerge in Thailand during the 1990s in the form of sanctuaries for elephants rescued from camps, illegal logging and other industries. Founded in 1996, Elephant Nature Park pioneered an alternate form of elephant tourism by offering ride-free elephant encounters to visitors. Since that time multiple sanctuaries and sites offering 'ethical' elephant experiences have been established across Thailand. Although the treatment of elephants varies across sanctuaries, they are still seen as more humane than elephant camps, circuses and zoos (Curtin and Day, 2020; Weston *et al.*, 2021). Instead of being ridden, forced to perform or constantly confined, sanctuary elephants are typically unchained and given some freedom to engage in natural behaviours such as foraging and swimming (Sadashige, 2015; Parreñas, 2016; Malikhao and Servaes, 2017; Taylor *et al.*, 2019).

Many sanctuaries are linked to the increasingly popular trend of volunteer tourism or voluntourism, in which visitors pay to take part in what are typically framed as altruistic endeavours such as humanitarian, conservation or research projects (Campbell and Smith, 2006; Conran, 2011; Bailey and Russell, 2012; Wearing and McGehee, 2013; Almela and Calvet, 2021; Lucrezi, 2021). While many volunteers identify altruism as a chief motivator, self-development, career advancement, adventure, participation in community development, cultural authenticity or understanding and/or cultural capital have been cited as equally important incentives (Wang, 1999; Wearing, 2001; Brown,

2005; Conran, 2011; Bailey and Russell, 2012; Mostafanezhad, 2013; Wearing and McGehee, 2013; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017).

Elephant voluntourists typically perform labour traditionally performed by *mahouts* (elephant keepers). The labour performed by these voluntourists can range from shovelling elephant dung, accompanying and observing elephants as they walk and forage, or cutting banana trees and other elephant treats, to reforesting elephant habitats or even helping local children learn or practise speaking English (Rattan *et al.*, 2012; Sadashige, 2015; Parreñas, 2016; Taylor *et al.*, 2018). Sanctuary volunteers may endure long hikes, sweltering heat and demanding physical labour. Although taxing, such experiences provide tremendous novelty, a key motivator for travel – particularly the anticipation of sensory pleasures in the form of new sensations, tastes and smells (Fennell, 2009). The immersive nature of life at an elephant sanctuary certainly ticks all these boxes, as volunteers typically sleep under mosquito netting in Thai-style or dorm-like housing, consume local cuisine and are led by Thai tour guides. Volunteers are additionally surrounded by the sounds of elephant squeaks and rumbles and the smell of fresh dung. In some cases, they may even be allowed to stand close enough to be brushed by a flapping ear as they hand bananas to an eager trunk. In this way, sanctuaries can provide tremendously intimate encounters that may foster a sense of human–animal connection (Parreñas, 2016; Erickson, 2017; Taylor *et al.*, 2018; Flower *et al.*, 2021).

Those who visit or volunteer at sites promoting ‘ethical’ elephant attractions may be attracted to the idea of combining altruism with tourism, as activities at such sites are often marketed as forms of elephant care. For example, Hug Elephant Sanctuary states, ‘Elephants need your warm embrace’ and claims that one of its elephants, Mae Ka Nai, sulks if she doesn’t receive attention (Hug Elephant Sanctuary, 2019). The lack of sanctuary standardization combined with the liberal and unregulated use of terms like ‘ethical’ and ‘humane’, however, may confuse the conversation around or stall progress in animal welfare.

Despite the popularity of elephant voluntourism, questions have been raised about the ability of such sites to meet global animal welfare standards (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009; Duffy and Moore, 2011; Bansiddhi

*et al.*, 2018; Cui and Xu, 2019). Western tourists and NGOs, for example, have been quick to view the presence of an *ankus* (mahout's hook) or chains as an indication of abuse as opposed to safety measures implemented to protect both tourists and elephants (Duffy and Moore, 2011; Malikhao and Servaes, 2017). But sanctuaries that forbid the use of the *ankus* and chains can still curtail natural elephant behaviour by allowing tourists to feed or 'bathe' elephants by throwing buckets of water on them. The increasing popularity of such attractions means that elephants may be subjected to an increasing stream of humans on a regular basis, which has been shown to elevate elephant stress levels even without physical contact (Millspaugh *et al.*, 2007; Kumar *et al.*, 2019; Szott *et al.*, 2020). Thus while sanctuary visitors want to believe they are contributing to wildlife conservation and elephant welfare, they may in fact be undermining elephant well-being (Cui and Xu, 2020).

## **A New Hands-Off Policy**

In November 2018, Burm and Emily's Elephant Sanctuary (BEES) boldly announced a new 'hands-off' policy banning all physical contact between volunteers and elephants (BEES, 2018b). Founded in 2011, BEES is a small, family-owned sanctuary that houses three rescued elephants: (i) Mae Dok (58 years old); (ii) Mae Kam (60); and (iii) Thong Dee (approximately 70) (BEES, 2018a). BEES can accommodate up to 12 overnight visitors at a time, and offers stays of varying length. Visits to BEES are not actively promoted as voluntourism. Instead, activities such as 'Observing the elephants in the forest' and 'Cleaning the elephant areas' are presented as an integral part of the experience (BEES, 2018c), seamlessly integrating education and service into elephant tourism. In the past, BEES did allow limited and supervised tourist–elephant contact in the form of hand feeding and elephant 'bathing' in a river. Although small, the sanctuary had welcomed a steady stream of visitors and gained a robust online following.

Elephant Nature Park has slowly shifted its practices over the years, and Boon Lott's Elephant Sanctuary (BLES) has long insisted that visitors



not approach their elephants (Connor, 2017), but BEES's very public statement marked a shift. BEES's new policy, which also justified the change, was prominently announced on both its website and social media:

We feel allowing visitors to be in physical contact with the elephants to Pat, Play, Bath, Hand Feed and Take Selfies is taking away from the elephant's freedom ... [BEES] is a place where humans now work FOR these elephants. NO Exploitation, NO Abuse, Just Elephants Being Elephants.

(BEES, 2018b)

As someone who has visited multiple elephant sanctuaries in South-east Asia as both a volunteer tourist and a participant observer (Sadashige, 2015), I saw the introduction of this new policy as a unique opportunity to assess tourist attitudes towards human–elephant contact. I was curious to learn how visitors balanced the desire for human–elephant contact against values such as animal welfare and conservation. A clearer understanding of visitor motivation could help sanctuary owners increase tourism to their sites as well as more effectively tailor on-site and virtual messaging about elephant welfare and conservation.

## **Surveying Voluntourists**

In March 2019, I travelled to BEES to conduct a small-scale, Institutional Review Board (IRB)-approved survey assessing the attitudes of volunteers about the new policy.<sup>1</sup> Participation in the survey was strictly voluntary, limited to individuals who were at least 18 years old, and participants were allowed to skip questions or stop at any time. After the survey had already been approved, Emily McWilliam, BEES's co-founder, suggested I also make the survey available online to a private Facebook group of over 300 members consisting of *past* visitors to BEES. Consequently, online survey participants could have visited prior to or after the implementation of the new policy. Because the survey was originally created for tourists visiting after the policy was in place, it did not include a question asking when they visited BEES.

Paper copies were made available to guests visiting BEES between 14 and 18 March 2019. A link to the survey was also made available online between 10 and 31 March 2019. The survey included nine Likert-scale questions about visitor experience, six questions about visitor intentions as a result of the visit, one question on the duration of the visit, and one demographic question about gender. The demographic question was included since research suggests that a high correlation exists not only between elephant volunteer tourism and self-identification as a woman (Sadashige, 2015; Taylor *et al.*, 2018; Curtin and Day, 2020), but also between concern with animal welfare and female gender identification (Donovan, 2006; Gaarder, 2011).

The first set of questions asked participants to rate their support of the hands-off policy through responses to positive and negative statements. Including positive and negative statements is a recommended technique in survey design to prevent survey takers from automatically choosing the same response (Weisberg, 2005; Swain *et al.*, 2008). Additionally, research suggests that respondents are more likely to provide negative answers to negatively worded questions or statements (Kamoen *et al.*, 2017). The three statements about the new policy were thus worded and arranged to elicit the most honest response possible: (i) The BEES hands-off policy is good for elephants; (ii) BEES should allow visitors to touch the elephants; (iii) I do not understand why a hands-off policy is necessary.

A number of questions addressed visitor engagement with the elephants, the effects of their visit, and post-visit intentions. These questions were adapted from surveys conducted at wildlife tourism sites (Orams, 1997; Powell and Ham, 2008; Ballantyne *et al.*, 2011; Hughes, 2013). Research suggests that a perception of intimacy with animals, a sense of wonder, physical proximity and non-captive settings are key contributors to visitor experiences that instil lasting memories that motivate behavioural changes such as pro-environmental attitudes and actions (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2011; Hughes, 2013). This set of questions sought to determine: (i) visitor attitudes towards the prohibition of human–elephant contact; (ii) whether or not visitors perceive a human–elephant intimacy in the absence of physical contact; (iii) to what degree visitors view their actions as altruistic; and (iv) whether or not BEES’s on-

site education serves its mission to raise and spread awareness about ethical elephant tourism.

## **Survey Distribution and Results**

Over the 3 week period 10–31 March 2019, 19 individuals completed the survey online, and five completed it on paper on site at BEES. All participants were over the age of 18. All respondents completed the demographic portion of the survey. Of the 24 survey takers (i.e. overall sample  $n = 24$ ), 20 identified as female. Two-thirds of the participants stayed 1 week or more ( $n = 16$ ), one-quarter visited for three nights ( $n = 6$ ), and two participants stayed just one night. Of the five who took the survey on paper, three identified as female, and each of the two that identified as male came as a result of romantic relationships with one of the women. While this was not recorded in the survey, the two couples made clear their relationship during the course of their stay. In both cases, the male visitors explicitly mentioned that they would not have come to BEES had they not been brought by their partners. The two male companions comprised 50% of the male survey participants.

Table 5.1 displays responses to questions directly related to the hands-off policy. Although all those who took the survey on site completed all questions, one individual taking the online survey declined to respond to the statement, ‘I do not understand why a hands-off policy is necessary.’ Of the respondents, 96% felt that the new policy was beneficial to elephants, with 63% indicating that they agreed strongly. Somewhat similarly, 92% of respondents disagreed with the negatively worded statement, ‘I do not understand why a hands-off policy is necessary,’ with 52% indicating that they disagreed strongly.

The statement ‘BEES should allow visitors to touch the elephants’ elicited less uniform results than the other statements, with 21% agreeing that BEES should allow visitors to touch the elephants. Thirteen per cent were not sure whether or not BEES should allow physical contact between visitors and elephants. And while 63% disagreed, only 30% disagreed strongly. Regardless of their feelings towards human–elephant

contact at BEES, 88% of respondents stated that they would encourage other tourists to visit sanctuaries with hands-off policies, and most (86%) indicated that they would actively discourage others from patronizing establishments that allowed contact (Table 5.2). Two individuals declined to respond to the second statement.

Finally, the majority of respondents both experienced a sense of wonder upon seeing the elephants and also felt an emotional connection to one or more of them (Table 5.3). This was consistent across both survey groups, and thus may include individuals who had visited when limited human–elephant contact was permitted.

The sole individual who felt neither wonder nor connection wrote:

I've been around elephants my entire life and I've been having rides since before I can even remember. But coming to Bees [sic] I do not miss the experience and I think other people can make the switch if they get the same information I did.

(anonymous respondent)

**Table 5.1.** Survey responses to questions related to BEES hands-off policy<sup>a</sup>

Statement	Response options						
	Agree strongly	Agree	Agree somewhat	Not sure	Disagree somewhat	Disagree	Disagree strongly
The BEES hands-off policy is good for elephants.	15 (4)	7	1 (1)	0	1	0	0
BEES should allow visitors to touch the elephants.	0	0	5	3	5 (2)	4 (1)	7 (2)
I do not understand why a hands-off policy is necessary.	0	0	0	1	3	7 (1)	12 (4)

<sup>a</sup>Numbers refer to total responses; parenthetical numbers refer to responses from the on-site survey. On-site respondents visited after the implementation of the hands-off policy.

**Table 5.2.** Survey data on post-visit intentions specifically related to human–elephant contact<sup>a</sup>

Because of my visit to BEES ...	Response options		
	Yes	Not sure	No

I encouraged/would encourage other tourists to visit elephant sanctuaries and camps with 'hands-off' policies.	21 (4)	3 (1)	0
I would discourage other tourists from visiting elephant attractions and camps that allow visitors to touch, feed and/or ride elephants.	19 (4)	3 (1)	0

<sup>a</sup>Numbers refer to total responses; parenthetical numbers refer to responses from the on-site survey.

**Table 5.3.** Survey data on perceived human–elephant intimacy<sup>a</sup>

Statement	Response options						
	Agree strongly	Agree	Agree somewhat	Not sure	Disagree somewhat	Disagree	Disagree strongly
I felt an emotional connection to one or more elephants.	9 (1)	7 (3)	6	0	1 (1)	0	0
I felt a sense of wonder or awe seeing the elephants.	18 (3)	3 (1)	2	0	0	1 (1)	0

<sup>a</sup>Numbers refer to total responses; parenthetical numbers refer to responses from the on-site survey.

The commonplace nature of elephants in this respondent's life likely influenced this response. The lack of perceived connection, however, is noteworthy and suggests that the perception of a species as livestock may preclude bonding or the desire to connect with a species. It also raises the question of whether visitors are more likely to seek emotional connection with animals they deem wondrous. These issues are well beyond the scope of my study, but the role of exoticism or novelty in fostering compassion should be investigated in future studies.

## Discussion

The primary purpose of this survey was to generate initial research on visitor response to forbidding human–elephant contact at a small

sanctuary. Survey results could help sanctuary owners better set tourist expectations, identify potential visitors and promote animal welfare for captive elephants. But information gleaned from surveys like this one also contributes to studies in ethical and animal tourism and may ultimately signal shifts in tourist desires or motivation.

Survey participants were largely in support of a hands-off policy: 96% felt that the new policy was beneficial to elephants, with 63% indicating that they agreed strongly with the policy. Future studies might consider exploring why visitors choosing an 'ethical' elephant experience might still oppose a hands-off policy. In a multi-year study conducted on visitors to Elephant Nature Park, one dissatisfied tourist implied that the cost of the visit warranted an experience that went beyond observation: 'The fact that you pay big bucks to go here and can't even touch an elephant seems like a waste of money' (Cui and Xu, 2020, p. 118). While this particular individual may simply have been misled by outdated photos or reviews from when they still allowed elephant bathing, tourists who eschew elephant rides and performances may feel they are 'owed' something in return.

Survey participants also prioritize elephant welfare when choosing travel destinations – and not just for themselves: 88% of respondents stated that they would encourage other tourists to visit sanctuaries with hands-off policies, and 86% indicated that they would actively discourage others from patronizing establishments that allowed for human–elephant contact. Although none of the participants qualified how they might encourage or discourage other tourists, all indicated that they do or plan to support elephant conservation through donations or other means. There is also evidence to suggest a correlation between volunteer tourism and high levels of civic awareness and responsibility (Bailey and Russell, 2012). In other words, individuals who believe they can make a difference might be more likely to act on such beliefs and opt for vacations that incorporate ideologies and actions that promote a common good. Thus volunteer tourists may invite a significant other to a sanctuary or discourage a stranger from booking an elephant ride, because they see vacations as an extension of the service-oriented activities in which they are already engaged on a regular basis.

These individuals, however, may not be representative of even the ‘typical’ elephant sanctuary volunteer. During my visit, Ms McWilliam, one of BEES’s co-founders, mentioned that 25% of their reservations were cancelled after the announcement of their new policy. It may thus be the case that the five individuals (and myself) who happened to be at BEES during the survey period were there in spite of, or even because of, the new policy. Prior to BEES, I had volunteered at several other elephant sanctuaries, and one of the other on-site survey participants had not only visited BEES previously, but she had returned to share the experience with her significant other. The small sample size and personal relationships between two couples – who comprised four of the five on-site visitors – may also account for some of the uniform responses among on-site survey participants. That is, some discussion likely precipitated their choice to visit BEES instead of any of the other elephant sanctuaries or camps.

As noted earlier, the majority of BEES visitors identify as female. While the survey comprises a small sample, this same high female to male ratio has been observed in studies that have focused specifically on volunteer tourists at elephant sanctuaries in Thailand (Sadashige, 2015; Taylor *et al.*, 2018). Other tourism studies that included elephant sanctuaries have found more even sex ratios, but those studies either did not distinguish between volunteer and non-volunteer tourists and included non-sanctuary elephant attractions (Worwag *et al.*, 2019; Curtin and Day, 2020), or they only surveyed non-volunteer tourists at a single sanctuary (Rattan *et al.*, 2012). While further research is needed, it does appear that, although gender does not necessarily determine who visits elephant sanctuaries, it is a key determinant in whether or not one volunteers at one.

The predominance of women volunteers at elephant sanctuaries probably represents the confluence of at least two other gendered trends: (i) care for animals; and (ii) volunteer tourism. Women are far more likely to be involved in animal rights and activism, be the primary caretakers of animal companions in multi-person households, and volunteer at animal shelters (Gaarder, 2011). Women also make up the majority of volunteer tourists, whether or not the project involves animals (Rattan *et al.*, 2012; Mostafanezhad, 2013; Taylor *et al.*, 2019; Almela and Calvet, 2021). The

disproportionate involvement of women in all these activities may be rooted in the socialization of gender roles (Mostafanezhad, 2013). In her pioneering work on the ethics of care, Carol Gilligan (1982) proposed that early socialization results in distinctly male and female ethical frameworks, whereby traits such as care for and sensitivity to the needs of others are more strongly encouraged in women than men. Josephine Donovan similarly suggests that the historical trivialization of women's points of view may sensitize them to the experiences of other marginalized groups, including animals (Donovan, 2006). Thus the persistence of traditional gender norms and social structures may contribute to some women's desire to integrate service into travel and willingness to undertake what Juno Salazar Parreñas (2016, p. 109) has described as 'shit work'.

The predisposition to care for others may also explain why almost all participants felt that their visit helped Thai elephants. The activities during my stay involved walking with elephants through the forest, cutting banana tree stalks for elephant food, cleaning shelters of dung and uneaten food, and preparing a chopped 'salad' for an elderly elephant. These activities were supplemented with informal education on local flora and fauna, the elephant's role in the local ecosystem, and life histories and anecdotes about the individual elephants. In this way, visitors were afforded ample opportunity to reflect on how their activities differ from those offered at trekking camps and ultimately support elephant well-being. At other times of the year, visitors may also engage in reforestation, which undoubtedly reinforces the impression that their presence supports both the elephants and the local environment.

The question of allowing human–elephant contact produced the greatest disparity among respondents. Twenty-one per cent felt that BEES should allow visitors to touch the elephants, despite the fact that 96% felt that the hands-off policy was beneficial to the animals, and 86% said they would actively discourage other tourists from visiting sites that allow for hands-on contact.

Volunteers at elephant sanctuaries typically welcome, if not actively seek a human–elephant connection (Parreñas, 2016; Taylor *et al.*, 2019; Cui and Xu, 2020; Curtin and Day, 2020; Weston *et al.*, 2021). Because they also prioritize animal welfare, many sanctuary visitors and



volunteers research elephant tourism venues and base their decision on a combination of online reviews, venue reputation and recommendations (Sadashige, 2015; Cui and Xu, 2019, 2020; Curtin and Day, 2020; Flower *et al.*, 2021). In addition, visitors' own perceptions of whether or not elephants appear 'happy' factor heavily into whether or not tourists will condone or condemn an activity (Cui and Xu, 2020; Curtin and Day, 2020; Weston *et al.*, 2021). Consequently, individuals who thought that BEES should allow visitors to touch the elephants might have based their responses on prior positive experiences when BEES still allowed limited contact and the belief that a sanctuary like BEES could offer forms of contact that aligned with the highest animal welfare standards. Moreover, because physical proximity and viewing animals in a non-captive setting have been shown to magnify emotional affinity and create strong memories (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2011), it should not be surprising that some individuals may have given contradictory responses. For participants who had enjoyed some physical contact with elephants in the past, the new policy could have produced cognitive dissonance since condemning human–elephant contact would require reconfiguring their understanding of 'ethical' tourism and reframing their own participation in a now forbidden activity.

Despite the absence of touch, most of the on-site respondents still experienced a sense of wonder upon seeing the elephants and also felt an emotional connection to one or more of them. Their responses suggest that emotional engagement and feelings of intimacy are not predicated on physical contact. As one individual wrote, 'There is something more thrilling about experiencing elephants in their natural environment, observing and spending time & space without intruding.'

## **Conclusion**

Since this study was conducted, the outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) had a devastating effect on global tourism. In March 2020, Thailand's borders closed, and cut off the flow of income to all elephant-based tourists sites (Alberts, 2020; Laws *et al.*, 2020). As a

result, camp and sanctuary owners alike faced the prospect of supporting their elephants – whose food costs are estimated at US\$30 per elephant/day (Laws *et al.*, 2020; Head, 2023). Some sites turned to virtual visits to raise funds for elephants and their mahouts, and others employed online fundraising (Gluckman, 2020; Head, 2023). Although Thailand reopened in July 2022, the country's tourist arrivals were still below pre-COVID-19 levels as of January 2023 (BBC, 2023). The pandemic has thus raised important questions about the sustainability of wildlife-tourism-dependent and volunteer-dependent forms of animal conservation.

BEES received COVID-19-driven relief funding through World Animal Protection (WAP) (World Animal Protection, 2020). As one of three smaller elephant operations featured in WAP's news post about supporting elephants through the pandemic, it is possible that this helped bring some attention to BEES. In March 2023, Ms McWilliam noted that not only has BEES enjoyed a 'steady stream of visitors' since July 2022 but that the number of enquiries seems to have increased (E. McWilliam, Thailand, 2023, personal communication). She speculated that this was due to more and more people doing research in advance in the hope of making 'responsible decisions when it comes to wildlife in captivity' (E. McWilliam, Thailand, 2023, personal communication).

Small studies like mine might not be generalizable, but focus on individual sites may help identify emerging trends and niche subgroups in animal tourism. Several recent studies on elephant tourism have noted increasing concerns about elephant well-being, even among visitors to venues that allow riding (Cui and Xu, 2020; Curtin and Day, 2020; Flower *et al.*, 2021). These studies also suggest that when deciding on a venue, many tourists seek out personal recommendations and word-of-mouth information from fellow travellers.

Understanding that many tourists rely on their peers to advise them on which elephant venues to visit, and knowing that the majority of BEES's visitors are willing to discourage others from patronizing sites that allow hands-on contact are powerful insights. All survey participants additionally indicated that they had or would tell people at home about their visit, and all but one indicated they had or were planning to share photos from their visit on social media. Cultural change is never uniform,

nor are its drivers singular. If BEES can encourage their visitors to become ambassadors during their travels, they may be able to advance animal welfare and prove themselves to be trendsetters and not outliers.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> This research was conducted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a master's degree in biology through Miami University's Global Field Program. All travel was independently funded by the author.

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# 6 Elephants and NGOs: The Complex Intersection of Advocacy and Tourism in Nepal

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© CAB International 2024. *Emerging Voices for Animals in Tourism* (eds J. Hooper and C. Kline)  
DOI: 10.1079/9781800625259.0006

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## **Abstract**

Captive elephants in Nepal, and their caregivers, find themselves at a crossroads. Teams of elephant and human co-workers offer safari rides to tourists interested in experiencing natural areas more intimately. Tourism income is perceived as vital to local economies and provides employment for marginalized humans. Thanks to increasing regulations and changing human perspectives on animal use within tourism, local and international organizations have become involved in elephant lives, purporting an interest in their welfare or that of mahouts. Organizational personnel have tried to implement welfare improvements, 'rescue' programmes or social support. What is missing is adequate consideration for the welfare of elephants and their caregivers based upon the desires of each, not simply upon external perceptions. These organizations claim to want what is 'best', but few agree on what the 'best' entails. What follows is an examination of organizational discourses and practices, and a discussion of how inter-agency cooperation, or lack thereof, impacts the lives of elephants and mahouts.



## Introduction

Wildlife tourism is a significantly increasing sector of the global nature-based tourism market (Moorhouse *et al.*, 2015). Throughout South-east Asia, such attractions feature Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*) as both objects and subjects of tourism practices (Koldowski *et al.*, 2020). Elephants are found in sanctuaries (a contentious term, see below), camps (where numbers of elephants are housed in proximity), and even theatres where they perform unnatural behaviours such as playing instruments, painting or performing tricks (Cohen, 2015; Moorhouse *et al.*, 2015). In some countries, such as Nepal, captive elephants serve as the literal vehicles for tourists seeking to encounter ‘wild life’ (Szydlowski, 2021). Now, perhaps due to a variety of factors like widening global access to elephants via television, film and social media along with elephant-rights campaigns, human perspectives are changing as more attention is paid to the health and welfare of captive individuals (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020a, b; EAZA, 2020; Veasey, 2020). Likewise, pressure from tourists and advocacy organizations is impacting elephants in tourism: for example, the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA, 2020) and TripAdvisor (n.d.) have withdrawn support from venues where elephant contact is permitted, concerned that management techniques in these facilities negatively impact welfare. These changing perspectives, coupled with increasing numbers of tourists visiting animal-centric venues, and a growing sensitivity to welfare concerns may mean that more people now feel they are stakeholders in elephant lives (Di Lauro *et al.*, 2019; Rodak, 2020).

‘Welfare’ itself is a contentious term, the nuances of which continue to evolve, and which is often described based upon cultural contexts (Brambell *et al.*, 1965; Balcombe, 2009). Welfare is one’s ‘state as regards its attempts to cope with its environment’ and requires descriptors of both scale and valence (Broom, 1986, p. 524; Mason and Veasey, 2010). If an animal spends a lot of energy or time trying to cope, the animal’s welfare is considered poor. Housing, treatment and nutrition all impact welfare, which can be examined at a population or individual level (Broom, 1986). More current definitions of welfare include a

consideration of agency, affective states and opportunities for socialization (Mason and Veasey, 2010).

Despite its small size and low number of captive elephants (~120 compared with Thailand's 3700), Nepal is not immune to the pressures of changing human perspectives of welfare (Asian Elephant Specialist Group, 2017). However, thanks to its unique tourism history and management practices, Nepal faces different challenges from other range states (Szydlowski, 2021). For example, Nepal's use of elephants in tourism has a much shorter history than that of other countries; the use of elephants for tourism did not arise until the mid-1960s, nor were there enough visitors to support wide-scale tourism prior to the 1970s (Mishra, 2008). In 1962, for example, only 6000 tourists visited the entirety of Nepal (Mishra, 2008; Government of Nepal (GoN), 2015). Most of Nepal's tourism elephants are housed in small towns near Chitwan National Park (henceforth Chitwan), the country's busiest protected area. The small town of Sauraha, the focal point for this chapter, serves as the main entry point for Chitwan, and hosts more than 150,000 tourists annually.

Before 1960, captive elephants resided in government stables and served as transport for conservation activities, research and hunting; but growing public interest soon resulted in high demand for 'tourist safari' (Mishra, 2008). The government initially embraced this opportunity, but the rapid (and time-consuming) rise in tourist demand, pivoted their elephants exclusively to conservation practices. They offered the tourist trade to the privately owned Tiger Tops Lodge, which was at that time located within Chitwan, which successfully transitioned 'hunting' elephants to safari mounts (Mishra, 2008). By 1970, tourist numbers had risen tenfold, and other would-be safari providers scrambled to obtain elephants (Bhattarai *et al.*, 2005; Gairhe, Sauraha, Nepal, 2019, personal communication, 2019). Concerned with shrinking wild populations of 'Nepalese' elephants, Nepal outlawed the capture of wild individuals, thus necessitating that tourism practitioners purchase elephants from India (Kharel, 2002). Because elephant ownership within Nepal had historically been limited to the government, few regulations existed which could be applied to these newly obtained individuals (Locke, 2011; Gairhe, Sauraha, Nepal, 2019, personal communication).

As tourism grew, the number of lodges and stables quickly expanded, making it difficult to create a unified system of elephant management.

Recently, both local non-governmental organizations and international non-governmental organizations (henceforth NGOs or INGOs) and researchers have taken an interest in the care and use of Nepal's tourism elephants, and the practices of owners and caregivers (Szydlowski, 2021, 2022a). A continued lack of legislation or standardized management is one factor creating tensions between owners and NGOs. In addition, community attitudes appear to be changing, reflected in the refusal of local tourism providers and nature guides to support elephant rides (Szydlowski, 2021), and initiatives by grass-roots groups focused on ending pachyderm beauty pageants, football and polo (Animal Rights Club, 2019; Pant, 2022). In addition, some NGOs desired to end all elephant-back safari and transition elephants to chain-free enclosures, and thus improve health and welfare (Schmidt-Burbach, 2017). Several of these NGOs are based outside Nepal and list as their goals 'rescuing' elephants or creating 'sanctuaries'. However, a unified vision of what these sanctuaries entail remains unclear (Szydlowski, 2021; also, Tomassini *et al.*, 2022, re: 'sanctuary'). Some envisioned facilities where tourists might 'look but not touch', while others described places where elephants could choose when, where and with whom to interact (Szydlowski, 2021). Still others described corrals with zero tourists where elephants can, in the words of INGO2's founder, simply 'be elephants' with agency in their daily activities (INGO2, Sauraha, Nepal, 2019, personal communication).

This chapter examines the intersections of elephants, tourism providers and INGO/NGO (henceforth I/NGO as needed) personnel within Nepal. It summarizes data obtained from in-person interviews with 135 mahouts, elephant owners, community leaders (business owners, animal advocates, nature guides, educators) and personnel from eight I/NGOs. Interlocutors were chosen using a purposive sampling method. This method uses non-random sampling based upon the interlocutor's interest in or experience with a specific topic. Interviews were supplemented by participant observations in 26 elephant stables and email, phone and message communications between 2017 and 2022 (noted subsequently in this chapter as PC to indicate personal

communication). Data were analysed using a combination of intuitive qualitative and narrative analyses, allowing for the emergence of themes and patterns. This type of analysis allows for the participants' stories, and the ways in which they characterize their experiences, to become part of the data. By describing the interactions of stakeholders, along with their differing approaches, beliefs and behaviours, we can examine how this expanding circle of human involvement is impacting elephant lives.

## **Tourism in Nepal**

More than 7% of Nepal's gross domestic product comes from tourism, which employs nearly a million Nepalese people (World Bank, 2018, p. 4). Tourism practices create pressure on the infrastructure of small communities like Sauraha Park, but may also offer large financial gains (GoN, 2015). For example, park admissions provide the greatest income, over 81 million rupees annually (~US\$700,000), followed closely by elephant-back safari fees (GoN, 2015). According to the government (GoN, 2015), these fees are closely linked to successful conservation practices and allegedly offer financial support to marginalized communities. The validity of such claims, however, has been questioned (Kellert *et al.*, 2000; Puri, 2019). Additionally, increasing pressure from INGOs is creating tension between tourism providers, local organizations and tourists (Lipton and Bhattarai, 2014; Puri, 2019; Szydlowski, 2021).

To understand these tensions, one must first examine the differences between Nepalese elephant tourism and that of other countries. The practices, living conditions and welfare of tourist elephants in Nepal varies greatly from those in larger range states, such as Thailand, which may be more familiar to readers. For example, privately held elephants represent 95% of the captive Thai population, vs approximately 30% in Nepal (Asian Elephant Specialist Group, 2017, p. 21). Thai camps offer a variety of options, such as museums, veterinarians, volunteer programmes and social opportunities for elephants and mahouts (Cohen, 2015). Thai camps are the focus of academic research on elephant

health and are the inaugural venues for accreditation standards (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2019, 2020a, b; Asian Captive Elephant Standards, n.d.). While many Thai camps still struggle with elephant (and mahout) health and welfare (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020a, b; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2020), others have seen improvements following changes in management standards, the formation of camp associations, and increasing support of interspecies bonds (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020a). Many interlocutors in the current study viewed these Thai camps and associated studies as evidence for continued use of elephants within Nepal. However, in contrast to Thailand, most privately owned elephants in Nepal do not live in camps, but rather in small stables behind businesses without regular access to water, browse, veterinary care or conspecifics (see Fig. 6.1) (Szydlowski, 2022a). The few that do live within olfactory or visual range of others (an important welfare consideration; Varma and Prasad, 2008; EAZA, 2020) are still prevented from physical contact.

Further separating Nepal from other range states is the lack of mahout or village ownership of elephants (United Elephant Owners' Cooperative (UEOC), PC, 2019). As mentioned above, elephants in Nepal are purchased by wealthy businessmen, as their high price (up to US\$90,000 per elephant or 90 times the average annual income) makes them accessible to only those occupying high socio-economic tiers (Szydlowski, 2022a). Also unique is the existence of a Nepalese owner's cooperative. Several decades after the rapid expansion of elephant ownership in Nepal, two organizations emerged to serve the interests of elephant owners and assist in safari oversight (Szydlowski, 2021). In the 2000s, these groups merged into the UEOC. The organization is responsible for scheduling safaris, setting prices, arranging purchases and sales (legal and illegal), and distributing profits (UEOC, PC, 2019; see also GoN, 2009; NepalNews, 2019). Every Nepalese owner in Sauraha, save one, belongs to this cooperative, which serves as one of the organizations examined below.



**Fig. 6.1.** A typical Nepalese *hattisar* (elephant stable). Photo by the author.

## **Nepalese perceptions of elephants**

When asked to describe elephants, many owners and mahouts used words such as ‘intelligent’, ‘sentient’ or ‘family member’. One mahout described his elephant co-worker as a ‘soulmate’ (mahout, PC, 2019). Others described elephants’ connection with the Hindu god Ganesh, sent to ‘aid’ humanity (Vaj, PC, 2022). Some, however, described elephants simply as commodities, referring to them as ‘jeeps’ or ‘buses’ and mahouts as ‘bus drivers’ (mahouts, PC, 2019). Despite these varying

conceptions of elephants, one statement was consistently repeated by mahouts and owners in this study: captive elephants must be physically and mentally ‘dominated’ to work alongside humans (National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) staff, mahouts and UEOC, PC, 2019). However, the definition of this domination was dependent upon the background of its user, and discussions of its impact on elephant welfare created tensions between owners, mahouts and NGOs. For example, domination was seen by mahouts as those necessary physical and mental acts (such as intimidation and physical punishment) which allowed them to ensure the safety of tourists and themselves. Because they are significantly smaller than the elephant, they felt they must use any available tools to maintain control. Mahouts explained that elephants ‘must’ anticipate physical or emotional repercussions for bad behaviour lest they become ‘naughty’ (mahouts, PC, 2019). For non-Nepalese interlocutors, the need for dominance indicated a lack of agency on the elephants’ part; and represented a dynamic of incarceration, rather than a co-working or at-will relationship. In contrast, owners described domination simply as ‘traditional’ practice, while acknowledging that the ‘proper use’ of these practices relies upon husbandry knowledge being passed down generational lines. Owners, however, conceded that this information flow has been interrupted, and that husbandry has thus deteriorated. In addition, they acknowledge that nutrition, care and treatment could – and should – be improved (UEOC, PC, 2019).

Academics such as Locke (2016) argue that there is nothing incongruous about these descriptions and resultant treatment of elephants. Nepalese can simultaneously view elephants as ‘animals, persons’ and ‘gods’ (Locke, 2016, p. 160), revering them while also violently dominating them for work purposes. But I argue that Locke’s (2016) perspective might be inapplicable to this context, and is in need of reconsideration. Locke (2016) argues that the human and elephant relationship was born of domination but is now maintained through trust, albeit unstable and conditional. Locke (2016, p. 161) describes the retention of elephants’ ‘own subjective agency’ throughout the relationship. While this may be true in a few stables in the Chitwan area (Locke did not examine privately owned stables, but rather governmental facilities), it is uncommon, and needs to be re-examined considering



knowledge of maladaptive passivity, post-traumatic stress disorder, marginalization and victimization (Seligman, 1972; Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018). While outside the scope of this chapter, rather than viewing stables as multispecies units, in which elephants and humans exist in a ‘hybrid moral community’ (Locke, 2016, p.160), perhaps a posthuman examination of individual facilities is needed to identify whether elephants are truly community members or rather victims.

### **Changing perspectives on mahouts**

In contrast to past eras where elephant caregiving might have provided financial security, favour and status improvement, current mahouts throughout Asia are ill-paid, inadequately housed (see Fig. 6.2), marginalized and ill-treated (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2020). They, like their elephant co-workers, are often described in literature and society as a ‘group’ rather than individuals; viewed simply as dirty, drunkards or gamblers (I/NGO, UEOC, Raja, interviews, 2019; see also Szydlowski, 2021). However, as within any society, these stereotypes are often untrue and can lead to further marginalization. Mahouts cited two issues which led to work with elephants: (i) little education; and (ii) a lack of other prospects. Few current mahouts had family ties to elephants, and many young men entered the field with no experience or embodied knowledge. Because they were unfamiliar with historical handling methods, these mahouts saw little alternative to using violent or dominance-based management to ensure their own (and tourists’) safety (mahouts, PC, 2019; see also Locke, 2009; Laohachaiboon, 2010; Cohen, 2015).





**Fig. 6.2.** Typical mahout housing. Photo by the author.

Mahouts may also find themselves viewed through what Locke (2009) calls a neo-imperialist lens. He suggests mahouts may be seen as ‘backwards and cruel’ but are instead trapped – forced to use the methods taught in the *hattisar* (elephant stable) without the benefit of historical knowledge. Nepalese and non-Nepalese I/NGO personnel expressed beliefs that mahouts were aggressive, cruel or uncaring; others described mahouts as disenfranchised populations suffering from a lack of education or advancement opportunities and caught in the crossfire between owners and NGOs. Mahouts find themselves stuck: required to maintain control of elephants for tourist safety but vilified by tourists or NGOs for such control. Lainé (2018) described similar issues in Sri Lanka, where the perspectives of Western visitors influenced facility rules governing elephant treatment. Mahouts were not allowed to control elephants in front of foreign tourists and felt that elephants refused to behave once the visitors were gone, placing the mahouts in danger. As elephant facilities are reliant upon foreign visitor funding, these practices might be seen as placing the elephants’ needs over those of mahouts

(Lainé, 2018). Other academic work, however, questions whether tourism elephants' needs are given even minor consideration or whether they have any agency in their work (Wemmer and Christen, 2008; Kopnina, 2016; Szydlowski, 2022b). What is clear, however, is that the health and welfare of captive elephants is intimately tied to that of their mahouts (Varma, 2008; Miller *et al.*, 2015).

## **The Rise of Non-Governmental Agencies (NGOs)**

While the UEOC is the key organization involved in elephant lives within Sauraha, others have emerged over the past decades. One, the NTNC, was established in 1982 and engaged by the Nepalese government to manage wildlife and protected areas (NTNC, 2019). To that end, the NTNC partners with numerous global conservation entities and is the primary caretaker of about 33% of Nepal's protected areas. The NTNC also owns elephants (between four and six females, some are rotated to the breeding centre), who serve as research transport and participate in wildlife census (NTNC, 2019). Until January of 2021, these elephants also served on paid tourist safaris. They were also formerly featured in work-with-elephant programmes bringing volunteers from more economically advanced countries and providing income to the NTNC (NTNC staff, PC, 2019). It is the NTNC's veterinary staff who are not only responsible for the care of injured or orphaned wildlife throughout Nepal, but thanks to an agreement with the UEOC, also provide veterinary care for all local elephants – government, NTNC and private (NTNC veterinarian, PC, 2017, 2019). This staff is therefore in a fraught position, beholden to owners' perspectives on care, use and domination while caught between differing expectations of NGOs, tourists, mahouts and local advocates.

In addition to the NTNC, five INGOs began with foreigners moved by encounters with elephants while on vacation or volunteer trips, who then established NGOs, herein referred to by numbers 1–6 for anonymization. Two of these have created relationships with Nepalese elephant owners and transitioned a total of ten elephants to chain-free facilities, thus demonstrating that alternatives to current management

practices exist. INGO1 allows tourist-centred activities and is attached to a high-end hotel which typically caters for ‘Western’ guests (INGO1 staffers, PC, 2019). This facility houses eight elephants, some of whom are NGO managed while others are Nepalese owned. These elephants all reside in chain-free enclosures on hotel property; however, the Nepalese-owned elephants still perform elephant-backed safaris (Hotel1 owner, PC, 2019). Guests can watch INGO1-managed elephants in their corrals or accompany them on contact-free walks around the facility for a fee; guests can also observe elephants drinking or bathing in the river.

INGO2 offers free informational sessions and positive reinforcement training demonstrations at their chain-free facility but does not allow tourists to reside on site, physically interact with elephants, or accompany elephants outside the stable (INGO2 staff, PC, 2019, 2022). INGO2 is discussed further below. Mahouts at both facilities now have health care, increased wages, on-site cooks, and improved housing. Both organizations are now also registered as Nepalese NGOs, with Nepalese boards of directors.

However, other tourist-founded NGOs have yet to make inroads with owners or establish themselves as Nepalese organizations (INGO3, INGO2 and UEOC staff, PC, 2019). Several have faced conflicts with owners and other organizations thanks to confrontational methods (outlined below). Adding complexity to relationships is the fact that INGO3, INGO8 and INGO9 have no continuous presence in Sauraha, instead occasionally parachuting in to, as they purported, ‘check on elephants’ or ‘look for property’ (UEOC, INGO1 and INGO2 personnel, PC, 2017, 2019). Without maintaining ongoing conversations with local advocates or elephant owners, it seems difficult to influence welfare. Lastly, two globally known organizations, identified here by the pseudonyms Animals in Need (AIN) and Global Animal Care (GAC), are now involved in Sauraha. Despite sharing the goal of improving elephant lives, their practices have not meshed with those of NGOs in the area, and tensions between organizations have resulted in the inability of AIN or GAC to create lasting change (AIN and GAC directors, INGO2 and UEOC personnel, PC, 2020).

This proliferation of I/NGOs has created concern over unintended consequences such as competition for funding, community conflict and

further alienation of marginalized groups (Sullivan, 2006; Puri, 2019). Because elephants and mahouts interact with a wide variety of these NGOs, disagreements between organizations and/or owners negatively impact welfare. These disagreements, which are the focus of the following section, may arise from what Roué (2003, p. 534) describes as attempts to collaborate ‘without regard for the ultimate goals of the others’. NGOs, mahouts and owners described themselves as focused on improving elephant welfare, which created the *illusion* of unified goals; however, each had differing views of what such welfare entailed. Attempts to create lasting change have been further foiled by a lack of consensus on value-laden definitions of terms such as ethical behaviour or appropriate care (Szydlowski, 2021).

### **Troubled relationships**

Personnel from the above organizations regularly expressed their desire to help elephants and described feeling responsible for improving elephant lives. Despite these common goals, tensions between organizations made it difficult to work together (Szydlowski, 2021). Interlocutors described issues centred around several key areas: (i) differing communication styles; (ii) differing perspectives on elephant husbandry and needs; and (iii) a desire to control the elephant-welfare narrative (including narratives which increase funding). Other issues arose from a lack of experience regarding local elephant–human relationships, Nepalese law, and in some cases, elephant biological or social needs. In addition, conflicts erupted over whose practices best represented the ideal concept of elephant care or sanctuary. For example, members of the elephant owners’ cooperative, AIN, GAC, INGO2, INGO3 and INGO8 described the ideal habitat as one large facility where all captive elephants could live together but did not take into consideration the potential for fighting and injury which might occur from forcing unrelated and unfamiliar elephants together (PC, 2019). Most of these organizations did not involve any researchers, specialists, veterinary staff, etc. on their teams. In contrast, INGO8 representatives, and several owners, described facilities where elephants could still serve as transport,

providing income, but where mahouts would be forbidden to use dominance management (PC, 2019). These groups did not consider that the elephants have no experience with other management styles and might become confused, unsafe or ‘unusable’ if suddenly released from traditional handling methods. Such concerns are relevant, as conflicts have occurred in areas where elephants unsocialized with one another have had violent interactions (NTNC staff, PC, 2019; Williams *et al.*, 2019; Mar, 2020). However, *increased* safety has been documented in areas where elephants experience a semi-wild or chain-free existence (Lehnhardt and Galloway, 2008). With adequate preparation time and knowledge of individual elephant personalities, these issues could be addressed (INGO1, INGO two and INGO3 personnel, PC, 2019; Szydlowski, 2021).

Regarding communication styles, INGO3 and INGO8 initially approached improving elephant welfare by publicly accusing owners and mahouts of using outdated, inappropriate or cruel methods (INGO1, UEOC and NTNC staff, PC, 2019). INGO3 and INGO8 took to social media, publishing issues with management, injuries or using a narrative best described as misery pimping, wherein donors are supplied with ongoing photos and stories of animal suffering to encourage donations (Haynes *et al.*, 2004; AIN director, PC, 2019). In addition, INGO3 and INGO8 trespassed in stables, approached and interacted with (touched, spoke to, offered sticks or browse to) elephants, all the while lecturing mahouts about perceived ‘abuse’ (INGO3 social media; INGO8, NTNC and UEOC personnel, PC, 2019). These visits took place without the knowledge or permission of owners. In addition, they were undertaken by NGO personnel with little knowledge of or experience with elephant biology, dietary or husbandry needs (see Wrenn, 2016 for a discussion of similar issues concerning animal-welfare NGOs). One tourist-formed NGO hired a local livestock vet to examine an elephant without the knowledge of the owner (the elephant was already under the care of the NTNC vet) (NTNC staff, PC, 2019). While these practices are inherently dangerous for the would-be advocates, they also suggest a neocolonial approach, with NGOs attempting to impose their own ideals, perhaps through a sense of ‘cultural superiority’ or heightened understanding above citizens of nations in the Global South, despite having no embodied

or academic knowledge of their own (Roka, 2012; Liu and Leung, 2019). These individuals purported that they had a 'right' to trespass and intervene if they believed elephants were 'hurt' (INGO8 founder, PC, 2019). Taking their public critique of practices a step further, several tourist-led NGOs built adversarial relationships by publicizing photos and videos online showing inappropriate elephant treatment without permission of those photographed and offering little background (Hotel1 owner, INGO1, INGO3, INGO4, INGO5, NTNC, UEOC personnel, PC, 2019). These posts garnered cruel and violent comments directed at owners and mahouts (Szydlowski, 2021). Furthermore, several INGOs have attempted to enter contracts to lease or retire elephants with individual owners without the knowledge of the larger cooperative, placing these owners in conflict with their peers. The connection of these INGOs to Western financial and cultural interests, as well as local governments, may serve to increase power differentials between members of different socio-economic groups (Walton *et al.*, 2016). Several organizations simply refused to include mahouts in conversations about elephant transfers, instead dealing only with the owner and 'purchasing' the elephant with the expectation that her mahout would be included in the package (INGO1, INGO2 and INGO5 staff, PC, 2019).

This treatment of elephants and mahouts as commodities, and as groups rather than individuals, highlights the vein of neocolonialism that runs through the management of some NGOs (Street, 2016; Larsen, 2018). Here, neocolonialism can be defined as the attitude that involving people from more economically developed nations is vital to improving elephant care, business practices and even individual personalities. This attitude was not uncommon among interlocutors. For example, one non-Nepalese founder described himself as 'well-loved' by Nepalese staff, as a parent and life guide for Nepalese employees (INGO1 founder, PC, 2020). In fact, INGO1's founder feels that thanks to him, his Nepalese business partner has 'evolved' into a better, more compassionate human being (PC, 2019). According to interlocutors, it is this attitude that continues to create tensions among community members, who regularly expressed their concern that INGOs are profiting from elephants while simultaneously painting Nepalese stakeholders as 'backward' or 'incompetent'. Community members suggested that INGOs should

instead involve more locals in decision making and work towards the goal of building a community-wide network of elephant care, run by Nepalese citizens (INGO2, INGO5, INGO6, NTNC and UEOC personnel, PC, 2019).

Because of the multitude of issues mentioned above, distrust and an inability to communicate between organizations is now pervasive. NGO personnel described owners as ‘criminals’ and ‘animal abusers’ with whom they can’t morally connect; owners decried ‘fake news’ stories of injured elephants spread by NGOs, typically without consent or understanding of the cultural significance of elephant-keeping (independent elephant owner, INGO1 and UEOC, PC, 2019). This distrust has led to fractures within the owners’ cooperative itself. For example, the owner of Hotel1 partnered with INGO1, from whom he received high lease prices to keep two elephants (out of five) off-chain and off-safari (Hotel1 owner, INGO1 and UEOC personnel, PC, 2019). Funding from this Western financier created tension and jealousy within the cooperative resulting in the owner’s ostracization (Hotel1 owner, UEOC personnel, PC, 2019). UEOC leadership worried that since INGO1 chose to ‘meet secretly with single people [owners]’ that it disadvantaged the cooperative’s other members. UEOC members complained that the hotelier was ‘getting away’ with breaking UEOC rules by contracting with someone outside their existing framework (PC, 2019).

Further tensions arose from INGOs’ differing views of elephant needs, especially between Nepalese and non-Nepalese personnel. The bulk of Nepalese owners did not see an immediate need to change their management methods; but believed that an end to so-called traditional management and elephant-backed safari was probably on the horizon (PC, 2019). While owners acknowledged that elephant husbandry and nutrition was lacking (see above), most felt that they were providing elephants with *enough* care to keep them work-ready. The NTNC vet agreed, with some reservation (PC, 2019). In his view, there was little academic research examining the true needs of captive elephants within Nepal, making it difficult to define appropriate husbandry and welfare. He explained that without evidence of *these* elephants’ nutritional needs or Nepal-specific welfare metrics, he could not recommend sweeping changes to husbandry or stabling. His position is understandable, given



his role in conservation efforts and his obligation to care for elephants belonging to the owners' cooperative.

INGOs (including AIN and GAC) and local advocates did not agree with owners' perspectives on elephant health (PC, 2019). Instead, they maintained that Asian elephant biology, physical and mental needs do not vary based upon their location or country-specific data, and as such universal standards for welfare and care should apply. These NGOs feel that the wealth of global data clearly outlines feeding, movement, agency and social requirements. They feel these requirements cannot be cast aside in deference to 'traditional' management practices, especially given the short history of tourism elephants in Nepal (Mishra, 2008; INGO2 staff, PC, 2019).

Many of the conflicts between personnel from advocacy groups, INGOs and owners revolved around a desire to control the narrative. Interlocutors felt that many NGOs simply wanted to claim ownership of the first 'sanctuary' (despite not having land or elephants), develop the largest following on social media, increase funding, or be the most celebrated by their donors (Hotell1 owner, INGO4 and INGO5 staff, PC, 2019). To that end, their leaders have alienated staff of other NGOs who could be great allies. This type of narcissistic leader is not uncommon in non-profit organizations or corporations (Fennimore, 2021). Instead of working towards a common goal, founders appeared to desire what one interlocutor described as a 'private paradise' – a facility allowing self-aggrandizement and thus garnering further funding (INGO2, PC, 2020; AIC staff, PC, 2020). Spreading photos and stories of alleged successes or owners' failures on social media has instead increased conflict between these NGOs, the cooperative and the community (INGO1, INGO3 and UEOC personnel, PC, 2020). While some owners were unconcerned with their images being used in videos or articles – even those regarding illegal practice – many others stated that they were angry that their facilities or elephants were represented without permission (NepalNews, 2019; UEOC, PC, 2019). In fact, some called the police when INGO staff refused to leave their property or stop filming (Pant, 2018; NTNC staff, PC, 2019). In one case, an INGO leader was repeatedly contacted by the police and threatened with deportation (Pant, 2018; INGO8 and NTNC staff, PC, 2019).



## **An example of conflicting goals?**

Two INGOs mentioned above, GAC and AIN, became involved with Sauraha's private elephants a decade ago (Schmidt-Burbach, 2017; Gagan, PC, 2019). 'Gagan', former AIN director, explained that his organization was coordinating with the owners' cooperative and GAC to formulate plans for a city-wide, chain-free elephant facility (PC, 2020). The vision for the facility, however, depended upon the speaker. Owners described a place where management of elephants could be centralized, reducing care costs while providing continued income, and placing elephants closer to the tourist gates (UEOC, PC, 2019). They described an area where those who wished to ride could, and those who did not could simply pay to observe. In contrast, AIN and GAC envisioned a facility which would permanently end the riding culture in Nepal (Schmidt-Burbach, 2017). This difference in perspectives was the first hurdle in the project's development.

The second hurdle arose from differences in understanding of the Nepalese elephant tourism business. After performing initial interviews which indicated that tourists would support a non-riding facility (World Animal Protection, 2018), AIN and GAC signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the owners' cooperative and constructed an elephant facility and business plan (World Animal Protection, 2018; Gagan, PC, 2020). However, according to owners, only 'Westerners' desire to see riding end, and therefore only if Westerners again become the primary tourists to Nepal would the plan succeed (PC, 2019). Currently, tourists from within Nepal and other parts of Asia are the primary consumers of elephant safari, and as these demographic groups support the practice (for academic discussion of this topic, see Wen and Ximing, 2008), owners remain committed to providing rides.

Another hurdle arose from what NTNC staff described as their complete exclusion from both the planning process and the MOU (PC, 2019). The NTNC, described above, provides all veterinary care for these elephants, and arguably knows them best. The support and advice of veterinary staff might have been the needed push to keep owners involved. The plan may also have stalled thanks to AIN's requirement for full participation from UEOC members before beginning (Gagan, PC,

2020). Gagan continues to insist INGOs refrain from obtaining elephants regardless of their welfare, believing that only with unanimous owner participation will the riding culture end (PC, 2020). In his view, if other NGOs continue to provide income for owners, there is little impetus to commit to the AIN plan. In some cases, this has proven true. UEOC members have attracted donated foodstuffs, stable upgrades and financing from smaller NGOs without giving up elephant ownership or committing to improve welfare (UEOC, INGO1, INGO3 and INGO5 staff, PC, 2019, 2022).

Lastly, and perhaps representing the largest hurdle, AIN and GAC want elephant owners to pay for this sanctuary, so owners will feel responsible for its future (Gagan, PC, 2020). Owners, however, explained they felt no need to fund any project arising outside Nepal or based upon foreign desires (elephant owners, PC, 2019). They purported that AIN promised ‘millions of dollars’ for the project (Gagan explained there is ‘plenty of funding’ but claims he did not offer any specifics to the UEOC), and therefore owners don’t see a need to invest their money (PC, 2019). Owners instead felt that by refusing to cooperate, increased funding might materialize (PC, 2019). For now, the plan appears to be stalled. According to staff from local and international NGOs, they will continue to reach out to AIN in the hopes of formulating a plan.

### **A contrasting example**

INGO2, in contrast, has avoided many pitfalls faced by other organizations (INGO2, PC, 2019, 2021, 2022). Their founders, one a former zookeeper and veterinary technician, first moved to the area, obtained a business visa and opened a restaurant with locals. Due to a belief that both mahouts and elephants are deserving of respect, physical and emotional support, they then contacted owners offering free or inexpensive elephant health and foot care, and free pachyderm food supplements. They then provided clothing for mahouts, social opportunities for mahouts and their families, school fees for mahout children, and financial support for health care. They also began using

their own social media, local events and personal conversations to speak of mahouts as vital to elephant care (mahouts, PC, 2019, 2020).

INGO2 founders requested permission from both mahouts and owners before interacting with elephants and then offered services which owners saw as valuable (INGO2 founders, PC, 2019). They posted only neutral or positive messages online, to avoid alienating owners and mahouts or perpetuating negative stereotypes. Finally, they did not try to control the elephant narrative. They quietly approached stakeholders as individuals and developed relationships with each one. Founders reached out to other INGOs and individuals working in the area in the hope that they could build a community of elephant advocates. While they share common goals and work with many of these INGOs, they have had to sever ties with some, citing irreconcilable differences in practice or communication styles.

INGO2 was able to negotiate for their first elephant resident in 2019 (INGO2 founders, PC, 2019). This elephant was injured and removed from safari for severe foot and joint problems. She previously spent a year chained within her small stable as her former owner debated what to do, and NGOs argued over her care. Why was this NGO successful in transitioning her where others failed? First, they could prove financing was in place for a year's worth of support prior to moving this elephant to their facility, reassuring the former owner she would be cared for. Secondly, they performed risk analysis and conducted long-term negotiations – which according to Nepalese interlocutors is expected practice, but which many foreigners are hesitant to undertake. In addition, the NGO involved experienced staff including behavioural specialists, elephant veterinarians and zookeepers. Lastly, they requested advice and support from the NTNC vet, who helped negotiate terms with the owner.

Initially described as 'very dangerous' by the veterinarian and a 'killer' by her mahout, this elephant has since transformed to a sweet (occasionally anxious) individual who regularly chooses to affiliate with selected humans and one conspecific (NTNC staff, PC, 2019). Her feet are healing, and she voluntarily approaches for veterinary and foot care via positive reinforcement training. Her original mahouts were offered increased wages and chose to accompany her to the new stable. They are

now described as well respected by other staff and outsiders; these mahouts exhibit a sense of ownership over the stable, beautifying the space by cleaning and planting flowers in common areas and encouraging visits from others. They now have elevated housing (for the monsoon season) and access to medical care. By seeing each elephant and mahout as individuals, and working with vet staff and owners, this NGO has built a community network, especially among those interested in working together towards solutions which improve elephant welfare throughout Nepal. These cooperative relationships, and their constant presence as community members, may be why they have succeeded where others have struggled.

## **Conclusions**

Captive elephant care is a complex and evolving issue influenced by changing local perspectives on the use of animals in tourism and the growing involvement of international entities. This chapter offers a glimpse into some of the ways that interactions with a wide variety of human stakeholders have impacted the lives of captive elephants in Nepal. While all interlocutors expressed a desire to act ethically and provide what they see as best for elephants, few agreed on how to proceed, and thanks to differences in approaches were unable to work together. Conflicts arose when organizations failed to educate themselves on local perspectives, alternative viewpoints, or the desires of elephant owners and caregivers.

Differing communication styles regularly impacted the ability of NGOs to succeed in promoting welfare. Some refused to work with the larger community of NGOs, elephant owners or their cooperative. Others created conflict by focusing on perceived flaws in elephant management or using social media to expose what they defined as cruel treatment; however, exposing such treatment was ineffective in improving elephant welfare. Conflicts also arose from differing beliefs in approach or scale, or from differing definitions of sanctuary. While some NGOs chose to create change for a small number of elephants, owners and mahouts as

opportunities presented themselves, others preferred to wait for unanimous owner support. Thanks to ongoing efforts from NGO personnel, some organizations are now seeking common ground.

What has yet to be considered by non-resident NGOs operating in Nepal are the needs and desires of individual elephants. Many of the INGOs discussed above lacked even basic knowledge of elephant biological or social needs. They did not seek out indigenous or academic knowledge before deciding upon what 'welfare' might mean for captive elephants. Any attempts to improve welfare are bound to fail if personnel do not understand the needs of their target species. Likewise, an understanding of mahout knowledge, their role in society, their needs and their desires is required to improve working conditions within Nepalese *hattisars*.

Tourists themselves may play an important role in improving the lives of those working in tourism practice. Educating oneself on the living conditions of human and other-than-human animals in tourism, and how tourism influences the social standing, health, management and financial impacts of those involved is key to becoming a responsible tourist. Likewise, tourists should focus on supporting organizations which have a local presence, involve local community members or local NGOs, and which avoid neocolonial approaches to welfare.

Because the current economic model of elephant riding used in Nepal is problematic for both mahout and elephants, it appears that change is needed. Whether a community-wide stable, a shift in safari styles, or several private, non-riding sanctuaries are the best answer remains to be seen. Further examination of riding and non-riding facilities in Thailand which have demonstrated welfare improvements for both mahouts and elephants might be considered as positive models for Nepal. Given the number of elephants and the presence of a well-organized owners' cooperative, Sauraha may provide an ideal future site for some form of non-riding facility. In the meantime, there is the possibility of improving the living conditions of two important and marginalized groups, mahouts and elephants, if NGOs can continue to discover common ground and leave behind neocolonial notions. It is necessary that both local and Western organizations be willing to work within the existing

elephant owners' cooperative and alongside the community to create lasting change.

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# 7 Contemporary Coexistence at the Seaside: Social Narratives of Gulls Living Alongside Tourism

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DOI: 10.1079/9781800625259.0007

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## **Abstract**

Gull species, commonly referred to as seagulls, are a conspicuous presence in many seaside resorts. In these tourism-dependent coastal spaces, these seabirds live their lives among the human leisure experience. As a result, gull and human interests are required to coexist in these tourism spaces. However, as this chapter illuminates through the analysis of 21st-century newspaper coverage of gulls in the resort town of Scarborough, UK, the coexistence is anything but neighbourly. In considering the representation of gulls in newspapers, as a magnification of social narratives, the chapter uncovers anthropocentric and speciesist biases that ignore gulls as sentient beings. This has significant implications for gulls in seaside tourism destinations and, in addition, human responsibilities.

## **Introduction**

On the UK coast, as non-human animals look to fulfil their interests as sentient beings, humans seek the pleasures and profits of tourism. In tourism-dependent coastal resorts, such as the focus of this chapter Scarborough, local human stakeholders cater for visitors who spend their leisure time with the traditional bucket-and-spade seaside holiday (Walton, 2000). Numerous tourist interests are fulfilled at the UK seaside resort, from eating fish ‘n’ chips, sticks of candy floss and an ice cream perched on a sea wall, building sandcastles or burying someone neck-deep in the sand, to ambling between penny-amusement arcades on the promenade. At the seaside resort today, such traditional holiday activities are joined by pubs, fine-dining restaurants and mainstream branded attractions, such as the Sea Life Centre aquarium. Sitting behind these attractions is the seaside as a place where human leisure-driven ideals challenge the non-human right to belong, and create conflicts over which animals are included and excluded (Carr and Tully, forthcoming). Such contestations infringe on animals’ rights as sentient beings and undermine humans’ responsibilities to them.

Gulls are a seabird with a long history in human environments, one that has increased in the 21st century. As humanity has expanded, particularly with urbanization, gulls’ adaptability has allowed them to increasingly exist in places designed by and for people and their activities (Rock, 2005). Despite more than 50 species of gull being in existence globally (Ross-Smith, n.d.), humans commonly and collectively label them seagulls, an indicator of the lack of attention paid to them. The seagull is a human construct that places understandings in the human imagination. Through this construct, gulls are often positioned as a pest animal in human environments and, in particular, a detrimental aspect of the seaside (BBC, 2015; Carr and Reyes-Galindo, 2017). As such, gulls join the group of metaphorical ‘trash’ animals that exist in the human imagination (Nagy and Johnson II, 2013), thereby risking human disregard for how gull actions are a response to their interests as sentient beings.

At the seaside, gull species live via their own physiological, psychological and social interests. Yet the relations between gulls, local people and the tourism sector may be anything but neighbourly, given the human demonization of gulls and their behaviour in UK human

society (Carr and Reyes-Galindo, 2017). This relationship epitomizes the notion that human and animal interest groups often conflict at the seaside (Carr and Tully, forthcoming). However, despite this coexistence between gulls and tourism, these birds are largely invisible in the sector's animal concerns. In recent years, the social sciences have undergone an animal turn that has seen work position animals as agents within social action (e.g. Kirksey and Helmreich, 2010; Rose, 2010; Taylor, 2012; Hamilton and Taylor, 2017; Carter and Charles, 2018). This is being replicated in the tourism field (e.g. Carr and Broom, 2018; Young and Carr, 2018; Dashper, 2020; Äijälä, 2021; Rickly and Kline, 2021; Bertella, 2022). Yet this turn is yet to consider gull and tourism entanglements. Such a situation means what we seem to understand about gulls' influence on tourism and vice versa is predominantly anecdotal. Therefore, this chapter expands thoughts and debates around gull and tourism coexistence. In doing so, it is positioned within a social sciences more attentive to the multispecies entanglements that exist in multifarious forms around the world and in which humans have responsibilities of care (Van Dooren and Rose, 2016).

Increasingly, calls are made for tourism to become more animalcentric in its thinking and action (Carr and Broom, 2018). This aligns with the need for the tourism industry to become more attentive to animal welfare and rights issues that it affects (Fennell, 2012, 2013). As such, the need exists to recognize that animals' lives contain physical, mental, social and emotional interests and to account for these in practice. This chapter considers how gull interests are disregarded in favour of humans and, especially, their tourism practices on the UK coast. It uses empirical evidence from 21st-century newspaper coverage of gulls in the UK seaside town of Scarborough. This data illuminates humans' social narratives of gulls and their relations with people and tourism activities in this leisured seaside place. In doing so, the chapter explores how representations of gulls occur via anthropocentric bias and speciesist principles which ignore the interests of gulls. In reflecting on these social narratives the chapter critiques a failure to recognize gull sentience in favour of tourism activity.

## **Knowledge of Animal Sentience**

Animal sentience is displayed in the complex and unique physical, mental, social and emotional lives that animals of all species experience (Tully and Carr, 2022). It is a concept that acknowledges that animals have capacity for environmental and personal awareness, feelings like joy, boredom and fear. Sentience acknowledges that animals can partake in social relationships and meaningful communication, have abilities to choose and make decisions, and perform activities that in the human world would correspond to play and work; it recognizes animals have the capacity to be creative and resourceful, to mourn and grieve, to learn and adapt, to suffer mental and physical pain (Bekoff and Pierce, 2017). Due to increasing scientific knowledge of species-specific sentience, humans should now consider that each individual animal should be thought to possess some degree of sentience (Broom, 2014). Such recognition of animal sentience should guide how humans, who have the power in relations with other species, act towards animals. Broom (2014) reasons that as people share comparable characteristics of sentience and recognize these as morally worthy in each other, human relationships with animals should be based on similar thoughts of generated obligations. Within this context, people, as those in power in human–animal relations, are obliged to act with responsibility to enable each animal to experience their best physical, mental, social and emotional life.

## **The Natural Behaviour of Gulls**

If we are to start from the position that all animals contain some degree of sentience, what may this look like in natural gull behaviour? Gulls are colony breeders. As a result, they traditionally are found gathering in groups to nest and breed. Take the kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) found in Scarborough, for example, who traditionally colonize cliff faces. Once the kittiwakes are gathered in their colonies, around the breeding season (approximately April through to July) they undertake actions that

demonstrate awareness, emotional investments and other cognitive capabilities. They conduct site-suitability assessments over predation concerns, court and socialize with a mate, construct a nest, incubate eggs, occupy and defend their nesting site, and rear and teach their chicks (Danchin, 1987). Once a chick is born, a parent stays in the nest to protect and care for their young, defecating over the side so as not to have to leave the chick at risk of predation and thus causing a 'whitewashing' effect on the surrounding area (Coulson, 2011).

Within gull colonies there are distinguishable social interactions. The kittiwake pairs communicate with each other via distinctive vocalizations. One such example is the greeting display between pairs that entails a distinct kittiwake call (Coulson, 2002). This call is made uniquely relevant between mating pairs. Moreover, individuals perform it in multiple vocalization bursts with distinct identifiers hidden within its sounds (Aubin *et al.*, 2007). Through these identifiers, individual kittiwakes communicate with their mate, chick and, possibly, those closest nesting neighbours (Mulard *et al.*, 2008; Coulson, 2011). In short, these birds have the capability to develop and understand distinctive communication strategies.

Like the kittiwake, the herring gull (*Larus argentatus*) also inhabits Scarborough. It is possible to witness intelligence in both species. Take, for example, the nest-site selection of herring gulls, who have moved into human environments increasingly over the last 70 years (Rock, 2005). These gulls put significant thought into the choice of their nesting site. Dalla Pria *et al.* (2022) observe how herring gulls utilize specific man-made structures of a place, such as harbours, rubbish bins, streetlights and roof structures when nesting. Harbours and rubbish bins act as consistent food sources. For feeding, the herring gull is an opportunist who can utilize a range of sources, such as fish, crustaceans, molluscs, smaller birds, various insects and a wide range of anthropogenic sources (O'Hanlon *et al.*, 2022). Herring gulls observe activities and follow patterns of human behaviour to learn when the best food sources are available (Spelt *et al.*, 2021). Streetlights are a way to extend daylight foraging periods and an observation point over an area (Dalla Pria *et al.*, 2022). Suitable roof structures offer protection from predators similar to cliffs (Rock, 2005). Thus, through their intelligence and adaptability

herring gulls have the ability to learn how the places and actions of humans can be of benefit to them and assist in their living.

The gulls of Scarborough demonstrate in their behaviour various abilities that align with the sentience concept outlined earlier. If we are to approach all animals with the belief that they possess sentience, then the gulls discussed clearly qualify as sentient beings. Some may suggest that gull behaviour is based on evolutionary processes drawn from environmental aspects as opposed to the physical, social, mental and emotional interests of sentience (Tinbergen, 1960). Yet this, like with determinations of sentience, is a human view and, as with sentience, is unprovable. Therefore, it is surely a better strategy to support the idea that gulls are sentient given the complex physical, psychological and social life experiences this inherent dimension entails. As such understandings come down to human judgement. Consequently, it seems that the best strategy is to side with the animal (Bekoff, 2008). Such an approach provides a basis from which humans can act in ways that treat the physical, mental, social and emotional lives of gulls with justice and fairness.

## **Assessing the Social Narratives of Gulls in Newspapers**

The media is a social institution that is central to the construction and maintenance of social meanings and values. As such, it is fundamental to constructing the meanings of animals. It is a forceful institution that is inseparable from the socialization of global society (Hjarvard, 2008). Media discourse, such as the contents of newspapers, is a dynamic part of how people construct and understand the social world. Such media discourses 'shape what the public is interested in', yet what the public is interested in also influences what the media covers (Kahneman, 2011, p. 138). The social narratives found in newspapers, hence, are representative of public attitudes and beliefs and a driving force behind them. As such, newspapers have been used to assess the representation of animals' presence in society and, of particular relevance to this chapter, show an ability to illuminate the social narratives that exist



around birds in society (e.g. Jerolmack, 2008; Fernández *et al.*, 2022). Jerolmack (2008) illuminates how a small portrayal of pigeons ballooned into a full social narrative of them as ‘rats with wings’ via newspaper discourse. This makes newspapers the ideal data source to explore the social narratives that exist around gulls. The remainder of this chapter analyses regional newspapers that cover the UK seaside town of Scarborough to reflect on the representation of gulls in the social narratives of a tourism-dependent resort town.

Scarborough – in the county of Yorkshire – is a coastal town in the North-East of England. It is situated in the borough of Scarborough and is operated by Scarborough Borough Council, which also manages the neighbouring coastal resorts of Filey and Whitby. The town is the original seaside resort destination of the UK and pioneered many visitor coastal leisure activities (Scarborough Maritime Heritage Centre, n.d.). Many traditional ‘bucket ‘n’ spade’ seaside-holiday activities remain in Scarborough, with donkey rides and amusement arcades joined by more contemporary attractions such as the aquarium Sea Life. As such, the town remains one of the most popular destinations on the UK coast for visitors (Kirby, 2019). Before the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the borough was attracting 10.2 million trips annually, with visitors contributing more than £610 million to the local economy and employment for 47.3% of the local population (Borough of Scarborough Council, 2020). Hence, tourism is, and long has been, integral to Scarborough. As such, regional newspapers of this county were considered potential data sources for reflections on the social narratives of gulls.

The 21st-century newspaper content used in this chapter is a sub-sample of a larger data set. The study that created this data set collected newspaper content on gulls’ presence in Scarborough, dating back to the first mention of them in regional newspapers in 1857. In total 278 content pieces were collected up to 2022, including news articles, opinion and commentary editorials, travel reviews and letters to the editors. The content came from three digital newspaper archives: (i) The British Newspaper Archive; (ii) LexisNexis; and (iii) Newsbank. The three archives were required because no one archive held a complete timeline of relevant newspapers. The simple search term of ‘gulls and

Scarborough' was used along with the regional filters of the newspaper archive. This was followed by a manual-selection process which consisted of the first author reading each piece of content for relevance. Subsequently, each relevant piece was downloaded in portable document format (PDF), entered into an Excel database, and filed by decade with a unique identifying number for source tracing. A follow-up search with the term 'seagulls and Scarborough' found no omissions from the initial collection stage. For this chapter, 131 pieces of content published since the 1 January 2000 to 13 May 2022 were analysed.

To analyse the entire data set the first author conducted a qualitative thematic analysis (Walters, 2016). Each piece of content was read individually in date sequence to develop initial coding. This involved numbering and noting codes on the PDF document along with the writing of brief researcher thoughts in a notepad. Through this process 456 codes were established. Splitting these codes by date, they were re-read, associations identified, and arranged into combined ideas to create themes per decade via a Microsoft Word document. From this analysis, the chapter focuses on the 21st-century content. This period's themes were placed into a new Microsoft Word document and were again read through with returns to the original PDFs for cross-checks and further critical reflection. As Walters (2016) discusses, thematic analysis provides an inductive strategy that sees the researcher infer from the data as opposed to their theoretical presumptions, through its numerous stages and the researcher's use of a notepad for ongoing reflections.

## **Social Narratives of Gulls**

### **The gull population of Scarborough**

Gulls are consistently framed as problematic for Scarborough's human activity and, in particular, its tourism. This is evident in reports of an increase in the kittiwake population. For instance, a headline warns, 'Residents face new nuisance as gulls move in' (*Yorkshire Post*, 2002). The weariness underlying this is associated with the previous establishment

of herring gulls in the town. By the 21st century, herring gulls ‘bloated on a diet of discarded fish and chips have become a familiar sight on rooftops and chimneys’ (*Yorkshire Post*, 2002), with their presence causing ‘headaches’ for people via alleged bothersome behaviour that means ‘the rising numbers are a real problem’ (*This is the North East*, 2003). One reader’s letter lays bare the negative views associated with gulls, associating them with disease, which is a common trope in media portrayals of ‘problematic’ animals’ presence in human-constructed places (Jerolmack, 2008):

The gull problem in Scarborough is reaching epidemic proportions, with filthy droppings and nests everywhere. The gulls are fine if they stick to their rightful home on the cliffs, but should be treated like vermin when they live, scavenge and nest throughout the town.

(*Scarborough News*, 2014a)

Gull behaviour causes issues for the human interests of the place. Gulls have become such ‘a menace that they have left some people on one Scarborough street almost too frightened to leave their own home’ (*Scarborough Evening News*, 2005a). These challenges to human interests are expanded on in a reader’s letter that says:

Is there any way Anti-Social Behaviour Orders can be served on the growing population of ill-disciplined seagulls frequenting the resort? I realise that living here seagulls are a fact of life, but their numbers seem to have increased dramatically and they never seem to sleep. They skateboard on our roof, hold River Dance auditions, quarrel, brawl and constantly scream filthy abuse.

(*Scarborough Evening News*, 2005b)

These representations cast gulls as a problem. The language of ‘nuisance’, ‘bloated’, ‘headache’, ‘menace’ and ‘vermin’ all have negative connotations for the human imagination. The comments and letters about the ‘real’ difficulties that people experience in the town emphasize disruption to human interests. Further representations contribute to a framing that accentuates the challenge to people of gulls. These are views that position the birds as perpetrators and the humans as victims. Indeed, as one article notes ‘a growing population of aggressive seagulls are making lives a misery for people’ (*Scarborough Evening News*, 2005a). Another labels gulls as ‘hook-beaked invaders’, remarking that ‘invading gulls are terrorising the locals’ (*Yorkshire Evening Post*, 2002). Hence,

showing the birds as the Other, which is reminiscent of the discriminatory social narratives that surround human immigrants (Nagy and Johnson II, 2013).

These social narratives are grounded in anthropocentric bias and speciesist principles. They continually represent human interests as the most valuable and without equal (Peggs, 2012; Fennell, 2014; Tully and Carr, 2020). Newspaper articles frame the gulls as a danger to humans and their ideals of place. Consequently, in social narratives, human interests of Scarborough are visible and prominent, framed and shared as valuable, while gull interests in living in the town, as opposed to on the cliffs, are unseen and worthless.

This speciesism is exemplified in discussions around the culling of gulls. The newspapers often reference that the local council was able to take action against gulls, via poisoning, from the 1970s until 1990, when public complaints led the central UK government to prohibit such acts. This representation is done in a way that positions the destruction of gulls as the best strategy, saying things like ‘since culling of the gulls stopped in 1990 the population of birds in the borough had reached its highest ever recorded level’ (*Scarborough News*, 2014b) and ‘the council’s policy of using killer bait up to 1990 had reduced the gull population considerably’ (*Yorkshire Evening Post*, 2002). When used in combination with the previously discussed negative framing of gulls and especially the discourse of population increase in the 21st century, these representations say that culling eliminates the problems and protects human interests. In other words, eradicate gull populations to remove human troubles. Killing animals behind the facade of population control is speciesism at its most damaging. It is the use of human power over nature, enacted to end animal life, the ultimate expression of domination. As such, it is a failure of humans to act with responsibility for gulls as sentient beings. It is also a strategy that has an established history of causing disharmony between those that are pro-culling and anti-culling, and has consequences that span social, political, environmental and economic dimensions, as evidenced with badger debates within the UK; a species which has been long persecuted as a potential vector of disease (Caplan, 2012). Such economic dimensions are critical in Scarborough as the culling is seen as a strategy used to

counter gull behaviour that disrupts the tourism experience, as will be discussed below, and, thus, threatens the primary economic activity. Yet, it is also worth noting that such strategies of animal abuse also carry external risks for the town's tourism sector. Animal campaigners encourage destination boycotts over such acts and use them to challenge a destination image (Shaheer *et al.*, 2023).

Despite the scientific advancements in knowledge of sentience identifying gulls as worthy of moral regard, the representation of killing them as humans' perfect solution, as noted from the newspaper articles studied, has not been confined to historical references. As a new licence became available in 2015 that allows actions which mainly involve the destruction of gulls' nests and eggs, the idea of killing was at the forefront of representations: 'Fed-up residents have been handed a 'licence to kill' Scarborough's dive-bombing seagulls' (Scarborough News, 2015).

But seaside campaigners think they may have finally stumbled across the answer to the great seagull problem – in the form of a so-called 'licence to kill'. As the end of another summer plagued with gull attacks on the seafront nears, Scarborough councillor and avid gull campaigner Andrew Jenkinson says it's time to take action. He wants residents and businesses to make use of a Natural England licence which allows people to legally destroy herring gulls' nests and eggs and even kill some nuisance birds using semi-automatic guns or cage traps.

(*Yorkshire Post*, 2015a).

### **Conflicting behaviour: gulls and tourists**

The social narratives occur because of the human priorities that stakeholders defend, especially the town's tourism sector. The difficulties begin with the high tourism season clashing with the breeding period of the gulls, which results in 'the beaked bandits swooping on holidaymakers and fouling the seafront' (Scarborough News, 2015). When visitor sensitivities are engaged by unwanted animal attention, especially when the animal is socially framed as a pest, as gulls are, they are more likely to have a negative tourism experience (Carr and Broom, 2018). Hence, there are warnings that gulls' presence 'makes visiting the seaside at Scarborough a less-pleasurable experience than it should be'

(*Yorkshire Post*, 2020). The representations make clear that the less-pleasurable tourism experiences are a result of gull behaviour.

Much gull behaviour is represented as detrimental to the experience of tourism in Scarborough. For instance, take kittiwakes – these are intelligent social communicators with specialist vocalizations, and birds with unique behavioural actions, especially when nesting, breeding and rearing chicks, such as defecating outside the nest, as mentioned earlier. The depiction of this is ‘the Kittiwakes that nest on the business frontages of the foreshore ... are noisy, messy and smelly’ (*Scarborough News*, 2014c). Relative to their defecation, they cause an ‘unpleasant trail down the side of buildings and on surrounding pavements. On hot days it also produces a strong ammonia smell’ (*Scarborough News*, 2020). These behaviours are not shown as natural or a product of animal sentience but, rather, are seen through an anthropocentrically biased lens. The portrayals emphasize the negative impacts for human activity and sensitivities and are framed as conflictive with the tourism experience. For example:

Bosses at the Grand Hotel in Scarborough have swooped to take action against randy seagulls which have been keeping guests awake with their noisy love-making antics. Guests have complained at being woken up as early as 3am by the cheeky gulls. Eric Barlow, operations manager at the historic hotel, said: ‘When the gulls get passionate they can become quite noisy’. He said other hotel owners in Scarborough had also received ‘grief’ from holidaymakers who had received a rude awakening in the early hours. The problem is worst during the mating season which almost coincides with the busiest part of the tourism season. He said ‘We’ve scaffolding up as part of our continuing clean-up of the outside of the building and have taken the opportunity to carry preventative measures to stop birds from nesting outside. We are installing netting and spikes to deter the gulls’. Mr Barlow added that the gulls were also a problem because of bird muck often being splattered across guests’ windows and pavements outside the hotel.

(*Scarborough Evening News*, 2006)

The feeding habits of herring gulls are characterized as particularly harmful to the tourism experience. Herring gulls have proven to be adaptable over recent decades to urban environments and are opportunistic feeders on anthropogenic sources. As a result, their actions often involve taking food from litter bins and people’s hands, the latter being framed consistently as ‘gull muggings’ by ‘dive-bombing birds’ (*Scarborough News*, 2014d). For example, a newspaper article identified

‘scores of complaints of ‘gull mugging’ which have seen people walking the streets – several of them ice-cream clutching children – being attacked by the birds’ in Scarborough (*The Northern Echo*, 2017). Another noted that herring gulls have ‘developed a liking for food traditionally consumed by humans and they are willing to both scavenge and to mug people to obtain it’ and ‘are getting bolder and more brazen in their attempts to snatch food’ (*Yorkshire Post*, 2015b). Representing the gulls as muggers criminalizes their behaviour and ignores the reality that gulls are doing what comes naturally to them as opportunistic feeders aiming to survive. For the tourism of Scarborough, their natural behaviour is represented as detrimental: ‘They [gulls] remain a constant nuisance for any holidaymaker settling down for traditional fish and chips on the seafronts of Yorkshire’s most popular resorts’ (*Yorkshire Post*, 2015c).

[Councillor Bill Chatt said] ‘We want to encourage people to come to Scarborough, have their chips and their candyfloss and swim in the sea, without being swamped by these seagulls. They can be quite terrifying to a child. When these seagulls are mugging people, and upsetting people, we’ve got to try and do what we can’. The blight of the nuisance gulls has been well documented in recent months, with SBC [Scarborough Borough Council] even starting a record of the number of muggings of incredulous residents and tourist.

(*Yorkshire Post*, 2017)

There are also concerns about how a large gull population affects the town’s destination image as noted here: ‘gulls raiding seafront litter bins and rubbish then being strewn. It creates a very bad image for holidaymakers to our town, said Councillor Jenkinson’ (*Yorkshire Post*, 2013). In letters to the editor, readers express concerns that Scarborough looks like ‘a bird-battered ghost town with the visual appeal of a rotting sausage roll discarded by even the hungriest gull’ (*Scarborough News*, 2014e), and hence, ‘something must be done before visitors are put off coming’ (*Scarborough Evening News*, 2005b). The gulls are positioned as a disruptor to the crucial practice of tourism in Scarborough. The anthropocentric-biased and speciesist-principled social narratives give ultimate priority to the activity of tourism, for and by humans.

## **Speaking for gulls**

The social narratives represented in newspaper coverage of Scarborough are not evenly balanced. Moreover, contributions from those looking to recognize gulls as worthy of thought are restricted. Often contributions defending gull behaviour may be labelled as coming from an 'objector', 'protestor' or 'campaigner'. Furthermore, in being defined in such a way the authors of these contributions are labelled as deviant, riling against the dominant social narrative and morality. These contributions may also be buried deep in an article after the headline and majority of the content establish the negative account. A similar situation occurs with the limited contributions from animal experts, such as the animal rescuers who treat gulls after human abuse. They are quoted, for instance, saying, 'by shooting and killing gulls without a licence people face prosecution on three fronts' (*This is the North East*, 2004). The quotes of animal experts are reduced to a focus on the human aspect of a situation rather than using them to understand gull behaviour. In this way the suffering of the gulls is ignored, doubling down on their disempowerment. In short, the newspaper content gives no sort of voice to gulls. Those trying to defend them are enveloped by the anthropocentric bias and speciesist principles that establish the dominant representation.

## **Reflections on Social Narratives**

Ideas about animal belonging and exclusion are constantly in flux, dependent on the whims of human choice (Carr and Tully, forthcoming). This is based on the recognition that humans are in a position of power in this coexistence. Yet far from giving humans the right to do as they like, this power comes with the responsibility to ensure the well-being of those not in positions of power, including gulls as sentient beings with inherent life interests. As Broom (2014) says, humans have 'a duty to act or to refrain from acting' (p. 13) in manners that account for animal sentience. How humans choose to construct animals via social meanings is one such act. This is demonstrated in the social narrative of gulls in Scarborough which portrays them as an unwelcome pest, an animal that



is particularly disruptive to the tourism activities that the town depends on. This fails to acknowledge these gulls as sentient beings.

Responsibility for gulls is lacking in the social narratives of them in Scarborough. This illustrates gulls as unworthy of care and fair treatment, as evidenced, for example, in frames around the killing of them for ‘population control’ that allegedly would resolve human grievances.

Throughout the social narratives, there is a lack of understanding of bird behaviour and also a lack of willingness to engage with such understandings. The anthropocentric-biased and speciesist-principled narratives mask the sentience of gulls. As a result, people simply see a story of gull behaviour as detrimental to human activities, especially those of tourism. As such the narrative reinforces the social norm. The social meanings ascribed to animals though, like any story, can be rewritten if humans choose; clear improvements in the representation of gulls are possible. Indeed, animal scientists and ornithologists believe that representing scientific understandings of gull behaviour better in newspapers would alter people’s thoughts about them (Carr and Reyes-Galindo, 2017). Such a transition would seem long overdue given the growing depth and range of scientific knowledge about gull sentience. As such, it is important to support calls for newspapers, and all media platforms for that matter, to become more responsible via accurate, scientifically-backed animal representations (Freeman *et al.*, 2011). Yet it is important to recognize that doing so flies in the face of the dominant narrative and its resistance to change. To overcome such dominance and reticence demands the application of social and individual power by activists and those in power – both humans in general and those politically and economically invested stakeholders who influence the media.

It is critical to consider the tourism researchers’ potential role in this shift. It is clear from newspaper coverage that tourism is clashing with gulls and that human stakeholders position this activity as a priority over animal sentience and well-being. To the best of the authors’ knowledge, though, gulls have had no coverage in tourism studies to date. As researchers, who ourselves contribute to the social narratives, we have simply ignored gull sentience and accepted the anecdotal,

anthropocentrically biased and speciesist-principled accounts about gull influence on tourism activities. Alternatively, and no less damning, we have ignored gulls in favour of researching more 'exotic and appealing' animals. To rectify this situation we must shake off the shackles of humancentric thinking and improve our studies to help in shifting the destructive social narratives about animal life. To improve gull treatment at the seaside and elsewhere, tourism researchers must consider the needs and wants of these birds who are vilified in favour of the experiences of human tourism.

## **Conclusions**

It is important to think of newspapers as a magnification of and lens into the social conscious. Newspapers provide a way of looking at a version of the social world but cannot be used to view the reality of what happens in a place. For that, destination field studies are required. The social narratives found in newspapers, though, do illustrate starting points for increasing consideration of the gull phenomenon in tourism destinations. Studies should look into how different gull behaviour impacts tourists in destinations and how tourists respond. This can involve looking at how informed tourists are about gull sentience, considering the roles that the social narratives and scientific studies have, and can potentially have, as information sources. They should consider the local stakeholders who provide tourism activities and their effects on gulls because of these acts. This may involve consideration of policies and actions to understand the role gull sentience has in decision making. Studies should also examine how gulls influence a destination image and vice versa, which may involve considering the realities in place and how these are then presented, thus considering how animal sentience appears in the tourism gaze. In all studies, knowledge of gull sentience should be prominent and considered in determining conclusions. If researchers treat gulls justly in their studies, they can better advocate for changes in tourism destinations and social narratives. This all speaks to a need to utilize human power to empower the sentience of gulls.

Finally, while this chapter has focused on gulls, the work and ideas forwarded in it need to be applied to other animals whose lives intersect with tourism for and by humans. This chapter hints at the possibilities but future work needs to explore the dominant narratives of other animals, including those we love, those we hate, and those we are indifferent to. Only by incorporating all of these in research and public appreciation can we truly shift away from a humancentric position of power over animals, to recognize their sentience and hence our responsibilities towards them in an animalcentric context. Doing that is arguably the first step to a truly post-humanist world. Such work needs to be undertaken in a range of different places, recognizing the place specificity of culture, upon which social narratives are based.

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# 8 Trick or Treat? The Dilemma of Ceva in North Pantanal Wildlife Tourism

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© CAB International 2024. *Emerging Voices for Animals in Tourism* (eds J. Hooper and C. Kline)

DOI: 10.1079/9781800625259.0008

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## **Abstract**

This chapter reflects on the work relationships between human and non-human animals (hereafter 'animals') in the context of wildlife observation tourism in North Pantanal, in the state of Mato Grosso in the Midwest of Brazil, and how these relationships intersect with the practice of *ceva* – the provision of food used to promote proximity with other species. Based on an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, and the multispecies ethnography method, this research discusses how the *ceva* appears as a form of payment for animals that are regarded as workers. But, the practice raises concerns because as wild animals are becoming more submissive and cooperative with tourism, they are also facing situations of vulnerability due to the fact that not all humans have good intentions or display ethical behaviour towards other species. As a conclusion, it is important to build a new model of coexistence between human and animals in tourism, considering the dangers linked to negative interactions, especially those that may affect tourists.



## Introduction

The ethics of captive attractions featuring non-human animals (hereafter ‘animals’) have been the subject of much contemporary debate. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as World Animal Protection, Sea Shepherd and Greenpeace have increased public awareness of cruel attractions such as circuses and low-welfare zoos – especially exposing the psychological suffering endured by captive animals (Chuahy, 2009). However, Fennel (2016) notes that although animals are involved, in one way or another, as workers or objects in practically all tourism activities, there has been little critical thinking about these uses within tourism academia. Fennel (2016) further claims that tourism theorists focus mainly on the concept of animal welfare and that work relationships between species are acceptable as long as the physical and psychological needs of non-human animals are addressed.

In wildlife tourism, it is uncommon to reflect on such relationships, since the animals are not held captive. This happens especially because the issue of labour relations between humans and animals in contemporary society is generally linked to the concepts of coercion and domestication (Porcher, 2014; DeMello, 2021; Arluke *et al.*, 2022). On the one hand, there are exploited species considered as tools, such as guinea pigs, laboratory animals and livestock (DeMello, 2021; Arluke *et al.*, 2022). These animals are treated as objects with no subjectivity (Adams, 2012; Joy, 2014). On the other hand, there are service animals, such as guide dogs, which are regarded as companions and are very often seen as part of the human family (Hurn, 2012), despite the fact that they are working to provide a better life condition for a human as well. This happens primarily because our relationships with them are based mainly on the premise of affection or because they are providing a service to a human, performing what Arluke *et al.* (2022) referred to as ‘the role of good citizens’ – although abolitionist groups criticize their work as a form of oppression. However, in both domains underlie the idea of submission and human dominance (Arluke *et al.*, 2022). After all, the link between species can be fragile and the animals’ value can shift: companion animals, for example, can be ‘euthanized’ or relinquished when they

display aggressive behaviour (Baptistella, 2019). No matter in which category the animals are placed, they will remain regarded as 'good animals' as long as they submit themselves to human interests. As Arluke *et al.* (2022) explain a 'good animal' is one that remains subordinate to humans, basically in a master–servant dynamic that also fits in working relationships. So, the idea of a free wild animal regarded as a worker is rarely a matter of reflection.

First of all, it is important to remember that animals work for themselves. For example, they work to eat and protect their families. Yet humans commonly only consider animals as working when they perform activities with us and for us. Coulter (2016) says that we have a considerable amount of work ahead of us to define what animal labour is and what it might become. Coulter also posits that a definition of animal labour should include all practices where other species care for others. Nevertheless, DeMello (2021) points out that the history of working animals in human society is primarily utilitarian since the animals hardly have an 'opinion' on that. They are 'recruited, generally without their input and often against their wills, to provide services to humans' (DeMello, 2021). Even research about works involving partnership and affection, such as animal-assisted therapy, focuses mainly on human benefits (DeMello, 2021). The benefits for the animals, their consent, and even what work means to them remain subjects of little academic concern (Porcher, 2014). But we must remember that our society evolved in a regimen of partnership with other species and that animals also experience joy and pleasure in some of the relationships they establish with humans (Baptistella, 2019). Although they do not use the same verbal communication as humans, they have their own languages, and they can also express pain, suffering, fear and a multitude of feelings through their behaviour (Bekoff, 2010; King, 2014; De Waal, 2016). Thus, the theme of animal work is controversial, as it is challenging to define what is work and what is oppression.

However, humans evolved in regimes of cooperation with other species (Hare and Woods, 2020; DeMello, 2021). Porcher (2014) goes further and considers that, without relationships with other animals, the category of 'human' would not exist:

However, above all, living with animals means working with them. The question of work is not a theoretical anecdote; it is at the heart of our lives and of the relations that we maintain with domestic animals (cows as well as dogs) and with certain 'wild' animals at work in animal parks, zoos, and circuses.

(Porcher, 2014, p. 2)

It is worth noting how the animals that Porcher deemed 'wild' are placed inside confined environments. Nevertheless, what about those who 'escape' our control? Blattner *et al.* (2019) consider that many wild species tend to avoid human contact. But this is a landscape that is changing fast. Due to climate change, loss of viable habitats and other anthropic actions, wild animals are having to become more and more tolerant of human proximity (Baptistella, 2019). Thus, the species involved in wildlife tourism might be thought to establish work relationships with humans as they are not coerced but also they are not domesticated. But how do these relationships develop when they are acknowledged? And how does the act of *ceva* (the provision of food used to promote proximity with other species) impact animals' lives? The latter question is particularly interesting given that *ceva* is justified in different ways by different stakeholders, but brings about concerns for human and animal safety. Based on these reflections, this research sought to identify how *ceva* and the work relations between species appear in tourism in North Pantanal in the state of Mato Grosso, Brazil, and discuss the implications of these relationships.

## **Methods and Theoretical Framework**

As this chapter is part of the contemporary review of the relationships between species (Haraway, 2008; Chuahy, 2009; DeMello, 2021), I used an interdisciplinary approach from different areas, including anthropology (Kirksey and Helmreich, 2010; Hurn, 2012), sociology (Arluke *et al.*, 2022), communication (Thompson, 2011), biology and cognitive ethology (Bekoff, 2010), to interpret the information obtained during the field research. This chapter uses the method of multispecies ethnography (Kirksey and Helmreich, 2010; Sússekind, 2018), in which it is considered that humans and animals have agency (Latour, 1994)

and intentionality (Lestel, 2001; Linden, 1999; De Waal, 2016) within multispecies spaces. To Kirksey and Helmreich (2010), multispecies ethnography is the meeting of anthropology and animal studies and involves the critical thinking of culture in the Anthropocene. As Tsing (2015) indicates, human nature is a multispecies relationship, and we should consider evolution as a codependent web of species. So, I regarded all animals (human and non-human) as actors, also focusing on the wild animal behaviours, attitudes and cultures.

This work is part of a broader research, ongoing since 2015, focusing on the Brazilian North Pantanal. The data analysed here were collected between 2016 and 2019 in the region between the municipality of Poconé and the community of Porto Jofre, two of the most important tourism regions in Pantanal. During this period, I made ten trips to the biome. However, between the years 2004 and 2015 I made several trips to the Pantanal to collect information, which were recorded in a field notebook. Information from this period has been included here for comparison purposes with the current tourism model. I travelled to Pantanal during the rainy and dry seasons, accompanying tourists in activities carried out by different hotels and guides.

Data were recorded using a digital camera and field notebooks, and my primary informants (other than the animals I observed) were the human guides, hotel workers, travel agents, digital influencers and hotel owners. As a result, I have registered dialogues with at least 70 individuals. I also interviewed 18 tourists and 21 human workers that perform different types of activities in the tourism business. The source's identity was protected in order to preserve their anonymity. I identified the guides by the letter G and a number.

## **Animal Work in Tourism in the Pantanal**

Tourism destinations based on the observation of free animals are generally considered ethical and marketed as free from animal suffering (Baptistella, 2020). However, this perception can hide conflicts. As an example, while the whale-watching industry helps to maintain bans on

whale hunting in various parts of the world, the boat noise can reduce the effectiveness of mammalian sonar by up to 99% and impairs their food search (Dias, 2008). In Brazil, swimming with wild Amazon dolphins is a popular attraction in the Rio Negro region, but the practice can harm the animals, which suffer from wounds on their chin and fins (Fung, 2018). This situation happens because the tour operators need to manipulate these parts of their bodies to keep them out of the water so the visitors can see and touch them (Daly, 2019). For Vidal (2011), the lack of a clear public policy to rule the activity results in risks to the animals, which are overfed and stressed by many tourists around them in the river. Baptistella (2020) explains that there was a governmental effort by the end of the last decade to create this set of rules, but there was not enough surveillance to guarantee that humans would respect the law.

In the Pantanal of Mato Grosso, the animals are the main attractions. Their presence is very important as most of the tourists are there specifically to experience close encounters with animals. So, in many situations these animals are regarded as workers, because of their cooperation with tour guides and their toleration of human proximity. In this case, therefore, animal passivity and submissive behaviour are performative work of the wild animals (Fig. 8.1). It is, however, important to note that the travel packages to the Pantanal of Mato Grosso are marketed to travellers as being a cruelty-free activity – in other words the animals are not forced to be around tourists. When they book, customers are informed that encounters with other species are not guaranteed. Animals appear according to their own will. The hotels and guides only offer a structure that favours these encounters: (i) transportation; (ii) location; and (iii) knowledge about the biome.



**Fig. 8.1.** A tourist approaches a giant anteater in order to take pictures of the non-human animal. Photo taken by the author.

For many tourists, this narrative of freedom reinforces the ethically oriented aspect of their chosen leisure activity. However, most tourists are unaware of the striking ecological characteristics of the biome (Baptistella, 2020), such as the flood pulse: the annual alternation between floods and droughts that determines variations in the spatial distribution of animals (Mitsch and Gosselink, 2007). When the waters are low, this configuration allows visitors to spot a multitude of species, including birds, reptiles and mammals. In the Poconé region, wildlife tourism is configured based on post-productivist transformations of the rural environment (Ratamaki and Peltola, 2016), so the rural economy that was once focused on food production has been changed to one based on alternative activities, in this case wildlife tourism. The activities revolve around the observation of fauna, and the most common options are contemplation in boats and in adapted vehicles. The hotels also offer trails and viewpoints where tourists can spot animals.

During the multispecies ethnography, I could perceive that tourists' expectations were formed by what they had already seen in the media, characterizing what Thompson (2011) calls mediated worldliness: 'our sense of the world which lies beyond the sphere of our personal experience, and our sense of our place within this world, are increasingly

shaped by mediated symbolic forms'(Thompson, 2011, p. 34). However, the expectations of tourists were often not met, especially during the seasonal flooding period, because the animals disperse through the floodplain, and it becomes more difficult to spot them.

The idea of animals in freedom was valued by visitors, but at the same time the absence of many species caused frustration among the tourists. Tourism guides and professionals are not unaware of this contradiction. Therefore, as guide G1 explained to me, their knowledge about the environment and animals is essential: 'There are things that seem like magic to the tourists', he explained. G1 says that tourists make statements like these: (i) 'Wow, he called, and the monkey came!'; and (ii) 'How did you see the rabbit in the middle of this forest?'. And then G1 explained to me:

We are here every day. We know where the alligator will be. We know the little place that usually has a tachã [*Chauna torquata*]. These howler monkeys [*Alouatta caraya*] show up more or less at the same time and place every day. So, they don't fall from the sky. We know their habits, we live with them.

(Guide G1)

The tachã is an endemic bird that lives in areas near the riverbanks. Their wingspan can measure almost 1.7 m, and they can weigh up to 3 kg. Besides their impressive size, their chant attracts the attention of tourists (Antas, 2009). In the past, when cattle breeding was the most important economic activity in Pantanal, they were almost extinct. The cowboys killed the birds because they used to sing when a human approached, warning fugitive cows (Baptistella, 2020).

Besides knowing the animals' ways of living, the tour operators have other strategies to respond to the tourists' demands of animal encounters. One of them, is the habitat and safety provided by the hotels which stimulates the animal's presence in their areas. Through the provision of a favourable environment, the establishments have a set of species that inhabit their surroundings and appear regularly. I referred to this population of non-human animals established around a tourism attraction as 'residents'. The hotel owners create a context for the animals to settle on the properties: absence of dogs, artificial lakes and reinforcement of native species that lure certain animals are ways of

attracting them. Depending on the place, there are easy-to-see ‘residents’, such as tuiuius (*Jabiru mycteria*), rheas (*Rhea americana*), blue macaws (*Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus*), capybaras (*Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris*), deer (*Blastocerus dichotomus*), crab-eating foxes (*Cerdocyon thous*), caimans (*Caiman yacare*) and giant anteaters (*Myrmecophaga tridactyla*), among others.

Animals that coexist well with human presence are called habituated. In the case of several species, this is a natural process, as the hotels are within their *habitats* and offer good safe conditions – because there are no poachers in these areas. In this case, many guides argued that proximity was beneficial to ‘both sides’ and considered animals as workers. For them, the fact that animals have consciousness was demonstrated by cooperation: this proved that the animals recognized the protection network they received and acted to maintain it. Guide G2 defined it as follows:

If it were not for tourism, perhaps some of them would not even be alive, right? I think this is the best option, it is something that does no harm to anyone. It does not hurt the animals; it is good for the inhabitants. The animals are not stupid; they know what is good for them.

(Guide G2)

Habituation, however, is often interconnected with the provision of food. In Brazil, this practice is called *ceva*: ‘a food supplement provided to wild animals with the objective of accustoming them to visit some places frequently’ (Macedo *et al.*, 2016). This is related to practices adopted by poachers, who leave food at certain points to attract prey. In tourism, this is considered dangerous because it changes the habits of animals and makes them more vulnerable. As guide G1 emphasized, an animal that is not afraid of humans is more likely to suffer at the hands of someone who has bad intentions.

In addition, it can stimulate conflicts. For example, when a large carnivore begins to associate humans with food supply, there is a risk of antagonistic encounters. During the field research, a famous guide had to reattach two fingers after being bitten by a caiman when he was offering meat to another reptile. In the 2000s, I visited several hotels in Pantanal where the *ceva* was used as a way to promote interaction with animals. In some cases, the tourists were even allowed to take photos feeding



caimans. The visitors treasure this kind of experience because they think that it establishes a special connection between them and the animals (Fig. 8.2).

It is important to highlight that the media has a huge influence on that behaviour, since many tourists express the wish to relive or re-enact scenes that they have seen on documentaries and news reports (Baptistella, 2020). Thompson (2011) calls this process 'mediated worldliness', which means that part of our life experience is mediated through symbolic forms. That is why many people that have never been to Pantanal before, acted like they already knew the biome because they have seen movies about it. The other key to understand this desire is the fact that most of these TV programmes depict wild animals in close relationships with humans, building a narrative of harmonic coexistence (Markwell, 2015).



**Fig. 8.2.** A tourist touches a caiman's tail during a trip in Pantanal, Brazil. The ceva is used to attract the animals but there is a risk of antagonistic encounters. Photo courtesy of Cristiano Baptistella.

## **‘Jaguar Fever’ and the Dynamics of the Ceva**

Today, the jaguars of Porto Jofre are the greatest attraction of the region. The guides say that there is a ‘jaguar fever’, because tourists go to the site only to experience close encounters with the big cats (Baptistella, 2020). These animals tolerate the presence of tourists really well. But we cannot forget that they are the ‘heirs’ of the *ceva*. Their parents were accustomed with food provisioning offered by fishermen at the beginning of the century. Therefore, they taught their young which human groups do not represent danger. The jaguars that work in tourism tolerate large groups of boats or cars that transport tourists. However, they flee from humans who are on horseback and from small numbers of humans who arrive in single boats, as they associate them with hunters (Baptistella, 2020). It is important to highlight an episode of conflict when, in 2009, a jaguar attack resulted in the death of a fisherman which triggered a warning about the practice of *ceva* (Arini, 2009). For this reason, the state government created a regulation for the observation of jaguars that prohibits *ceva*. According to several tourism professionals, the practice has been given ‘a bad name’, and many hotels began to prohibit it or deny its existence (Baptistella, 2020).

However, food provisioning persists in some places and can be ‘crucial’ for the tourists’ experience. On one occasion, I spent hours in the forest, and only a few capuchin monkeys (genus *Sapajus*) appeared. In another location, with the offering of the *ceva*, many monkeys showed up immediately. On this tour, the guide, G3, vocalized the call of the animals and then placed the food on the trail. When I spoke about the research, he asked me not to give details that would reveal his identity or the location where we were because:

People are being very annoying with this *ceva* thing. *Ceva* this, *ceva* that... It is not how they picture it. This is also the work of the monkey. The tourist wants to see, the animal comes. Then, do they have to come in exchange for nothing? It is a treat. I get my money, the monkey has to get something. Hence, it seems that it is a lion who is going to kill someone. I just put some fruits on the ground, people watch the little monkeys, and everyone is happy. Are you one of those who thinks it is bad? Because they deserve it. I think they deserve it. Because they come, everyone takes pictures. Even you took a photo.

(Guide G3)

The *ceva* is also part of the performance (Ratamaki and Peltola, 2016) of some guides. The interaction is very appreciated by the tourists, and there are professionals who stand out precisely because of their 'intimacy' with the animals. In this act, the guide calls the animals by their names, manages to touch them, and even establishes dialogues. For example, a very famous guide claims that he befriended a group of caimans. During the trips, he calls the caimans by their names and the animals approach the boats. He also does the same thing with a giant otter. He not only calls these animals by their names, but he also talks to them as if they were humans, trying to portray to the tourists his familiarity with the animals. In another situation, I found a hotel owner who developed a relationship with a caiman and the animal was treated like a companion animal. He received chicken parts as a 'special meal' as habituated caimans love chicken. The caiman's name was Chico and when the man called him, the reptile approached immediately. The tourists feel fascinated by these conversations, expressing that these close relationships are special and a proof of human care towards other species. But it is important to note that most of these approaches involve the *ceva*. Often called 'animal charmers', these guides use food provisioning as an attraction factor. Tourists rarely recognize the *ceva* as harmful. To most of the visitors, it seems as a form of care and an index of trust between species. For the travellers, the animal that is recognized as an individual is considered as an equivalent to the animal companions of their daily lives. A good example is the tuiuiu called Taffarel, which spends the day on a floating dock receiving fish from tourists (Fig. 8.3). He was named after Cláudio Taffarel, a famous Brazilian goalkeeper, who played in three FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) World Cups. The bird received this name because he manages to catch all the fish that the tourists throw to him. He is treated with affectionate expressions, and many try to attract his attention by using vocalizations like the one's humans direct to companion dogs and cats. Taffarel's situation is one of many that shows how the *ceva* is considered a 'fair payment' and establishes a relationship of labour between species in the tourism of Pantanal.



**Fig. 8.3.** The tuiuiu Taffarel being fed by tourists. Many humans enjoy the proximity with the bird and consider the *ceva* a ‘fair payment’ because the bird allows himself to be photographed. Photo taken by the author.

Food provisioning is also considered as a form of care towards the animals. Although some tourism professionals considered it harmful, others resented the prohibition. This opinion prevailed among hotel and inn employees. Their dissatisfaction used to be manifested with body language. Despite claiming to follow the administrators’ orders, they made ugly faces or shook their heads in denial while talking about the subject. The order to interrupt the *ceva* was seen as an imposition that they could not disobey but with which they did not necessarily agree. There was a strong notion that some animals deserved to be paid for their cooperation. A hotel employee said:

They’re spending their time here. We spend time [with tourists], and they pay us. So, in order to stay here the animal has to receive something. They will not stay here, spending their time with nothing in return, because they need to eat. If they stay here for free, what time will they eat?

(hotel employee)

For some guides and hotel employees there was a feeling that the animals deserved payment just as humans do, and the safety and the



habitat offer were not enough. After all, time is also a currency, and they were spending it with the tourists. Some of them felt like they were being unfair to the animals.

In interviews with residents of the region, I found cases of animals that are somewhat similar to what Vander Velden (2011) calls 'familiar animals'. They are wild animals that coexist daily with humans within the area of the properties. In this context, food sharing is seen as a natural act. The same occurs in some inns and hotels, where leftovers are offered as a way to 'help' animals during periods of scarcity. Thus, the issue of *ceva* is delicate because it involves different worldviews and there was a dispute of discourses in which everyone claims that they want the best for the animals. The professionalization of tourism, accidents involving food provisioning, and new sensitivities related to the growth of consciousness about animal rights increase the complexity of the debate. It also raises questions about the very nature of animal work in this economic segment.

### **Freedom Restriction: The Expression of Natural Behaviours and the Risks of Negative Interactions**

Tourism in the Pantanal is represented symbolically as a narrative of harmonious coexistence between species. In the context of this study, animals were considered actants alongside humans (Latour, 1994), and their cooperation was recognized as essential to tourism. Among the professionals interviewed, there was a consensus that the jaguars of Porto Jofre could identify dangerous situations and that they are free to move away from what or who may harm them. When the work relationship brings constraints, the situation is seen as a sacrifice that the animal endures for the 'preservation' of the biome. This is the case for the baby caimans that are taken from the water and immobilized so the tourists can have their photos taken with the animals. Some guides reason that the animal is suffering, but the images will stimulate the biome's conservation. Because once people see the pictures, they will be more prone to protect Pantanal and its fauna. The guides recognized that

the food provisioning can make the animals become what they call ‘silly’, because animals that receive *ceva* stop seeking food on their own. This problem was mentioned by many tourism professionals.

Conversely, they rarely admitted the risks involved when animals are encouraged to tolerate approaches from humans. Especially the fact that some humans may have bad intentions. Every time I mentioned that we have consistent efforts from many congressmen to permit hunting in Brazil again, the human workers of Pantanal argued that there is no danger in the region, because the animals are protected by the local community. Contrary to this discourse, I spotted two caimans shot dead in the Transpantaneira Road – which is a country road that has 119 bridges in its 145 km, and it is one of the best places to spot wildlife in Pantanal, mainly because it is a public site so that everyone can enjoy the landscape and the close encounters with the wild animals.

In these two episodes, the guides told me that sometimes people shot the reptiles for fun. In 2019, a jaguar was found shot dead within the Sesc Pantanal reserve. I also collected several reports about a giant otter that was killed in Porto Jofre in July 2018 when boarding a boat. She was a habituated animal, which was used to receive food provisioning from fishermen. They were in a boat and offered her fish. Some informants told me that at some point, when the animal was already in the boat, her behaviour scared one of the men, who beat her to death. Other sources claimed that the giant otter was stabbed to death as part of a joke.

Today, at the level of discourse, the *ceva* is considered a bad practice, and many hotels do not permit this activity. The prohibition is based on biological sciences, which connect the practice to behavioural changes that are harmful to animals. On a day-to-day basis, in places where it still occurs, food provisioning is justified based on arguments that include both the animals as a part of an economic chain and also as an act linked to friendship, trust and affection – elements that, according to DeMello (2021) are part of working relationships between species.

Porcher (2014) suggests that farm animals need to be integrated into social sciences because it is in this field that the subjectivity of non-human animals stands out and this opens the way for new forms of relationships between species. The free-living animal workers of Pantanal, although not domesticated, also deserve this inclusion as a

way to deepen the discussion about the suffering that is not perceived during tourism activities. Their cooperation during the tours guarantees them a relative security, a chance to keep existing amid the increasing pressure over their livelihoods. The jaguars of Porto Jofre are an unequivocal proof of this. Although they are still being killed on farms since they represent a risk to the herds, they have become an economic asset and, in this region, they are not being molested anymore. It is not by chance that the advertisement of a famous hotel advocates that in the establishment 'the jaguar is worth more alive' – a phrase repeated to exhaustion by workers in the region.

The giant otter, a species that is used to running away from human presence, also begins to tolerate tourism boats because the cost of moving to other territories is very high (Baptistella, 2020). As shown by Fanaro (2020), the status of non-human animals may vary according to their degree of submission to human control. In Pantanal, adapting to tourism is the way that wild animals are finding to survive. In the context of this research, this clearly includes their incorporation into the sphere of what Arluke *et al.* (2022) call 'good animals'. Their subordination arises by cooperating with human work. But this condition is also highlighted by a process that I call 'petification', which means that they are becoming regarded as pets inside human semiospheres (Lotman, 2019) – especially because the images of close interactions between humans and wild animals are highlighted in the media and in social networks shaping tourists expectations before the trip (Baptistella, 2020). With their peaceful and even docile behaviour, it is not uncommon that they are compared with the tourists' pets. There is also a link with petishism (Szasz, 1969), an acute form of anthropomorphism (Begann, 2022) that is very present in urban societies: these humans are so far from nature that, in Pantanal, they end up creating an idealized identification with wild animals. 'Petishism, like fetishism, involves a disavowal of difference through an amnesiac over identification, and it involves a fundamentally humanist erasure of the difference between human and non-human animals' (Sinha, 2022, p. 99).

However, there is a problem at the heart of this behaviour. Who would pay the bill for a negative interaction incident involving an animal and a tourist? On the Fraser Islands, for example, dingoes that attacked humans



were exterminated although the tourists were responsible for the antagonistic encounter, due to the fact that they disregarded the norms that rules the activity of animal spotting (Burns, 2016). In Pantanal, animals are free to come and go whenever they want, but it is still necessary to ask about the freedom to express aggression or irritation – feelings common to all of us, but which for them can mean the difference between life and death. After all, much is said about animals accustomed to humans, but little is thought about the contrary, that humans also adapt and acquire specific behaviours in living with other animals. Local guides and residents are used to the different shades of the animals' behaviours. Tourists, by contrast, usually do not know the animals enough to understand their personalities. For an accustomed human, certain interactions, such as a scratch, do not acquire dramatic tones. As a guide told me, 'The animal also wakes up on the wrong side of the bed, right?' In the case of unaccustomed humans, the territory is hazy, and the results of an antagonistic encounter will almost always result in greater losses for animals.

Haraway (2008) points out ways that we should coexist with other species within a landscape of responsibility – something that abolitionist supporters would disagree with, because it means that sometimes we need to admit the maintenance of animal suffering. For example, when I asked the guides if our proximity was disturbing some animals – like the giant otters – some guides said that a few animals must endure the annoyance because people only protect what they know. In that case, by tolerating the human disturbance, these animals were protecting others of the same species. However, Haraway's (2008) proposal is consistent with a point in which we can no longer give back to the other animals everything that was taken from them, but in which it is also undeniable that they have rights and that these rights need to be legally recognized and respected. What Haraway (2008) calls 'degrees of freedom' can be experienced more broadly in the work that animals perform in free-living tourism. Nevertheless, asymmetries persist and need to be the subject of constant reflection.

To recognize animals as workers in free-living wildlife tourism is also to recognize their cooperation, agency and personalities. This is important because the recognition of animals as individuals is one of the keys to

guarantee their rights (Bekoff, 2010). Coulter (2016) proposes that humans should use the lens of care to think about animals' work and how they engage in different labour activities. The continuum of suffering and enjoyment establishes that all animals' work, and work-lives must be under permanent evaluation to guarantee them a life on the enjoyment side of the continuum (Coulter, 2016). Their personalities are also important:

Where animals' work fits on the continuum depends on, among other factors, the individual animal and their preferences, the job, the specific tasks, the coworkers and employers, and their age, health, housing and social relationships, and opportunities away from work.

(Coulter, 2016, p. 205)

The *ceva* may be a way of acknowledging and even valuing the wild animal's work. However, it carries high risks for certain species, such as large carnivores – mainly when it comes to antagonistic encounters. It also raises concerns about all animals' safety and health.

Haraway (2008) argues that we need to be in a permanent state of ethical reflection towards what she calls the 'unequal use' of species: the exploitation of non-human animals must involve a kind of responsibility that does not allow us to settle in a certain type of moral comfort – the calculation of the sum of benefits is a powerful sedative in which the 'sacrifice' imposed on non-human animals is romanticized. Rather than considering oneself outside of the killing, it would be more important to assume the complexity of these relationships and seek ways to make these animals' lives meaningful (Haraway, 2008).

Most human workers understand the asymmetries of the practice but resent the prohibition of food provisioning, because the activity also represents the bonds of affection and appreciation that involves human and animal cooperation. Thus, we have found that working relationships between species in Pantanal tourism are accepted and are in full reconfiguration. On the one hand, a growing number of hotels and guides are advocating against the *ceva*. On the other hand, a growing number of wild animals are teaching their offspring to tolerate the proximity of humans.

However, it is impossible to predict future scenarios because a turnaround is underway. In 2020, wildfires consumed 30% of Pantanal,

and at least 17 million vertebrates died in the fire (Tomas *et al.*, 2021). Many others died of starvation. But thousands more survived precisely because of the food supply provided by humans. In 2021, the extreme drought threatened the existence of numerous species in Pantanal. During this period, governmental entities – such as the Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA) and civil society organizations (e.g. the Animal Disasters Rescue Group and Ampara Silvestre) – were mobilized to provide food and care on a daily basis to non-human animals weakened by hunger and thirst (Barbosa *et al.*, 2021). The *ceva* became accepted as a way to save those animal populations. The media enhanced this perception by depicting wild animals as victims (Baptistella and Nobre, 2021) and displaying images of food provisioning. The same happened in social networks: videos of animals searching for food left by humans became very famous which only further promoted the *ceva*.

In a landscape of ecological disasters, the *ceva* may be seen as a transient act of solidarity and compassion, but that has already begun to reconfigure behaviours. Animals that were very difficult to spot, such as iraras (*Eira barbara*) and tapirs, started to approach hotels and other places that offer food for the victims of the environmental tragedies. Idoeta (2021) explains that veterinarians and animal advocates who work in Pantanal already found monkeys that learned to approach humans to ‘beg’ for fruits – a habit that they haven’t seen before.

The effects of these new dynamics on the relationship between human and animals in tourism are only beginning to unfold, especially in the context of climate change and anthropogenic interventions that already severely affect the flood pulse in the biome. It is already known that wild animals are approaching cities all around the globe (Quammen, 2007). Due to the lack of habitats, animals are learning how to live alongside humans in urban areas. In Cuiabá, the capital of the state of Mato Grosso, for example, animals such as capybaras, caimans, tuiuius, tucanuçu (a species of toucan), giant anteaters and even boa constrictors share spaces with humans (Baptistella, 2019). Hare and Woods (2020) call this process ‘self-domestication’, meaning these animals are changing their behaviours and cultures to be accepted in human-dominated spaces. After all, for most of them it is the only chance

of survival. The newer generation of jaguars in Porto Jofre, which are presented in this study, is an example of self-domestication, as they already live in a cultural environment where they regard certain humans as safe companions and do not run away from them, cooperating with tourism. In exchange, the community does not accept poaching in the area. For example, in the past a famous hotel in the region used to be a farm and jaguar killing was common. The current owner of the place is the grandson of a very famous hunter, a man who killed more than 300 of these felines. Nowadays, the place has become a hot spot to observe jaguars and giant otters, and the owner always says that they do not accept poachers in the region because now the 'jaguar is worth more alive than dead'. The tour guides and the residents also manifest the importance of protecting the animals. So, they work together as informal inspectors who will denounce poaching if the practice happens.

I suggest that the current model – in which close encounters are so valued – should be seen as valuable in the context of species preservation, but also it should be a transient model: a terrain in which the seeds of new forms of relationships between species are cultivated. As Blattner *et al.* (2019) points out, it is urgent to find a path where we do not accept animal exploitation but also do not have to give up our significant multispecies relationships. A path where we can walk together with justice and dignity for all. Non-human animals are adopting extreme behavioural changes to survive. Can the humans who work in tourism also take a step further in the construction of a new partnership? Do we truly need the interactions that make the expression of natural behaviour a risk for the individuals? Can we acknowledge that animals understand the benefits of cooperation in tourism activities and abandon the *ceva* once and for all? Is it even possible at this point? Probably, the only certainty is that animals are 'speaking' to us by accepting our proximity: they still want to be part of this world.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have reflected on how the *ceva* can assume different roles in human and animal relationships in Pantanal tourism and the need to discuss its implications and the risks related to the practice. Wild animals that live in the biome are often regarded as workers – by accepting human proximity, they are worthy of community protection against poachers and other dangerous humans. The idea of cooperation is reinforced by the fact that animals are free to come and go. However, this habituation process can be connected with food provisioning, an act that can promote antagonistic encounters. So, it is important to question the narrative of safety for wild animals. More than that, we must reflect on the hidden asymmetries of the *ceva* because people tend to disregard the perils of bait feeding and even of the habituation process. There are advantages of being included in the category of worker but there are also limitations: animals are seen as individuals, but also they must remain submissive towards humans. In other words, they are not free to display all sorts of natural behaviours, including teaching their offspring to avoid potential dangers presented by humans.

In conclusion, I consider that wild animals understand that they need to be submissive in order to survive in a human-controlled society. The *ceva* constitutes a spectacle that must be abolished. I also suggest that we build a future where the tourists are not so eager to interact and be so close to the animals: a future where tourism develops into an even more ethically oriented economic chain, providing entertainment that respects animal interests in all dimensions.

## **Acknowledgement**

I would like to thank Simone Hedenskog who helped me while I was translating this chapter.

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# 9 Humano–Cat Cultures and Tourist Attitudes Towards Local Free-Living Cats of the Costa Del Sol

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© CAB International 2024. *Emerging Voices for Animals in Tourism* (eds J. Hooper and C. Kline)

DOI: 10.1079/9781800625259.0009

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## **Abstract**

As a species the domestic cat (*Felis catus*) occupies a somewhat liminal status between a domesticated and wild, or ‘wild-like’ animal. While free-living urban cats are not typical tourist attractions, their presence does not go entirely unnoticed. This is especially so when they frequent restaurants and hotel grounds, feeding off food dropped by diners or thrown out by kitchen staff. This chapter takes an excursion into the world of the cats who live at one of two sites on the Costa del Sol, Spain. Personal encounters with free-living cats, and observations of how the cats interacted with each other and with humans provided a window into the local cat–human cultures. To gain insight into the tourist perspective, a thematic discourse analysis of English-language TripAdvisor reviews of hotels, cafes and restaurants in the area was employed. Emerging themes demonstrate how free-living cats are adored, abhorred, pitied and ignored by human visitors. Comments expressing the sentiment that local cats are an unsightly and

unwelcome presence are examined within a broader framework of entitlement and tourist expectations. However, most visitors appear either indifferent towards the cats or express delight at watching and interacting with them. That the cats are well fed and human friendly suggests that most of their interactions with both human residents and tourists are positive. However, harmonious multispecies coexistence depends on an appreciation of cat–human cultures within the context of a traditional ‘sun and sea’ holiday destination and an economy built around tourism.

## Introduction

My personal photo collections from the 1990s and 2000s, and social media feeds from the 2010s onwards, feature quite a few random cats I have encountered on my travels. Social media is testimony to the fact that I am not unique in enjoying seeing healthy, happy, cats going about their lives. Indeed, a study of how Turkey is presented in travel blogs found that photos of street cats attract the same level of attention as the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul (Bilal and Öztürk, 2021). As a species, the domestic cat (*Felis catus*) occupies a somewhat liminal status between a domesticated and wild, or ‘wild-like’ animal, perceived interchangeably as a ‘pet’, pest, problem or pitiful creature in need of rescuing (Crowley *et al.*, 2020; Hill, 2022). Tourism predominantly prioritizes the human and pays little attention to other-than-human animals beyond how they serve or affect the tourist experience (Cohen, 2019). While academic study has focused on how tourism impacts human locals or wildlife (e.g. Higgins-Desbiolles *et al.*, 2021), and animals ‘used’ within tourism (e.g. Carr, 2019; Kline, 2021), free-living cats who inhabit urban tourist destinations are largely overlooked. Thus, I set out to determine what the prominent discourses are among English-speaking tourists regarding local cat populations, as well as gain insight into the lived experiences of these cats. This chapter takes an excursion into the world of the cats who live at one of two sites on the Costa del Sol, Spain. The first site is a gated community, comprising privately owned properties that are either occupied permanently or used as vacation homes, predominantly by British migrants or holidaymakers. The second site is further up the coast, namely the promenade of Torremolinos and home to an ageing colony of free-living cats.

The Costa del Sol, Málaga, Spain, is a mature Mediterranean tourist destination based on the classic ‘sun and sea’ style holidays of the late 1950s (Navarro-Jurado *et al.*, 2019). During the 1990s package tourism in Spain started to decline as holidays were becoming more individualized and alternative destinations established (O’Reilly, 2017). However, the low cost of living, high quality of life, and winter sunshine underpins the popularity of the Costa del Sol as a retirement destination among Northern Europeans (O’Reilly, 2000; Fàbrega-Domènech, 2019). ‘Brits in Spain’ became a phenomenon in the 1980s and the subject of bad press throughout the 1990s, earning a reputation as rowdy tourists or entitled migrants who were unwilling to integrate (O’Reilly, 2000). To understand how the popular representations and stereotypes were constructed, O’Reilly (2000) undertook an extensive ethnographic study of British migrants living on the Costa del Sol and found many contradictions. ‘Their relationship to Spain is circumscribed by the fact that for them Spain symbolizes holiday and escape (and tourism), but they insist they are not tourists themselves’ (O’Reilly, 2009, p. 191). Although informants in O’Reilly’s ethnographic studies disagreed with it, the Spanish use the term ‘residential tourism’ to refer to Brits living seasonally or permanently on the Costa del Sol (O’Reilly, 2009). Just like free-living cats are neither pets nor wildlife, these British-born migrants occupy a liminal space between tourist and resident.

My ethnographic observations seek to understand how different cats interact with each other, with humans, and their environments. I make use of the concept of street cat and humano–cat cultures (Jaroš, 2018, 2021), which recognizes that different groups of cats develop distinct cultures (established companion cats in an urban neighbourhood, city colonies, free-living rural groups, etc.) and develop unique relationships with different human groups (e.g. colony caretakers, restaurants who provision for free-living cats). However, to decentralize the human I prefer the term cat–human culture. Here I examine the cat–human cultures embedded within a touristic landscape to gain insight into how the cats relate to tourists and vice versa.

## **Methodology**

My data collection and analyses consist of three complementary approaches, namely a thematic analysis of observations and interactions with free-roaming cats, combined with a qualitative interview, and a discourse analysis of TripAdvisor reviews. I visited two sites on the Costa del Sol, Spain, in person, namely a resort near Estepona (September 2021) and the seafront of Torremolinos (February 2022). I stayed in tourist accommodation (a self-contained holiday let and a hotel, respectively) for 2 weeks at each site. I spent each day sitting, walking or eating within the locality, observing how the cats interacted with each other, with me, and with other humans. I took photos and video footage of cats I encountered to accompany field notes, and these provided visual data and served as prompts when writing up my field notes. I took care not to impose myself on any cats, allowing the cat to take the lead in terms of contact. Photos were taken from a distance, and if the cat did not run off, I took closer pictures. I was often able to sit and observe groups of cats playing with each other or take note of how they reacted to passing adults, children and dogs. However, I took great care to ensure any interactions were cat led and that the cat continued to assent to any proximity or contact. Ethical approval for this research was granted by the University of Exeter College of Social Science and International Studies (SSIS) Ethics Committee on 1 August 2019.

### **An ethnographic-style approach to bringing in the feline perspective**

By observing how cats behave around human volunteers, Alger and Alger's (2003) multispecies ethnography of a cat shelter noted that cats readily adapted their behaviour to novel circumstances. These cats were learning from their experiences of interactions with both humans and other cats. In their studies, Alger and Alger (1999, 2003) ascribe to a widely held sociological perspective that social interactions are fundamental to the emergence of consciousness, the mind and self-

awareness. Among human groups, ‘the belief that we can know the intentions, goals, and desires of other selves allows us to act in this world’ (Kohn, 2007, p. 7). This does not mean we need to know exactly what the other thinks or feels, just that we believe it possible to relate, empathize, and can subjectively interact using shared meanings. While I recognize that I cannot know what my ethnographic subjects are thinking or feeling, I assume they (both humans and cats) possess subjective minds and can participate in joint meaning making. Studies have shown that cats communicate with humans using social referencing (Merola *et al.*, 2015) and engaging in intersubjective joint meaning making with humans (e.g. Alger and Alger, 2003; Vitale Shreve and Udell, 2015; Jaroš, 2018).

### **Thematic and discourse analysis**

The ethnographic observations from the Estepona resort were supplemented by two unstructured interviews with a long-term resident, James (pseudonym), following my visit (September 2021). James is a British immigrant who has lived in the gated community for approximately two decades and is a long-time cat guardian and carer of local free-living cats. The interviews were subjected to a thematic discourse analysis that complemented the field-note analysis.

Thematic analysis is a strategy that facilitates the search for themes that culminate in a description of those themes (Ayres, 2008). I combined and contrasted emergent themes from my field notes to understand different ways in which cats interact with each other, residents, visitors, and their environment. To gain further insight into the tourist perspective, I performed a thematic discourse analysis of English-language reviews written on TripAdvisor (TripAdvisor, n.d.) by guests visiting restaurants, cafes, hotels and resorts that mention cats. Online reviews are written by consumers for consumers and have been shown to influence the decision making processes of prospective clients or visitors (Manap and Adzharudin, 2013). Although its popularity was decreasing even prior to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) travel restrictions, TripAdvisor remains the largest user-generated tourist-

review site (Filiari *et al.*, 2021). Scholars have used TripAdvisor comments in multispecies ethnographies where a particular animal group is a key feature of the destination, such as captive civets within curated Balinese kopi luwak (civet coffee) tours (Hooper, 2022), wildlife tourist attractions (Cong *et al.*, 2014; Moorhouse *et al.*, 2015), or visitors to Japan's 'Rabbit Island' (Usui, 2021). Any concerns about fake promotional reviews or personal attacks on businesses (Filiari *et al.*, 2021) will probably have less impact on the discourses surrounding cats because they are not directly part of the restaurants or hotels they frequent.

I searched TripAdvisor for all English reviews from hotels and eating establishments in Torremolinos that contained the word 'cat' and manually removed any that were using cat as a turn of phrase, such as 'not enough room to swing a cat' or when part of the restaurant's name. I retrieved 101 reviews from 24 establishments (11 hotels and 13 food and drink businesses), written between January 2010 and January 2022. These peaked in 2016 and 2017 and only three were written after March 2020, which coincided with the COVID-19 lockdown and business closures. I recorded the number of total reviews for each establishment to get a picture of the overall percentage that mentioned cats. I placed the headline and entire comment on a spreadsheet, together with: (i) the URL; (ii) demographic information provided on the date of visit (e.g. age, gender and country of residence of the reviewer); and (iii) the subject of the review (name of hotel, cafe or restaurant). This allowed me to code the comments independently and readily retrieve potentially relevant information about the location, season and reviewer.

I first coded the comments as cat positive (pro-cat), cat negative (anti-cat), and cat neutral (off-hand acknowledgement of feline presences, or not discernible as pro- or anti-cat). Table 9.1 provides example quotes from each category. The initial coding allowed a quantitative assessment of how many reviews were pro-cat, anti-cat or indifferent (neutral). These were then subjected to a qualitative thematic discourse analysis. Emergent themes that informed, or synergistically combined with those arising from the ethnographic data, were of particular interest.

I did not observe the cats interacting with diners at either of the two eating establishments within the Estepona resort. Furthermore, none of

the TripAdvisor comments mentioned the cats.

## The Estepona Resort Cats

The first site was a resort near Estepona, comprising around 300 privately owned properties that are either rented out as vacation homes or occupied by long-term residents. The vacationers are of mixed nationalities, but predominantly Spanish or English, and the residents are predominantly British-born migrants. The groundskeepers and cleaning staff are mostly Spanish locals. During my stay, I encountered 11 cats living within the resort (Table 9.2).

**Table 9.1.** Examples of comments about cats collected from TripAdvisor reviews from hotels and food and drink establishments in Torremolinos January 2010–January 2022

Type of establishment	Comments		
	Cat positive (pro-cats)	Cat negative (anti-cats)	Cat neutral
Hotel	We loved the resident cat. Who made a visit each day.	... there are cats roaming in the grounds totally out of control sitting on sun beds urinating in the gardens.	Lots of local cats!
	Great to see the little tortoiseshell cat who has little sight, still about and well, after 3 years.	The pool was dirty and even had sardines from [the] restaurant situated in various areas around the pool where cats had been eating.	Our view was that of a hedged area where all the wild cats roamed.
	There are also a lot of cats around the hotel. You can feed them and children love them.	... cats yowling throughout the night.	... the cats get better treatment than the guests.
Food and drink	There is a huge cat who seemingly belongs to this venue and many visitors,	... and there was a cat crawling everywhere not very nice at all.	I fed one of the local cats most of the chicken.

like us, loved to take pictures of him.

And cats all over :) Highly recommend that place.

If you are lucky, their unofficial owner 'El gato (the cat)' will welcome you! She's so cute.

The only negative was that there were cats roaming around and lying on the cushion seats. One even jumped on my lap.

Only downside was the cat on the sofa right next to our table, we did not need to see it cleaning its backside while we [were] eating.

I was not in a confrontational mood so ate the chips but took the fish to feed the local cats.

Cats roam free but not in your face!

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## Owned and unowned status within cat-human cultures

Many cats had a clipped ear, which I presumed to be a sign they were part of a trap-neuter-release programme, an assumption James confirmed. Other cats wore a collar (Table 9.2). James said that the council would send a team round every so often to round up all the stray cats and kill them. However, they would leave those with either a clipped ear or collar. Thus, the visible clipped ear protected the free-living cats, and the collar was a symbol that a cat belonged to a human household. During check-in my host mentioned that a 'beautiful tortoiseshell cat' lived nearby who was 'very friendly, but also a bit noisy'. I soon became acquainted with said feline, who I refer to here as Tortie. Most mornings I woke to Tortie's loud meowing outside my window, and she kept me company while I was drinking my morning coffee on the patio. The 'demanding' meow and the way Tortie gazed up at me (Fig. 9.1) is reminiscent of my own cats when they are seeking attention or food.

All the cats I met who were wearing collars approached me and initiated physical contact, such as rubbing on my legs. Many of the clipped-ear cats were also friendly and appeared mostly unbothered by my presence. Marbles (Fig. 9.2), Blue and Friday all exhibited affiliative



proximity behaviours such as approaching and sitting close by (Bernstein, 2007). Marbles sat next to me and exposed her belly on several occasions, behaviour indicative of trust (Bernstein, 2007). However, all clipped-ear cats withdrew from an outstretched hand. The only time Marbles touched me was when I accidentally found what I believe was her pile of kibble (dry cat food). I was idly rolling bits of kibble between my fingers, when Marbles ran up to me and batted at my hand as if to say, ‘NO that’s mine, leave it alone!’ This suggests she was not scared of me, just that she did not want to be petted.

**Table 9.2.** Estepona resort cat profiles<sup>a</sup>

Given name	Physical description	Sex	Cat-initiated interactions	Ear/collar
Red	Black	n.d.	Initiated physical contract on first meeting.	Collar
Marbles	Tortoiseshell	F	Approached me on multiple occasions, but no physical contact initiated.	Ear clipped
Blue	Small, grey, possibly a very young adult	n.d.	Approached me on multiple occasions, but no physical contact initiated.	Neither
Ginger	Ginger	n.d.	Approached me twice and initiated physical contract.	Collar
Tortie	Tortoiseshell	F	Visited daily, entered my apartment and initiated physical contract.	Collar
Beau	White	M	Approached me several times and initiated physical contract.	Neither
Cream	Cream	n.d.	I only saw this cat on the rooftops.	Collar
Moo	Black and white	n.d.	Approached me twice and initiated physical contract.	Collar
Mystery	Dark coat colour	n.d.	Ran off in front of me and hid behind a hedge.	n.d.
Autumn	Tortoiseshell	n.d.	Did not approach me.	Ear clipped
Friday	Black cat	F	Approached me, but no physical contact initiated.	Ear clipped

<sup>a</sup>F, female; M, male; n.d., not determined.



**Fig. 9.1.** Tortie interacting with the author during breakfast. Photos taken by author, September 2021.



**Fig. 9.2.** Marbles exhibiting affiliative proximity behaviours. Photos taken by author, September 2021.

I observed 11 cats within the Estepona resort (Table 9.2). However, cats who don't want to be observed are very good at hiding (Gunther *et al.*, 2020). One evening I became aware I was being watched from behind a bush, and as I approached the cat jumped out and ran off ahead of me. This was the only cat I noticed hiding or who seemed nervous of my presence. Autumn was another cat I observed only from a distance, one time while eating from a food bowl. This cat also had a clipped ear, and although unbothered by my presence clearly had no interest in me either. James mentioned a few cats that live in a field behind the resort and said, 'There's a few cats up the top end now there, but I don't know if they're neutered or not. I don't go up there very much.' Also, I learned that not all the resort cats are human friendly. James shared a couple of stories about cats who were fed by neighbours but that would not let you near them and became quite feisty when it came to trapping them for veterinary intervention.

I observed Beau interacting with several humans, approaching them as they walked by and rubbing against their legs. James believes most of the people who live or stay at the resort like cats, or at least are not ‘anti-cats’. He also shared that the ground staff were ‘pro-cat’ and would look out for any who got trapped in properties. I observed piles of dry cat food around the resort, and James said that even though they are not supposed to, residents feed the free-living cats. James did say there are a couple of people that ‘hate’ animals, but that the cats know which houses to avoid and who to stay away from.



**Fig. 9.3.** Resort cat–cat interactions. Arrows indicate which cats were observed as bonded pairs, playing or laying together, on multiple occasions. Underlined, dark-coloured names indicate cats who initiated physical contact with the author (see Table 9.2). All photos taken by author, September 2021.

## Cat parishes and clubs

I noted how the cats seemed to be hanging out within the same relatively small locality and I got the impression these cats had their own sub-territories within the less than 1 km<sup>2</sup> area of the resort. While individual cats have been shown to have home ranges (territories) up to almost 10 km<sup>2</sup>, in cities they tend to be less than 800 m<sup>2</sup> (Liberg *et al.*, 2000).

Smaller and exclusive (non-overlapping) ranges are more likely when the food resources are stable and evenly distributed (Liberg *et al.*, 2000; Natoli *et al.*, 2006). Thus, my observation was unsurprising, and was also backed up by James who commented (unprompted) on how territorial his cats were and how ‘the street cats have their little parishes too’. He said a couple of his cats venture up to the field behind them, but mostly they stay within the block. I never saw a cat fight during my short stay, and James told me, ‘they hiss and spit a bit, but they don’t fight much.’ In established colonies, well-fed cats display minimum aggression toward conspecifics (Vitale, 2022). The cats I met seem to have common groupings (Fig. 9.3) and the daily lives of the free-living cats appeared not to be that different from those of free-roaming companion cats. Even though they interacted differently with humans, the status of the cats within the human social world had less bearing on their social status among other cats who were seen playing or hanging out together.

### **The anthropogenic landscape**

Life for the cats of the Estepona resort might seem idyllic. There is the busy main road, but around the gated community there is no through traffic. The cats can wander through gardens and pedestrian walkways between the houses, and their interactions with cars are limited to the car park and service road to the restaurant. James says the cats love the weather and, unlike Britain, ‘Winters are great for animals here, they can sit out here all summer, and most don’t even come in at night.’ Of James’ five cats, only two come inside regularly, and a third one comes inside at night during the winter months.

However, living alongside humans can present unique dangers that are in part born out of their lack of fear for humans or human machines. For example, James told me Friday ‘will sit in front of a car and threaten it.’ Another one of the cats shares a similar lack of caution and will likewise ‘just sit in front of a car and challenge the car to stop’ (James). If they have become accustomed to something, especially as kittens, cats are unlikely to become fearful without a negative experience (Vitale Shreve and Udell, 2015). Thus, while the resort is relatively safe from

traffic, the cats do not learn to respect the road. As an unfortunate consequence, James witnessed one of their cats being killed on the quiet road just outside their home. He said he was working in the garage and watched as a cat ran out and straight under a delivery van. Although the van stopped and one of the gardeners ran up to help, the cat was already dead (James).

On my second day I found Tortie in my kitchen, acting like it was her home and she had every right to be there. And who am I to say she did not? It is likely that she has entered this apartment many times before my arrival and temporary occupation. I'd often leave the door to my apartment open during breakfast as the patio was a walled garden with a gate. However, cats can easily pass through and Tortie did not see any boundaries. As James said, some 'people put up fences to keep the cats out of their garden, but the cats, they go up onto the roof' and 'if the cat wants to come in, he's going to get in.' Sometimes the cats get stuck inside the walled gardens, but the gardeners open the gates so they can get out. A greater concern is if a cat gets locked in an apartment for an extended period, for example between holidaymaker check-in dates. I overheard a woman talking to a man who was standing in the doorway of an apartment. Snippets of their conversation suggests the white cat (Beau?) she was looking for had a habit of sneaking into apartments and getting shut in.

The pools are enclosed with a transparent, reinforced glass fence and gate. I assumed this was a safety measure to ensure small children did not fall in. The glass looked aesthetically pleasing, and the material also kept cats from climbing into the pool area. James told me how, prior to being fenced off, a few of their cats had fallen in the pools. Although they could swim, they had to be rescued: 'You gotta pull them out. They can't climb out ... .' Thus, enclosing the pool protects both children and cats from the potential danger of drowning.

## **Torremolinos Beach Cats**

The second site is further up the coast along the seafront of Torremolinos. Unlike the free-living resort cats further down the coast, those who live along the 2.3 km promenade between La Carihuela and Bajondillo would initiate physical contact. Some cats sleep in the shallow caves of the cliff front, which are sheltered by bushes and shrubbery (Fig. 9.4).

A couple of cats did wear collars and appeared to ‘belong’ to a seafront cafe. However, they also had clipped ears, indicating they were part of the managed colony’s trap-neuter-release programme. Thus, while some cats may have become ‘owned’ companion cats, behaviourally there were no discernible differences between these and the colony cats regarding how they interacted with humans.



**Fig. 9.4.** ‘Cat caves’ in the cliff face. Photos taken by author, February 2022.

On my first day I was taken by surprise when I sat down and a cat immediately jumped on my lap. Even when I tried to gently remove her, she snuggled down further (Fig. 9.5). TripAdvisor comments as far back as 2008 mention these cats, commenting on their abundance and friendliness. In 2017 cat overpopulation in Torremolinos was deemed a public health hazard, and fearing a mass killing, animal organizations got together and conducted a large-scale trap-neuter-release initiative (*EuroWeekly News*, 2017). The cats continue to be cared for by colony caretakers (Rivas, 2023).

Regarding cat–cat cultures, these cats also appeared to have their own sub-territories with the same cat or cats occupying the same area each day. Two cats shown in Fig. 9.5 appeared to be a bonded pair and were



often seen together. The cats are fed by colony caretakers, evidenced by the regularly filled food and water bowls (see Fig. 9.4, middle) laid out along the parts of the boulevard where there are no bars, cafes or restaurants. However, I also observed visitors feeding cats, both from their tables and from their pockets. I was not the only one taking photographs of the cats, and on one occasion I witnessed someone picking up a cat to pose with it. The cat did not seem to be overly bothered, which is surprising as many companion cats do not tolerate being picked up by strangers. The friendliness and lack of fear observed in the Torremolinos colony cats could be attributed to the positive interactions (and food) they receive from visitors.

### **The tourist perspective**

To gain further insight into tourist/visitor perspectives of the local cats I collected TripAdvisor comments from hotels and eating establishments in Torremolinos. Although there were sufficient reviews mentioning the cats (101) to perform a qualitative analysis, these comprise a minority of the total reviews. Cats were only specifically mentioned in 1% and 3% of the English-language reviews for hotels and food and drink establishments, respectively. This is unsurprising as cats are not the focus of these businesses. The abundance of cats is sometimes evident in how they are referenced in the context of complaints about the food, for example ‘even the cats wouldn’t eat it’ or to complain about the lack of hospitality, such as ‘the cats are treated better than the guests’ (such comments are coded as ‘cat neutral’) (see Table 9.1). However, it was comments related to how a feline presence was contributing to a positive or negative experience that provided greatest insight into how visitors perceive and relate to free-living cats. Overall, the comments about cats were predominantly cat positive (61%), with visitors generally enjoying the cats’ presence. However, more complained about cats in hotel reviews, compared with write-ups on food and drink establishments (Fig. 9.6).



**Fig. 9.5.** Author with free-living cats of the promenade, Torremolinos. Photo taken by author's partner, February 2022.

The cat-positive hotel comments tended to refer to one or two resident cats who the guest had met, often naming the cats in the reviews. Although a few did find the abundance of local cats endearing, especially those with children, negative comments tended to cite the noise and untidiness of multiple cats. Six low-rated hotel reviews specifically mention the smell of cat urine and others complained of cat presences in their room or the lobby.

Themes shown in Table 9.3 that correlated with my observational data were Resident cat, So many cats! (although I would not describe the current situation as overpopulation), Friendly cats, Cat watching, Feeding the cats, and Well-cared for cats. Additional insights provided by the TripAdvisor comments were Nuisance cats, Unhygienic, and Cat-related insults. These themes are interrelated and discussed below under two broad subheadings related to the cats' condition and status.

### *Well-cared for and well-fed cats*

Perhaps most notable from my analysis of TripAdvisor reports was an absence of comments concerned with cat welfare. I found no mention of sick, distressed or underfed cats, or any accusations of cats being mistreated. This is probably because the cats are monitored by a dedicated group of colony caretakers, who ensure they are fed and newcomers sterilized to prevent overpopulation (Rivas, 2023). References to how well cared for the free-living cats were, as well as those associated with bars, restaurants or hotels, was implicit in many of the



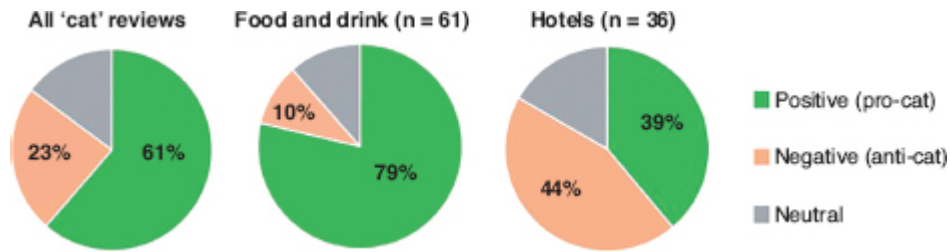
TripAdvisor reports. Other reviewers were more explicit and took time to write about restaurants and hotels putting food out for visiting cats. One report said the owners of a family-run restaurant fed all the cats in the area and others commented on how well looked after the resident hotel cats were.

Despite signs asking visitors not to feed the cats, who are provided wet and dry food by colony caretakers (Rivas, 2023), many did feed them. I observed a child feeding one a cat chew stick, given to her by her mother for this purpose. Others were sharing what may have been cat treats or could have been leftover human food. Several TripAdvisor reports on the beaches of La Carihuela and Bajondillo also said 'be sure to feed the cats' (or similar). TripAdvisor reports also suggested the cats were often the benefactors of dissatisfied diners. For example, one reads: 'I was not in a confrontational mood so ate the chips but took the fish to feed the local cats' (TripAdvisor review, 2015). Some noted that the 'Community cats love what you drop on the floor' (TripAdvisor review, 2017) and others confessed to intentionally feeding the cats. For example, one self-proclaimed cat lover said of the resident cat, 'He thoroughly enjoyed my tuna ceviche!' (TripAdvisor review, 2017).

### *The resident cat (feline patrons)*

Like other Mediterranean destinations I have visited, I noted individual cats were often associated with specific restaurants. Furthermore, many (42) of the TripAdvisor reports mentioned the resident cat. The majority of these were cat positive and sometimes named the cat(s). A cat named Lola was specifically mentioned in six independent TripAdvisor reports written in 2018 and 2019. The fact that they knew her name implies a conversation centred around the cat had occurred between the diners and the owner or staff, although none explicitly stated this. For example, a typical comment read, 'Great staff and atmosphere, especially with Lola the cat' (TripAdvisor review, 2019). Cats in general were viewed as positive and negative attributes to tourist venues. For example, a five-star review stated 'and the lovely cat made the waiting time fly quickly and brought a big smile on our kids' faces' (TripAdvisor review, 2018). Another five-star review noted, 'the local moggies [cats] provide a homely

presence as they curl up and snooze in the odd empty seat’ (TripAdvisor review, 2015).



**Fig. 9.6.** Proportion of pro-cat, anti-cat and cat-neutral TripAdvisor reviews of hotels and food and drink establishments in Torremolinos January 2010–January 2022.

[Click to see the long description.](#)

**Table 9.3.** Themes of TripAdvisor discourse analysis of English-language reviews of hotels, cafes and restaurants in Torremolinos

Theme	Description	Examples of comments	No. of comments
Resident cat	Interactions with a cat associated with a particular premises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>‘... and Lily the resident cat is gorgeous’</li> <li>‘We had a great table and were joined by the resident cat for dinner.’</li> </ul>	<u>46 Total</u> 41 Positive 2 Negative 3 Neutral
So many cats!	References to feline abundance or multiple cats hanging around the general area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>‘Lots of local cats’</li> <li>‘... the army of local cats which seem to live on the cliff side.’</li> </ul>	<u>43 Total</u> 23 Positive 9 Negative 11 Neutral
Friendly cats	Comments about how friendly the cats were and how they initiated physical contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>‘The cats are friendly too.’</li> <li>‘A bonus was of course the darling restaurant cat who slept in my lap while I ate.’</li> </ul>	<u>35 Total</u> <u>33</u> Positive 2 Negative
Cat watching	Expressions of delight at watching or interacting with local cats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>‘Loved their ginger cat antic’s.’ [sic]</li> <li>‘The cats/view make the place a lovely spot</li> </ul>	<u>29 Total</u> 29 Positive

		to sit and watch the world go by.'	
Feeding the cats	Giving cats human food as a treat or to get rid of bad food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'The cats were very friendly, our one especially loved the garlic mayo.'</li> <li>'fed one of the local cats most of the chicken.'</li> </ul>	<u>15 Total</u> 10 Positive 1 Negative 4 Neutral
Unhygienic	Reference to cats being unhygienic/dirty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'... the smell of cat pee in the corridor'</li> <li>'... the thought of him [the server] messing with the cat and then pouring our drinks.'</li> </ul>	<u>13 Total</u> 1 Positive 11 Negative 1 Neutral
Nuisance cats	Cats begging for food, getting in the way, or making noise at night, or a general distain for cats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'... we could hear cats yowling throughout the night.'</li> <li>'One even jumped on my lap. Gave it a four star instead of 5 [sic] because of the cats.'</li> </ul>	<u>10 Total</u> 1 Positive 8 Negative 1 Neutral
Cat-related insults	Using references to the cats to make a point related to bad service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'Even the cats would not eat it.'</li> <li>'The cats get better treatment than the guests.'</li> </ul>	<u>8 Total</u> 1 Positive 4 Negative 3 Neutral
Well-cared for cats	Mention of locals and hotel/restaurant managers feeding the cats, or generally healthy-looking cats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'The hotel cat was a nice extra and was very well looked after.'</li> <li>'The area around has numerous cats (well fed and looked after).'</li> </ul>	<u>6 Total</u> 5 Positive 1 Neutral

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Some TripAdvisor writers implied cats were inherently unhygienic or took objection to serving staff stroking the cats. Arguably this, and especially the complaints of hotel spaces smelling of cat urine, are due to poor sanitary and cleaning practices rather than directed at the cats themselves. However, the notion that the cats do not belong or need 'controlling' was expressed in some reports. Others defended the cats saying, the 'cat was there but unobtrusive' (TripAdvisor review, 2015) or that 'Cats roam free but not in your face!' (TripAdvisor review, 2017).

However, both these speak to human exceptionalism and the notion that human comfort comes first.

## **Discussion**

### **Humano–cat cultures and tourism**

The home ranges of individual cats have been shown to vary greatly, from 9.9 km<sup>2</sup> in the countryside to less than 800 m<sup>2</sup> in cities (Liberg *et al.*, 2000). Exclusive (non-overlapping) ranges are more likely when the food resources are stable and evenly distributed (Liberg *et al.*, 2000; Natoli *et al.*, 2006), as would be the case in both the Estepona resort and the Torremolinos boulevard.

Compared to the wealth of studies on intraspecies social interactions in cat colonies, only a handful of studies have looked at social interactions between free-living cats and humans (Jaroš, 2018; Vitale, 2022). The key difference between the free-living cats of the Torremolinos seafront and those of the Estepona resort was their interspecific interactions with humans. The former would initiate affiliative and physical contact (rubbing on legs and jumping into laps) with humans. Many of the free-living cats of the resort were also unafraid of humans and would engage in affiliative proximity behaviours (approaching and sitting close by) but would withdraw from an outstretched hand. It is likely that the Torremolinos cats, although free living, were socialized to humans as kittens by interactions with colony caregivers and the high-volume of human tourists. Conversely, the resort cats may have grown less wary of humans over time, but cats who are not exposed to humans as kittens rarely engage in affiliative behaviours towards humans (Slater, 2004).

A TripAdvisor report stated ‘beautiful resort, but my wife got rather upset with the amount of stray cats’. In comments such as these, the upset seems to have been caused by them not having human homes, rather than them being in poor condition. Another user started a thread asking for advice about where to stay in the Malaga area:

My problem is that I am a real animal lover and I keep reading about the large number of stray cats on Costa del Sol. ... is there anywhere we can go where there aren[']t lots of stray cats or dogs. I would worry about them and it would spoil my holiday.

(TripAdvisor review, 2018)

The belief that all free-living cats are to be pitied or need ‘rescuing’ is a prominent theme in my doctoral studies (Hill, 2023), but in many cases this is unfounded. Cats accustomed to free living often do not fare well in animal shelters or being confined to human homes and are best cared for as community or colony cats (Slater, 2004; Natoli *et al.*, 2006). In response to the above question, several posts pointed out that the cats of Torremolinos were very well-cared for. A TripAdvisor member with ‘Destination Expert for Torremolinos’ status explained they were:

not strays ... they’re the most pampered beasts imaginable. There really isn’t any need to worry about them, the females are spayed wherever possible to keep the numbers down, and the local vets keep an eye on them on a regular basis.

(TripAdvisor member, 2018)

The liminal status of *F. catus* as not fully domesticated, yet not completely wild (Crowley *et al.*, 2020), bears resemblance to the status of British migrants living in Spain (O’Reilly, 2000, 2017). These migrants occupy a liminal status of being residents but not fully integrated into the local Spanish culture, with many retaining British passports (O’Reilly, 2017). The Brits in Spain have been subject to bad press over the years for their uncouth behaviours and refusal to integrate into Spanish society (O’Reilly, 2017), and much like free-living cats might be seen by some as transgressive and out of place (Holmberg, 2015).

In the case of the resort cats, many were companion cats belonging to resident Brits, so arguably their presence is an extension of the geographies created by the British migrants (Wolch *et al.*, 2002). British migrants are central players within the animal charity that oversees and takes care of the Torremolinos colony cats (Rivas, 2023). However, cats are also kept as companion animals by Spanish residents, and Spain has similar regulations and volunteer-led approaches surrounding the management of free-living cats as the UK (Natoli *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, James spoke of positive relations with the Spanish groundskeepers, who were looking out for the cats, and of the Spanish vets who waived fees for treating free-living cats. However, as members of

a companion animal species, living independently, the Torremolinos colony cats represent an escape from human control. All over the world free-living cats occupy this liminal space of not behaving like domesticated animals but not being fully wild or considered a 'native' species (Griffiths *et al.*, 2004; Crowley *et al.*, 2020). This status endears the cats to some people and offends others who see them as 'invasive' or a nuisance within human-dominated urban spaces (Houston *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, there are different cultural ideas about how cats should behave or places they are allowed to enter (Griffiths *et al.*, 2004), and entitled tourists might deem their complaints justified based on these (Martin *et al.*, 2017).

### **Human exceptionalism and entitled tourists**

Discourses surrounding free-roaming cats are invariably human centred and dominated by human exceptionalism – the belief that humans are inherently different from, or superior to other animals (Hill, 2022). Western tourism was based on ontological and ethical assumptions that prioritize the human and pays little attention to other animals beyond how they serve or affect the tourist experience (Cohen, 2019). Regarding the cats and tourists, my human informant said 'the Brits are the worst complainers' especially the ones who don't live in the Estepona resort. He went on to explain that the 'Spanish generally don't complain so much, but because of COVID-19 travel restrictions abroad, a lot came down from Madrid in 2020 'and they all got very anti the cats'. James proceeded to express the opinion that those who did not live there (in the resort) had no right to complain. However, it was unclear if he believed the visitors had no right to complain about 'our' (the residents') cats, or if he was defending the cats' inherent right to exist (it is likely it was a bit of both). However, the cats might be caught in between existing tensions between British and Spanish-born residents and tourists described by O'Reilly (2009). Certainly, future research could be directed towards an understanding of how Spanish locals relate to the cats and how this impacts relations with resident Brits and tourists.

TripAdvisor reports demonstrate how cats are sometimes not considered as being sentient beings, being written about as one might complain about mould growing in the shower. Comments expressing the sentiment that local cats are an unsightly and an unwelcome presence can be examined within a broader framework of entitlement and tourist expectations. Personality influences the emotions a tourist experiences on vacation in response to expectations not being met, and this can determine whether they have a positive or negative experience (Lin *et al.*, 2014). Campbell *et al.* (2004) conceptualized 'psychological entitlement' as 'a stable and pervasive sense that one deserves more and is entitled to more than others' and examined some of potential interpersonal consequences of such entitlement. Psychological entitlement is experienced across a multitude of situations, including expectations for services received on vacation. Non-entitled tourists enjoy the immersive cultural experience of local cuisine and TV stations, whereas more entitled visitors expect options that they are familiar with (Martin *et al.*, 2017). This leads them to feel uncomfortable and complain about that which is unfamiliar, including the local language and resident cats.

## **Conclusion**

While my brief visits do provide the visitor perspective and an appreciation of how the cats interact and quickly befriend strangers, I recognize much more could be gained from a longer multispecies ethnography. The emergent themes from my analysis could be used to inform further studies that included the restaurant owners and staff who fed the cats as well as local colony caretakers. Furthermore, both visits were conducted outside of the main tourist season, and future ethnographic studies could benefit from interacting with feline informants during the summer months.

Emerging themes demonstrate how free-living cats are adored, abhorred, pitied and ignored by human visitors. They are also well-cared for by resident humans and spoiled by visitors, and any expression of pity is not based on poor living conditions. Most visitors would appear

indifferent to the cats, to the point of not even commenting on them. However, 'ignored' is perhaps not the best term as it implies a need is being overlooked. Many people do enjoy healthy, happy cats and would be disturbed by an abundance of sick or abused cats. None the less, there is a vocal anti-cat element to the discourses, which associate cats with being dirty and a nuisance. I believe cats have a right to exist independent of whether human visitors (or residents) enjoy their presence, but a deeper understanding of both feline and human needs, wants and desires, within the context of a popular holiday destination, is imperative for continued harmonious multispecies coexistence.

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# 10 A ‘Day-Dog’ Afternoon – Turkish Street Dogs as Hiking Companions

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DOI: 10.1079/9781800625259.0010

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## **Abstract**

This chapter takes a multispecies ethnographic approach to examine the case of a multiethnic hiking group walking with free-roaming village dogs in the Istanbul countryside. Their entangled relationship offers a specific angle to explore more-than-human sociality. Dogs following the group are called ‘day dogs’, referring to the temporal status they fulfil as companions. In the long run, they are shaping hiking routes, practices and emotional topographies, inscribing themselves into the network of routes in many ways. However, there is a constant unsteadiness about human responsibility and non-human agency as day dogs often challenge prior expectations and events can take unexpected turns. The results of interaction between hikers, dogs and other human or non-human dwellers of a given environment reveals that places have a multispecies meaning. This encourages us to think of landscape as a social, rather than a physical, terrain. Movement creates a subversive potential to understand the significance of free-roaming dogs as social actors, partners in the meaning-making processes within the given cultural context.

## Introduction

There is a complex and complicated relationship with street dogs in Istanbul. They have been iconic figures of the city for centuries, mentioned recurrently in travelogues from the 18th century (Dubino, 2014) and later, with the advance of technology, displayed on postcards and photographs (Işın, 2016). They are probably the most visible and well-documented dog population of Turkey in social and historical research related to the urban spaces. Besides historical research on their place in Ottoman society (Işın, 1992; Pinguet, 2010; Gündoğdu, 2018), there is a vast interest among scholars to unravel the contested position of street dogs in contemporary Turkish society. These accounts cover multiple aspects from the embodied practices and ethics of care for street animals (Fortuny, 2014; Hart, 2019; Haspolat, 2019) to the struggles around their right to public space that is often violated by forced translocations (Zeybek, 2014; Alkan, 2016; Yıldırım, 2019). If animals, as Whatmore (2006, p. 604) claims, can become ‘agents provocateurs’ for thinking by, and about, ourselves, then Istanbul street dogs confront us with vital questions about the place of non-human others within changing social relations.

In this chapter I apply a multispecies ethnographic approach (see Kirksey and Helmreich, 2010) to explore how this entangled dog–human relationship spills out to the margins of the metropolis. Through the case of an Istanbul-based multiethnic hiking group walking with free-roaming village dogs I investigate how a multispecies leisure experience takes form and oversteps boundaries between strays and pets. The remaining green belt of forests and agricultural areas offer an opportunity to free-roaming dogs and hikers to become available to each other as fellow walkers, cross territorial boundaries and engage in spontaneous, temporal companionship.

Multispecies scholar Donna Haraway uses the term **becoming available** to refer to ‘those practices in which animals and people become available to each other, become attuned to each other, in such a way that both parties become more interesting to each other, more open to surprises’ (Haraway, 2008, p. 207). Her highly influential re-

interpretation of domestication is centred around the concept of companion species, that emphasizes the never complete nature of the mutually constitutive relationship. Thinking about dogs and humans as companion species thus means becoming-with, a conceptualization that refuses human exceptionality and the human mastery that often permeates established domestication narratives (Haraway, 2008; Lien *et al.*, 2018).

According to Haraway, new identities arise through the entanglements of becoming available. My example of walking with strays differs from Haraway's, who unravels her personal experiences in agility training with her own dog. Unlike Haraway and her dog Cayenne, who were engaged in a long-term learning process, a highly focused interpersonal relationship of 'laughter, tears, work, and play for thousands of hours over several years' (2008, p. 208), my human participants never met (or recognized) the same dogs, with one or two exceptions. Becoming available here refers to a pattern within a pattern, that emerges in a particular life world with particular form of dog-socialities embedded within. Encounters between hikers and village dogs bring individuals to new junctions, pushing and transmuting patterns further in unexpected ways, open towards surprises.

In the Turkish context, street dogs are generally perceived as neighbourhood residents (Fortuny, 2014; Alkan, 2016; Işın, 2016; Hart, 2019), similarly to other countries where coexistence with street dogs is rather the norm than the exception (see ethnographic accounts of Fielding *et al.*, 2005; Ruiz-Izaguirre and Eilers, 2012; Savvides, 2013; Capellà Miternique and Gaunet, 2020). However, Western visitors with a different cultural background often feel perplexed, as Fortuny confesses:

Roaming outside and beyond the traditional lexicons and taxonomies of civilized society, the feral dog belongs to another place and another time. He disarms the tourist who takes photos of him alongside other exotic artefacts of the city. American-born residents of Istanbul, like me, struggle to make room for him in our own imported frames of reference. Local people do not agree on his status.

(Fortuny, 2014, p. 272)

The liminal status of animals emerges through crossing pre-established categories, where the notion of something or somebody out of place is strongly tied to social norms and cultural judgements. 'Related

to the conceptual placing of animals is also a strong human sense of the proper places which animals should occupy physically' say Philo and Wilbert (2000, p. 10). After a few years, the hike leader – a foreigner himself – coined the term **day dog**, that reflects the temporal nature of their identity, compared with the spatialized one of street or village dog. The term day dog indicates a general type, a transient subject who steps out of their habitual space. In an inevitable way, the birth of new categories signals an attempt to exert power over things that require explanation and condense knowledge about how to relate to each other. Being a stranger, stepping out of boundaries, occupying liminal spaces and positions carries a subversive potential.

## Methodology

The data on which this analysis is based comes from ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Istanbul over 9 months in total between 2020 and 2022. The methodology combined walk-along as a form of participatory method, and semi-structured interviews.

The site of the field presented in this account was constituted through movement, therefore the methods of observation were informed by scholars who understand walking as a way of embodied knowing (Ingold and Vergunst, 2008). Walk-along or go-along methods gained popularity recently, as a research method that focuses on ways in which lived experiences, perception and meaning making are constructed through place and spatial practices of sociality and positionality (Kusenbach, 2018). More-than-human methodologies also embraced movement-based methodologies as a way of empirical data collection (Hamilton and Taylor, 2017) to address the 'challenge for contemporary animal studies, and particularly those that draw in the social sciences, is how to conceptualize and engage with the liveliness of animal movement as a legitimate way of knowing' (Buller, 2012a, p. 144).

Although go-along can be considered as a form of mobile interview, I decided to keep interviews and walking as separate activities. I always related to walking with others as a form of participant observation,

trying to stay attuned to human and canine companions and observe interactions. During the fieldwork I attended 21 occasions and wrote a detailed account of each hiking event in my field diary. The hikes were between 16 km and 24 km in length and lasted for 8–10 hours; they were quite demanding physically, especially in the summer heat. The continuous, unstructured flow of the walk presents a unique challenge to the participant observer, and reference points blur in the memory. Gradually, I employed a visual diary, taking photos on the spot during the walks, which could serve as memos of encounters, contacts, spatial positions and other relevant events or details.

In addition, I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with 16 participants that were transcribed verbatim and analysed along with the field diaries. The hiking group created a multicultural meeting ground, providing an opportunity for English speakers from various backgrounds to mingle with like-minded others, foreigners from different parts of the globe staying for shorter periods or settling down, and local Turks – many of them with transnational belongings or years spent abroad. All interviewees (ten Turkish and six other nationalities) can be considered as regulars. During the chapter I will use pseudonyms. In the case of day dogs, I kept the names they received from hikers.

Although language-centred data collection is often criticized as too anthropocentric (Hamilton and Taylor, 2017), dog stories woven into the interview open a window on one's values and concepts regarding the role of dogs, while shedding light on important momentums of multispecies dynamics. Interviews were analysed with a view to understanding how hikers perceive the liminal status of day dogs and how they make sense of actual situations.

When considering the limitations of the study, a significant portion of the collected data comes from the verbal accounts of hikers, thus the interpretation reflects their point of view. The diverging standpoint of locals who inhabit the landscapes remains hidden, as well as the continuing lives of stray dogs when they return to being street dogs after their paths intersect. Therefore, it cannot provide a picture of how the effects of the hikes continue to ripple through those local lifeworlds, only raise further questions about the relationship between mobile leisure



practices detached from home and multispecies meanings of places they appropriate.

## **Discovering the ‘Rural’ Istanbul**

Established at the end of 2013 by Karen and Thomas, both British, the hiking group organizes weekly hikes in the Istanbul countryside. Thomas, a performer, musician and producer, moved to Istanbul in the early 2000s. Karen, an art historian, had already spent two decades in Turkey and was involved in the design of long-distance hiking trails before the two were introduced to each other by a common friend. They shared a common idea to create a hiking book containing a network of original routes around Istanbul, that includes both the Thracian and the Anatolian sides. Their main inspiration was the Gezi protest and new awareness for environmental issues, following the controversial destruction going on in the city’s northern periphery. ‘Mega constructions’ of the third bridge, the new airport and the Kanal Istanbul project played a crucial role for city dwellers to expand and reclaim boundaries of their habitat. As Kentel notes: ‘The urban experience of Istanbulites was apparently never this much affected by what went on in the periphery, and by the transformation of the country’ (Kentel, 2019, p. 156).

Thus, the previously neglected green areas of the city periphery became sites of social imagination. The routes designed by Thomas and Karen include not only scenic sections and historical heritage but also ecologically devastated areas such as opencast mines, garbage-polluted seashores and clear-cut forests, with the intent to map and witness the transformations of the landscape. Walks are sometimes combined with protest against a new construction project that carries environmental injustice, utilizing the symbolic power of walking as a political gesture. As one participant noted, hiking for him was an activity for pleasure, but in Turkey everything becomes a question of politics, with the places for walking getting privatized or destroyed. Thomas often closed his social

media posts with a section of ideas and fantasies about the future of the land and areas that a given hike covered.

There are also occasions when walking turns into a form of playful disobedience. The group often crossed, jumped or cut fences, passing through areas that are closed up for various reasons (e.g. military areas, film sets, construction sites) and therefore *yasak* (forbidden). These acts were often justified by declaring that these lands should be open for walkers, or simply by the practical fact that somebody else had already opened a passage in the fence.

Many Turkish participants emphasized how they explored 'rural' Istanbul with a foreigner's help, despite growing up in the city. The combination of these transgressive tactics and the physically challenging, inventive style of walking moulds into a shared ethos among the regular hikers, while deterring other ones from returning. As Can, a keen member, put it in words saying after his first hike that his experience was like feeling 'a new taste in his mouth'. Hiking around Istanbul thereby reclaims locality while at the same time echoes a desire for authenticity that can be discovered outside organized touristic settings and destinations.

The characteristics mentioned above provide an empowering setting for like-minded humans, who see the embodied aesthetics and hiking style of Thomas distinct from other, more 'soft', hikers. However, the established practices and the arrangement of the routes carry consequences for those free-roaming dogs who engage and walk with the hiking group. While staying on the path or following a circular route would make it easy for dogs to get back to their point of departure, wandering off the roads, crossing various terrains through 20–25 km to end the journey in a different location results in a redistribution of communal dogs. The correspondence between locals and newcomers can be seen as the unpredicted side effect in the flow of interactions and entanglement, affecting others' locality while hikers detach themselves from the scene, a blind spot and a never-revealing reality. Hikers come with a desire to reconnect with nature in a political and personal sense, but they also affect those localities through the relationships they establish with stray dogs in a different way that not necessarily coincides

with their interpretation of political issues. However, it is inevitably multispecies politics – how to live and die together in the rural Istanbul.

## **Stepping Into a Relationship**

Hiking with day dogs poses a question: What to do and how to act, when there are no pre-existing or only partly applicable models to follow? Hikers often feel that day dogs are performing a ‘cultural camouflage’<sup>1</sup> (Beck, 2002, p. ix), very quickly acting like part of the group, as if they were family dogs on a trip. But one does not leave family dogs behind, and there are no standards for what extent one should take responsibility for a dog who is autonomous.

In an important sense, it would be inaccurate to say that dogs started to join the hikes. Dogs were there already, before the hiking project became the project that it is today or the group became any kind of group. When just the two of them, Thomas and Karen, started to walk together for the second time, with the plan in their mind to explore trails and routes for the Istanbul hiking book, they spent the whole day with a lovely dog without any awareness or conscious thought of what will happen at the end of the day. When they ended the hike on the roadside and decided to hitchhike back to the city, they suddenly realized that they were going to abandon this dog who was their company for 8 hours. They have stepped into the space of emotional and ethical entanglement with those free-roaming dogs without being aware of it. In Deborah Bird Rose’s term, (multispecies) ethics can be defined as: ‘Interactive dramas of encounter and recognition. To come face-to-face with others, to recognize and respond to the other’s call’ (Bird Rose, 2011, p. 12). Both of them recalled this (and the next few similar occasions on leaving their day-dog companion at the end of a hike) as a very upsetting moment, followed by the dog’s gaze, while they got into a car. The moral confusion overcame the previous experience of mutual satisfaction, as Thomas and Karen decide to leave the dog behind, because it is a ‘feral’ dog, as Thomas referred to her later. The ethical demand transferred through the gaze of the dog conflicted with its social status as an ownerless animal,

and the two British ‘outsiders’ were neither prepared to answer this call nor armour-plated emotionally to ignore it completely.

What comes later could be understood as a response and reaction to this enigma. Instead of looking for a way to discourage dogs, a set of rules and tactics emerged to come to terms with their presence. As Thomas summarized:

the dogs become quite often part of the complications of hiking around Istanbul. And I feel we have to accept those complications and try to handle them as best we can, and we can learn as we go along how to handle them and advise people [about] strategies how to handle them.

(Thomas)

In the next sections I will elaborate on those complications and strategies that he refers to in our interview.

## **Accepting Complications**

Street dogs can be found everywhere in and around villages, and many of them initiate friendly contact with strangers easily, whereas some dogs show no desire to initiate contact, or even withdraw. Every dog represents a unique individuality shaped by actual life experiences, personality and social position. As Miklósi (2009, p. 47) tells us, dogs evolved to ‘be able to develop new social relationships rapidly, capitalize on short-term contacts and be socially tolerant or even ignorant if required. Failure in these forms of social contact reduces the chance of success.’ This inherent talent may explain their general ease with complete strangers. Besides, some of them are not simply easy-going, but are rather ‘sticky’, determined to attach themselves to the amicable assembly. Although this stickyness stems from a shared mutual history of responsiveness going way back in the past before an individual’s lifetime (Haraway, 2008, p. 42), repeatedly it actualizes in those affective encounters between free-roaming dogs and hikers. Participants often give an account of the lack of means to control dog movement, and most of my informants agreed that they will follow anyway, even if they shout at them, or try to scare them by clapping.

The way dogs assert their own agency is reflected in the words of a hike leader, who stated that dogs make their own choices by coming. He advises people to act neutral in the beginning, neither encouraging (calling, petting, offering food) or frightening dogs off (throwing rocks, shouting). Moreover, threatening behaviour would create a negative association to his reasoning, reinforcing a negative image of the group as being a source of trouble.

However, not every participant agreed with this policy. Oya, a regular member from the early days, raised concerns regarding responsibility in the long run. She mentioned some occasions when day dogs got injured, for example being wounded by a barb wire when the group crossed a fence, or accidentally jumping in front of a car at the last village, when local dogs defended their territory from the newcomer. Although no fatal accident occurred, she felt upset about the role they played in making those situations possible. After these incidents Oya tried to prevent dogs joining the group, but that resulted in an ultimatum: 'Thomas said if I'm going to continue doing that, then he will ask me not to come on the hikes anymore.' This notice for Oya, who is an old friend of Thomas, suggests that the issue of dogs is about more than just personal disagreement.

The rejection of throwing rocks includes another aspect of self-identification. Being loud or using violent acts is a behaviour that many urbanites associate with village mentality. As Ada highlighted, being more rough (*kaba*) stems from a different lifestyle and flow of affects and energies, where using strong, physical gestures like pushing, kicking or shouting is seen as an effective way of establishing clean boundaries. Karen, even if she felt concerned, empathically concluded that street dogs probably 'had enough stones thrown at them in their lives. You know, we wouldn't want to do that.'

Furthermore, accepting day dogs as a source of complications can be understood as an attempt to harmonize it with the qualities and values that the hikers embrace. As Ömer, a regular Turkish participant pointed out in connection with dogs: 'We cannot minimise the risk to zero in our lives; anything can happen to the dog, and it can happen to us.' Worrying too much or trying to control the situation before any problem arises creates a stressful atmosphere that conflicts with the 'spirit of the hikes'.

In summary, in the beginning the ‘strategy’ is rather not acting than acting. This passive code of conduct is over when the group leaves the village behind and dogs are still following in their steps. They just gradually move closer and closer, until they are sure that they won’t be chased away. As a matter of fact, the composition of the group is different in every hiking event, and novice participants are not necessarily familiar with the informal ‘policies’. Even regular members are often ignorant of these unwritten rules, and cuddle dogs who approach them.

## Multispecies Meaning of ‘Outside’

Hiking as a spatial practice mobilizes the dichotomy between the ‘urban body’ and the body in nature altered by a multisensorial disposition.

Urban bodies in movement, according to these formulations, are highly regulated, defensive, passive, sensually deprived, performatively inert and, therefore, not conducive to reflexive practices. By contrast, the walking body in the country is conceived as being released from these restrictions.

(Edensor, 2000, p. 85)

Hiking as a leisure activity is attractive (and addictive) because of an altered state and sensual awareness of urban walkers, that Edensor (2000) calls the **body-in-becoming**, ‘as opposed to the ‘body-in-being’ of the farmer, is subject to an often intense, reflexive monitoring about the way in which it moves through, senses and apprehends nature’ (Edensor, 2000, p. 84). I argue that if there is a human urban body to be altered, there is also a canine village body in this sense. The sensual freshness that hikers are looking for through walking in the countryside is recognized in the playfulness and curiosity of day dogs, who leave their mundane environments behind.

Interestingly, it is mostly other dogs, and just occasionally villagers who actively prevent potential day dogs from following hikers. Observing stray dogs in an Italian village, MacDonald and Carr (2016) described how social groups have spatial dimensions. Similarly, Turkish street dogs within the village mark out various areas as their territory, teaming up against trespassers and protecting their street. It happened with Clever, a

skinny brown dog, who earned a nickname despite never becoming a day dog. He managed to find an alternative route on his own, when we climbed a gate that he could not cross. A few minutes later, he popped up and reunited with us. However, the gang of the upper village chased him back. On the same hike two more dogs were also prevented by other dogs, and a third one we met in the next street almost made it up to the edge of the village, where we met an elderly couple herding cows. The lady started to shout at and chase the dog with a branch, most probably because she was worried about their cows becoming scared.

These incidents indicate that a village is a space structured by territorial codes, where the permeability of different zones and spots are the results of constant negotiation and multispecies power dynamics. One can pass through while the other cannot, and this stems from interpretations on both sides. Leaving the village by joining hikers offers access to places outside the village not necessarily available for local dogs, or not likely to occur naturally.

Dogs who are so eager to join must have some kind of motivation to do so, the hikers often contemplate. Are they following people as the seagulls do the fishermen's boats? Are they looking for a home? Are they bored with their village life and is walking together with hikers an adventure for them as well? These guesses reflect the hiker's effort to understand a non-human experience. Hikers recognize a parallel personality trait between day dogs and themselves in terms of curiosity and adventure seeking, but also the social capability to occupy roles as leaders and followers.

The need for antidote against boredom is echoed by Miriam, a regular participant, who herself moved from Istanbul to a village some years ago. According to her observations, village dogs are bounded in daily life by routines and need mental and physical stimulation. They are excited to explore the environment outside the village. Miriam suggests that hikers offer this opportunity 'to move things around' for them. Many interviewees recall the joy and playful behaviour of the dogs as they are running and sniffing at things, jumping into the water or rolling in the snow. This attunement to the embodied experiences of animal partners is well known to those walking their dogs and watching them run and play in the park. Shapiro (1990) used the term kinaesthetic empathy to describe the 'bodily reflective mode' of this intersubjective phenomenon.

Nature in this sense is outside indeed, where humans and dogs go out of their normal daily routines by seeking company, and into a space structured by different relationships and possible affordances both in an individual and a collective sense.

Going a step further, I consider the moving body as a medium of sociality. The ways of walking, as Ingold and Vergunst (2008) conclude, are ways of thinking and:

to think and feel is not to set up a relation of external contact or correspondence between subjective states of mind and objectively given conditions of the material world, but rather to make one's way through a world-in-form, in a movement that is both rhythmically resonant with the movements of others around us.

(Ingold and Vergunst, 2008, p. 2)

Sharing the presence, movement and rhythm is a core element of the embodied experience of hiking. Walking with others is a social activity, and this is also true of walking with animals. For day dogs, inclusion can be a motivation and reward in itself. Dogs easily insert themselves in a leader-follower formation that corresponds well to the hierarchical organization of hiking, where a leader is designated to guide, and others fill the complementary roles of followers. As pointed out by the hikers, most of them felt surprised during their first day-dog hike, because the dogs acted so spontaneously 'as if they belonged to your pack'.

The lines of their movement show a pattern of going ahead or taking a sideway path and then coming back, as they are looping around the file of their human walking fellows. This pattern creates a coherence within the walkers, while letting the dogs explore the surroundings at their own speed. The dogs cover bigger areas in their movements, but they accept Thomas or the other hikers' route as reference. Thomas described this as a dialectic relationship where dogs are going ahead but constantly looking back, while going ahead actually forming a social hierarchy within the group, and within their conspecifics if more dogs are present. During our discussions, stories of successful cooperation often came up, where dogs and humans take part in the complementary roles of follower and leader. One such memorable story was recounted by Oya, when recalling a hike where 8 day dogs followed the group. She was walking ahead with them when she noticed hunters on the road with their own



dogs. In order to eschew a tense encounter because of their extended number, she called along all the dogs and led them aside. The willingness and cooperation of the day dogs to follow affirmed that they recognized her as a social partner.

While situations of coordinated and harmonic movement amplify the sense of community, certain barriers enhance the alterity between dog and human bodies. This partly occurs because hikers choose paths that dogs would avoid. It sometimes happens that day dogs need human help and need to be carried through the sharp rocky terrain or through prickly shrubs. In these situations, suddenly the individual bodily histories of socialization can manifest itself, since some dogs are unused to this kind of physical contact and are afraid of being lifted up. Other times whenever the group needs to cross busy highways, Thomas would attempt to use a leash he carries along for such occasions, but it is up to the individual dog whether he or she is willing to cooperate on the leash or not. Escorting day dogs through busy traffic areas presents a challenge where the dogs' reaction to being restricted affects the success of the manoeuvre, which would not necessarily cause a problem for leash-trained pets. In such cases, the hikers usually proceed to stop vehicles until each member of the party has crossed the busy road.

Stories of cooperation and solidarity have negative equivalents, where the temporal cohesion falls apart. When day dogs encounter other domestic animals, they can cause serious trouble. Village dogs are used to the presence of other animals such as cats, donkeys and hens, as many of them are roaming freely on the streets, and dogs know to ignore them. However, outside of their habitual spaces, the rules of these domestic ethics can become porous, in the lack of clear boundaries and consequences.

One time, day dogs scared a cow, and Karen, who grew up on a farm, expressed concerns for the victim of harassment, including the owner. Being scared can negatively affect the milk production of a cow, she explained and 'townies' – an ironic term of hers – hold no knowledge and feel no concern for the people whose land they cross. On a few occasions, day dogs had gone after poultry as well. A particular event was often recalled during our conversations, when six dogs killed several farm-owned geese. Miriam, one of the witnesses referred to it as 'the most

dramatic hike' of all, which brought with it an unusual escalation of violence. The day dogs appeared as radically different from the docile animals depending on people throughout their journey. All accounts stressed how they 'went crazy'. Hearing the details of the event from five different perspectives, all emphasized the radical otherness of dogs through their transformation from companions to predators in action, something atavistically wild.

The first unexpected event had happened already by lunch break. Thomas used to carry dog food in his backpack to provide some lunch for day dogs who stick with them for several hours. The dogs started a fight over the food, and he accidentally got injured on the wrist. This was the only time though when a dog caused harm to any hike member. They treated the wound and continued to carry on. Later the group crossed a place in the forest where geese were strolling around freely. Suddenly the dogs ran at the birds and started to hunt them down. The group managed to call back only one of the dogs, but they were unable to intervene in any way in the ongoing 'massacre' – as Devrim referred to it. They left the scene hoping that the rest of the dogs would follow and as they abandoned the site, they heard several gunshots. According to Miriam, villagers sometimes use fake bullets to scare off dogs and other animals, but farmers may not hesitate to kill a stray dog when they need to protect their property. It remained unknown what happened to the five dogs.

Henry Buller argues that:

one of the most basic of all relational contexts for human and non-human animals, as indeed one might argue for all inter-species mixings, revolves around relations of consumption; of being made edible (or not being made edible), of eating (or not eating) and of being eaten (or not being eaten).

(Buller, 2012b, p. 51)

The act of feeding is the basis of maintaining the social cohesion between human worlds and dog worlds. For street dogs, meat is mediated by humans in the form of raw scraps from the butchers, cooked leftovers or processed industrial products. The day dogs might have misinterpreted the context: they had met with those free-roaming birds in the forest and so maybe they did not perceive the environment in an appropriate way, and they exceeded their position in the chain of fleshly entanglements.

The story became a fable of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) era among the witnesses, as a shared narrative emerged, linking it to the pandemic conditions. In contrast to those stories that invaded popular imagination through media depictions of wildlife making its way into urban space (see Searle and Turnbull, 2020), the story of the six dogs reflected on the patterns of interdependence in the social life that is more-than-human. The dogs came from a seaside village that used to be a crowded weekend destination with its fish restaurants. As a chain reaction, the sudden and drastic rupture in the production of everyday spaces and metabolic intimacies manifested in the behaviour of affected bodies and pushed the hungry to despair. Nevertheless, dogs did not appear on the farm by miracle, and the hikers had to face the impact of their presence.

## **Separating Ways**

Entering the last village and returning to what hikers refer to as 'civilization', breaks up the hybrid community of movement to those who leave and some who stay. The transition from day dog to street dog has its own spatial dimensions, where escorting them to the village centre often becomes a manoeuvre of territorial negotiations.

There are instances where local villagers become involved in those actions. Can, a Turkish participant, recalled a situation where a local pack welcomed their day dog with angry barking. The hikers' bus was ready to depart, and they felt bad about leaving the dog alone without any support. A local shopkeeper approached them and offered his help by saying, 'Don't worry, I will keep your dog safe'. The possessive pronoun 'your' was somewhat paradoxical in the given circumstances, and reflected the ambiguous position of the dog, his state of in-betweenness.

It is unavoidable to leave the day dogs behind at the end of the day, but according to established customs, they should be left in a place where they can fit in under similar conditions. No village is alike, but they do share some characteristics, offering hope that the dogs will adapt to their new surroundings, attaching themselves successfully to a street or a

restaurant. The dog sometimes immerses himself immediately in his new environment and begins to survey the field. Sometimes the day dog waits at the bus stop, following with her eyes as people are leaving to return home. In the case of mammals, the organs of perception have also become the organs of transmission of messages about the relationship, says Bateson (1972). If you look at a dog's sense organs, you can read the patterns of the relationship in her eyes, her nose and her ears.

According to Devrim, the most stressful moment is leaving the dog in a place where 'it is unwanted'. In fact, hikers never find out what happens to the day dogs, or whether they even stay where they have been left. In the face of this uncertainty, some kind of psychological protection is needed, he argues, a capability to distance oneself from excessive emotional involvement. In identifying with the fate of street animals, many participants emphasized the importance of finding a balance between care and independence. Ada and Ömer shared the conviction that street dogs are capable, autonomous beings, who are accustomed to a life where they must adapt constantly.

Therefore, learning to navigate through affective encounters could be seen as a process of enskillment, a corresponding way to cultivate a life where one can stay close, stay open but also maintain independence in the presence of animals on the margin.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to evoke the logic of walking in its structure, presenting a particular hiking group's multispecies leisure practice in the Istanbul countryside. By examining how their site-specific spatial practices emerged through reflexive relationship to locality and sociopolitical conditions of contemporary Turkish reality, this embodied way of walking inevitably shaped the ways and lives of those free-roaming dogs who continuously join them as temporal companions. Seeking for the attunement of the body in nature that is mobilized in walking – as opposed to the 'urban body' – leads them, and us, to realize

that nature is pre-eminently social. Moreover, this sociality reveals the multispecies nature of places.

The interplay of human and animal agency creates a pattern of becoming available in certain ways in these hybrid assemblies. I argued that the attempt to create the category of ‘day dog’ within this emerging mode of dog–human sociality is a way to normalize, establish and bridge the often conflicting perceptions that arise in relation to street dogs. Freedom of movement, autonomy and competency are at the heart of what characterizes street dogs, but stepping out from spaces that they are associated with results in a liminal state where they often become more dependent and vulnerable than usual, while they can act as agents of subversion.

Looking beyond everyday animal practices that operate with implicit meanings is to discover new paths and unfamiliar situations that challenge established categories of animal. These encounters carry risk, the possibility of misunderstanding and failure, but also the possibility of learning through coming together. As humans we are not wild, domestic or feral in an anthropocentric epistemology, because we are the reference point. I believe the main question day dogs open up to people is: What are we to earthly others?

## Note

<sup>1</sup> Alan M. Beck’s foreword to the re-edition of his pioneering study on stray dog ecology within urban settings contains an interesting section where he describes a personal impression, recognizing that stray dogs perform a kind of ‘cultural camouflage’, meaning that ‘unowned (stray) dogs in an urban environment are to behave like socialized pet dogs’ (Beck, 2002, p. ix).

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# 11 Red Fox Sociality in Japanese Captive Wildlife Tourism: A Multispecies Storytelling Approach

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© CAB International 2024. *Emerging Voices for Animals in Tourism* (eds J. Hooper and C. Kline)

DOI: 10.1079/9781800625259.0011

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## Abstract

This chapter explores the social lives of red foxes involved in Japanese captive wildlife tourism. Multispecies ethnographic stories are used to evoke red foxes' subjective experiences of social interactions with conspecifics and humans at two public zoos and two private wildlife tourist attractions. It is argued that, despite being commonly understood as a solitary species, red foxes in captivity engage in complex forms of sociality and may benefit from companionship. In addition to advocating for the needs of captive red foxes, this research responds to calls for a taxonomic, epistemological and methodological broadening of animal-related tourism research. It uses multispecies storytelling as a way of engaging with the more-than-human social, exploring animal individuality, and bringing in animal perspectives.

## Introduction



Japan is home to a unique, niche wildlife tourism phenomenon featuring captive red foxes. Following the decline of the country's fur industry in the 1980s, foxes who had previously been farmed for their skins were repurposed in a small number of specialist wildlife tourist attractions (WTAs) offering tourists the chance to experience close contact with these charismatic canids. Red foxes are culturally significant in Japan due to their close association with the Shinto deity Inari Ōkami and their inscription in folklore as mysterious shapeshifters (Wallen, 2006). They are also adored for being particularly *kawaii* (cute) animals with expressive faces and bright, fluffy fur (Crossley, 2020). Therefore, although red foxes are an unusual focus for captive wildlife tourism, the species is typical of the large, furry, intelligent mammals that so often form the object of tourist desire (Carr and Broom, 2018).

These WTAs were largely unheard of outside Japan until 2015 when English-language videos about Miyagi Zao Fox Village started to go viral on social media. As a result of this exposure, the attraction became increasingly popular with international tourists. While some of these tourists described Miyagi Zao Fox Village as the 'cutest' or 'fluffiest' place on Earth, others complained that the foxes were kept in unsuitable conditions that led to widespread fighting and injury (Crossley, 2020). Some visitors attributed this aggression to an unnatural population density, claiming that red foxes are naturally solitary animals who are incapable of peacefully cohabiting among so many conspecifics. This argument regarding red foxes' lack of social skills was central to a recent petition on Change.org calling for the business's closure, which has been signed by over 3000 people. The petition description reads:

Foxes live in small groups, or even alone. They don't have the kind of intense social structure we connect with other canines like the wolf ... The foxes in the Zao Village are ... [t]oo crowded, they feel stress and become aggressive putting other foxes and the visitors in danger. They fight for the food, they hardly get water, they are suffering.

(Horsman, 2020, para. 5)

This international outpouring of concern for a species that is so marginal in captive wildlife tourism raises important issues regarding what it means to give voice to non-human animals (hereafter 'animals') in tourism. Tourists' efforts to advocate for foxes whom they perceive as

being exploited are laudable, but their understanding of red fox ecology, behaviour and welfare have so far gone unscrutinized. Through relying on lay knowledge of wildlife, there is a risk of misattributing detrimental behaviours, such as excessive fighting, to environmental factors that may not be their primary cause. This is particularly the case when transposing knowledge about wild animals to their captive-bred counterparts. The sudden, prominent inclusion of red foxes in tourist discourse reveals a dearth of tourism research focusing on this species and the need for tourism scholarship that engages with a wider range of taxa (Markwell, 2015).

Tourism research is increasingly recognizing the value of multispecies approaches, which bring new conceptual and methodological lenses to the study of non-human others (e.g. plants and animals). These non-anthropocentric perspectives seek new ways of articulating worldmaking entanglements between humans and other lifeforms. I argue that immersion in the lives of red foxes combined with a conceptual openness to a shared, more-than-human 'social' (Hamilton and Taylor, 2017) and multispecies ethnographic practice can produce novel understandings of vulpine sociality and subjectivity. I thereby respond to calls for a taxonomic, epistemological and methodological broadening of animal-related tourism research, while advocating for the needs of captive red foxes.

In the next section, I explore contemporary understandings of red fox sociality in wild and captive settings. I then question how such sociality, and red foxes' experience of it, can be empirically investigated; this leads me to a discussion of multispecies ethnography and storytelling. Next, I present research findings from four field sites in Japan, which are expressed as multispecies ethnographic stories that aim to evoke the social experiences of ten red foxes. The stories illustrate: (i) how solitary cages may result in boredom and frustration; (ii) how companionship emerges in red fox dyads; (iii) how rearing and feeding practices can foster either aggression or affiliation; and (iv) how humans are both feared and sought out as playmates. The research indicates that, despite being commonly understood as a solitary species, red foxes in captivity engage in complex social behaviours and appear to desire companionship.

## Red Fox Sociality

Sociality can be conceptualized as the capacity for animals to interact with one another and form social groups (Ward and Webster, 2016). Hunting in packs, living together in kin groups, raising young and providing companionship are all examples of social behaviours. Mapping forms of sociality for any given species can be a complex task as social interactions may vary across the life course or environmental contexts. Furthermore, Hodgetts and Lorimer (2020, pp. 9–10) recognize that ‘sociabilities (or different forms of social living) reflect tendencies at the level of the species but can mask differences between individual animals. ... These social geographies come to configure animals’ desires for companionship and/or solitude.’ In captivity, such individual differences are likely to be shaped by relationships with humans, leading to different patterns of conspecific and interspecific sociality.

The social lives of many captive animals in tourism are still poorly understood, particularly in the case of marginalized species such as the red fox. Captive animals have often been written off by ethologists as unnatural cases who have been distorted by their close interactions with humans (e.g. Dagg, 2011). However, captivity can also reveal the incredible behavioural plasticity of many animals and emergent socialities not found in the wild. Deepening our comprehension of such animal socialities has the potential to improve the lives of captive animals in tourism through better understanding their social needs. As again noted by Hodgetts and Lorimer (2020, p. 10), animals’ social geographies ‘can have important emotional consequences, creating situations of boredom and loneliness when companions are missing, as well as anxiety among crowds or in close confinement with a dominant other’.

Macdonald (1987, p. 9) complains of the inaccurate popular portrayal of ‘the red fox as a lonesome and anti-social roamer’. In the wild, many red foxes in fact lead socially complex lives, often living in small, hierarchical family groups known as a ‘skulk’. The skulk typically comprises one dog fox (male) and several related vixens (females) (Macdonald, 1987). While juvenile males disperse to establish their own territories, it is not uncommon for young vixens to remain with their

mother in order to help raise her cubs and defend the family's territory (Macdonald, 1979). The sociality of red foxes is also evidenced by their 'considerable communicative vocabulary' of approximately 28 vocalizations, which are used to greet, threaten, warn, summon or show submission to other foxes (Lloyd, 1980, p. 60). In addition, they communicate via a repertoire of bodily movements – particularly involving the mouth, ears and tail – and through scent marking (Lloyd, 1980; Macdonald, 1987). Red foxes communicate, cooperate, groom one another and even play together; they are innately social animals.

Our understanding of red fox social behaviour in captivity comes mainly from studies of fur farms, in which foxes are typically housed individually in barren wire-mesh cages during adulthood. Such research usually features silver foxes, which are a melanistic form of the red fox commonly bred for their fur (both are *Vulpes vulpes*). These studies often involve giving vixens opportunities for social contact with one other fox, or housing foxes in groups of two or three individuals through a system of interconnected cages (e.g. Hovland and Bakken, 2010). There is evidence that young vixens seek out social contact with same-age vixens (Hovland *et al.*, 2008). However, artificially created group housing situations often result in high levels of aggression, sometimes resulting in injury; this has been found both in small connected wire-mesh cages (Hovland *et al.*, 2008) and in larger, more naturalistic enclosures (Ahola *et al.*, 2001). These studies reinforce the notion that red foxes are solitary animals who are incapable of cohabiting peacefully and do not desire companionship as adults.

Red foxes are often conceptualized as 'human commensals' who dwell in 'humanised environments', benefitting from their relationship with us (Knight, 2000, p. 6). Many free-living red foxes regularly interact with humans, whose presence they have become habituated to. In captivity, such human–vulpine sociality is often further engineered by people hand-raising red fox cubs. This practice allows cubs to imprint on rearers, reducing their fear of humans and enabling them to develop greater interspecies socio-communicative proficiency (Addams and Miller, 2007). As a result, social behaviours can become directed towards familiar humans, such as zookeepers. It is common to observe red foxes excitedly approaching such humans in a non-fearful submissive greeting,

indicated by a wide grin, ears turned back, wagging tail and body close to the ground (Hovland *et al.*, 2008). Although such socialization techniques are premised on the belief that the fox cubs are born genetically wild, long-term breeding in captivity can inadvertently produce domestication effects in animals (Bovenkerk, 2016). Furthermore, selective breeding of red foxes can produce behavioural changes that include a propensity for friendliness towards humans (Trut, 1999).

## **Storying the More-Than-Human Social**

I conceptualize red foxes as individual sentient subjects who experience the world uniquely, possess intentional agency, and participate in complex forms of sociality. Recognizing red foxes as social actors who are capable of interacting and forming relationships, not only with conspecifics but also with members of other species (e.g. humans), invites us to reconsider conventional understandings of sociality. Hamilton and Taylor (2017) and Buller (2015) argue that concepts such as ‘the social’ and ‘social actor’ do not relate exclusively to humans, and support an expansion of the social sciences to include human–animal social interactions and relationships. Knight (2020, p. 11) concurs that ‘many human–animal interactions ... have an intimate, mutualistic, and even intersubjective character that makes it reasonable to talk in terms of sociality beyond the species barrier.’ Such intersubjectivity implies that animal sociality is constitutive of a broader, more-than-human social.

This is not to imply that shared forms of multispecies sociality lead to direct, ‘transparent access’ to the subjective experience of non-human others (Shapiro, 1997, p. 281). Therefore, in researching red foxes, it is necessary to engage in difficult interpretive work that is unavoidably grounded in a human perspective (Hamilton and Taylor, 2017). I endorse Plumwood’s (2002) view that we should attempt to represent animal subjectivity because failure to do so carries far greater risks. DeMello (2013, p. 5) echoes this view in saying that humans ‘can either choose to ignore what animals are saying, making them silent, or can interpret for

them, which runs the risk of doing so from the human point of view'. There is an urgent need for more diverse, non-anthropocentric animal-related tourism research given the considerable challenge that the tourism industry faces in terms of alleviating animal exploitation (Carr and Broom, 2018).

Van Dooren (2019, p. 156) calls for theorizations of subjectivity capable of capturing animals' complex experiential worlds that are '*characterized by embodied experiences, impressions, feelings, understandings, and beliefs*' (original emphasis). Storytelling is an approach that opens up new representational possibilities in this regard, and it is increasingly being used in multispecies research (e.g. Bencke and Bruhn, 2022). Writing stories about animals invites us to exceed the thick description found in ethnography by speculating on aspects of their experience that are inaccessible to us, and by pragmatically foregrounding non-human subjects in an attempt to spark curiosity, empathy and care in the reader (Van Dooren and Rose, 2016). As Greenhough and Roe (2019, p. 375) put it, storytelling 'refigures relations, multiplying perspectives and capturing forms and moments of encounter which are resistant to more conventional, isolationist and calculative modes of academic writing'. Storytelling is, therefore, a powerful way of bringing in animal perspectives to tourism research.

## Methods

I conducted an 18-month-long multispecies ethnography of captive red foxes in Japanese wildlife tourism. My background is in tourism studies and this ethnography represents my first foray into animal-related research. The research conceptualized the foxes as social actors and attempted to evoke their subjective experiences through multispecies storytelling. The study focused on Ezo red foxes (*Vulpes vulpes schrencki*) – a subspecies native to Hokkaido called *kitakitsune* (キタキツネ) in Japanese – because they are the predominant type kept at the WTAs specializing in foxes. Five field sites were chosen in order to enable a comparative

analysis, with all but one of them being discussed in this chapter (Table 11.1):

*Miyagi Zao Fox Village*, located in the hills above Shiroishi City, comprises a complex of solitary and communal cages together with a large walk-through enclosure. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, it attracted large numbers of international tourists. The ‘village’ is home to approximately 360 foxes – 90% red (mostly Ezo, some silver) and 10% Arctic – plus rabbits, guinea pigs, goats and ponies. Some of the red foxes are selectively bred to display unusual colouration not found in the wild, such as the ‘platinum’ colour morph.

*Kitakitsune Farm*, located in rural Onneyu Onsen, has a large walk-through enclosure with a comparable population density to Miyagi Zao Fox Village. It is less well known and receives fewer visitors. The ‘farm’ is home to 48 Ezo red foxes and a few racoon dogs. The foxes here are not selectively bred, but they do breed freely. Several of the foxes have congenital defects (e.g. blindness, dwarfism), which may be the result of a small gene pool. It also provides sanctuary for wild-born fox cubs brought in by members of the public.

*Asahiyama Zoo* and *Obihiro Zoo* are public zoos housing small numbers of Ezo red foxes, which are displayed as examples of native Hokkaido fauna as part of broader multispecies exhibits. Asahiyama Zoo, located in Asahikawa City, is considered to be one of the best zoos in Japan, in terms of both animal welfare and the visitor experience. Obihiro Zoo, located in Obihiro City, is smaller and less popular.

**Table 11.1.** Details of fieldwork sites in Japan

Field site	Prefecture	Facility type <sup>a</sup>	Red foxes	Fieldwork period	Fieldwork days	Red fox observations (hours)
Obihiro Zoo	Hokkaido	Zoo	1	Oct 2021	3	4
Asahiyama Zoo	Hokkaido	Zoo	2	Aug 2021– Aug 2022	10	20
Kitakitsune Farm	Hokkaido	WTA	48	Aug 2021– Oct 2022	21	63
Miyagi Zao Fox Village	Miyagi	WTA	328	Aug 2021– Sep 2022	9	37

<sup>a</sup>WTA, wildlife tourist attraction.

Observations of the red foxes and their interactions with humans were made during a series of intensive visits to the field sites using short-term ethnography (Pink and Morgan, 2013). In order to understand their social dynamics, it was essential to be able to distinguish between individual foxes. Therefore, I learnt how to identify foxes based on variations in face and body shape, coat colour, injuries, posture, gait and behaviour (Dorning and Harris, 2019). This process was facilitated by studying social media relating to the foxes, through which photographs of named individuals are often shared. In addition, staff at Kitakitsune Farm were often able to confirm the identities of the foxes during my visits. It was necessary to refamiliarize myself with the foxes during each new fieldwork trip given the dramatic transformations that come with their seasonal moult and regrowth of the coat. As a result, the process of identifying individual animals was ongoing throughout the research.

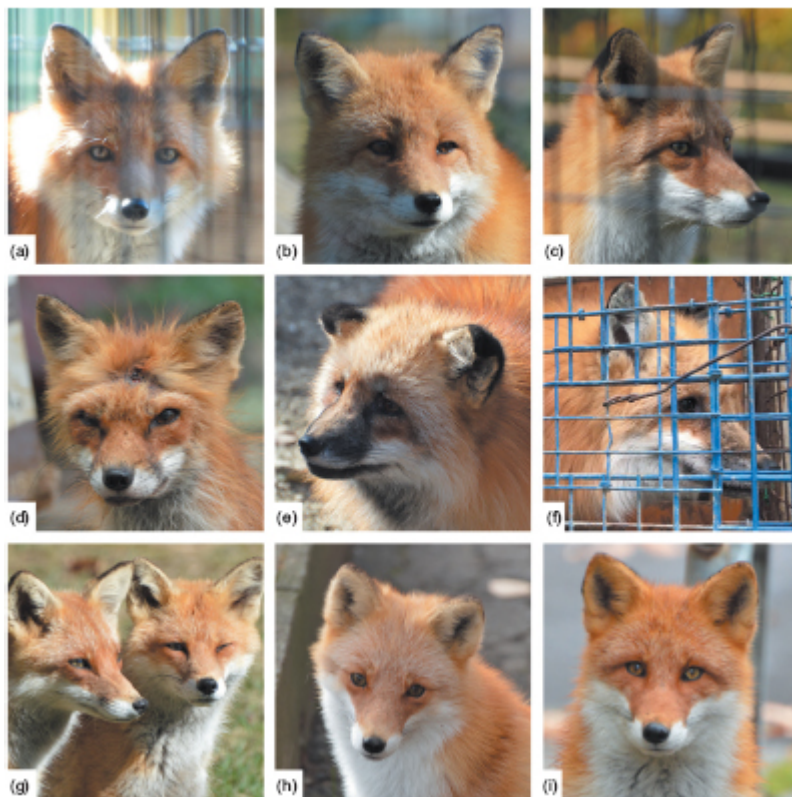
I recorded my observations through detailed field notes and photographs, and used videography to capture fast-paced interactions between the foxes that would have been difficult to interpret in the moment. There are also subtleties in the ways that red foxes move their bodies that would have been impossible to describe completely through field notes alone, such as the stiffness and intense gaze of a fox threatening a conspecific. Video recordings thus provided a means of capturing some of the embodied, sensuous qualities of red fox social life (Haanpää *et al.*, 2021, p. 97). With the help of an interpreter, informal conversations with staff and tourists were held at all the field sites, in addition to formal interviews with managers at Asahiyama Zoo and Kitakitsune Farm.

I interpreted the red foxes' behaviours by referring to a range of ethological and ecological texts; these were consulted prior to conducting the fieldwork, and again during the data analysis in order to confirm preliminary interpretations. In particular, I referred to: (i) Hovland *et al.*'s (2008) ethogram of behaviours during social interaction; (ii) Macdonald's (1987) pictorial-textual guide to postures and description of vocalizations; and (iii) Fox's (1975, p. 437) photographic guide to facial expressions. The field notes relating to red fox behaviour were inductively



coded and aggregated into themes relating to aggression, submission and affiliation directed towards both conspecifics and other animals (primarily humans). This analytic step allowed me to identify patterns of social behaviour between particular individuals, and in relation to environmental factors.

I present the findings as multispecies ethnographic stories featuring a diverse group of ten vulpine protagonists. I write parts of these stories in the present tense in order to create a sense of immediacy for the reader, drawing you closer to the action. These scenes are complemented with biographical information on the foxes: (i) their upbringing; (ii) kinship relations; and (iii) significant life events. I also try to convey the foxes' individuality by sharing their portraits (Fig. 11.1) and giving personal names to the unnamed foxes. Finally, although my interpretations of the foxes' social behaviour are firmly grounded in the ethological literature, the narratives occasionally speculate on what they are experiencing subjectively in the moment. I hope that these stories create new possibilities for thinking and caring about red foxes (Van Dooren and Rose, 2016).



**Fig. 11.1.** Red foxes in the stories: (a) Hokuto; (b) Eru; (c) Naru; (d) Scar; (e) Tod; (f) Momo; (g) San (left), Suzu (right); (h) Fuku; and (i) Nana. Photo taken by author.

## Findings

### Hokuto: a solitary fox

At Obihiro Zoo, a young Japanese girl approaches the red fox area. ‘Where is he?’, she asks her mother upon seeing that the cage is empty. The woman reads a sign about Hokuto, the zoo’s 13-year-old Ezo red fox, before explaining to her daughter that he is apparently very shy. ‘It’s not scary, Hokuto, come out!’, shouts the girl. But Hokuto does not come out. From the moment the zoo opens to the time it closes, he hides inside a wooden house located within his large cage until the visitors have departed and he feels that it is safe to come out.

Hokuto is an elderly, solitary, wild-born yet captive-raised fox. I meet the zookeeper responsible for Hokuto, who tells me his story. Found by members of the public and presumed to have been abandoned by his parents, he was brought to the zoo as a cub in 2009 along with his two brothers, Aru and Eru. Due to a lack of space, it was decided that two of the foxes would be relocated to another zoo; Hokuto was separated from his brothers and left on his own. Reportedly always a shy individual, he has only recently acquired the luxury of a retreat space in the form of his wooden house. For the first decade of his life, Hokuto was confined to a small cage at the zoo in which he was constantly on display during open hours. This caused him a great deal of stress and some of his fur fell out as a result. He was moved to a much larger, more naturalistic cage in 2019 and now makes full use of his new hiding place.

After hearing that I have travelled a long way to see this fox, the zookeeper tries to coax Hokuto out of his house with some food. After a couple of minutes, Hokuto peeks out and looks worriedly at us, moving his head vigilantly from side to side. He quickly retreats back inside without touching the food. The zookeeper offers to take a video of Hokuto for me inside his house, which shows him lying down, awake and alert. The fox does not look at the zookeeper filming him from above; instead,

he gazes out of the entrance to his house, watching and listening to the world beyond his cage. He seems unphased by the man's presence. Indeed, there are videos online showing Hokuto behaving submissively in the presence of the zookeepers, indicating that they have a positive relationship.

A local amateur photographer informs me that Hokuto can be seen when the zoo is closed from a path in the woods that runs just behind his cage. At the end of the day, I find the path and join a small group of fox enthusiasts waiting with their cameras at the ready to catch a glimpse of the elusive fox. Sure enough, at 4 o'clock on the dot, as the zoo closes its doors, Hokuto emerges. He is tentative at first, standing motionless beside his house, listening and occasionally looking at us. He can clearly see and hear people but does not seem afraid; the spectators are sufficiently far away not to be perceived as a threat. Hokuto then proceeds to pace for several minutes – a stereotypy that may indicate stress or boredom, or may simply be how Hokuto exercises within the confines of his cage (see Mason and Latham, 2004). The next morning, Hokuto can again be seen pacing in his cage and then, just as the zoo opens, he returns to his house for another long day of hiding.

### **Eru and Naru: foxes as playmates**

Hokuto's brothers, Aru and Eru, were relocated to Asahiyama Zoo in the neighbouring city of Asahikawa as cubs. There, they faced a similar predicament to Hokuto as they were made to share an unsuitably small cage for many years. The foxes received a dramatic habitat upgrade in summer 2020, but sadly Aru only got to experience the new enclosure for a few weeks before he died from cancer at 11 years of age. Earlier that year, another lone Ezo red fox cub had been found by a member of the public and brought to the zoo to be raised. It was decided that the male cub, whom the zoo named Naru, would be Eru's new companion and by autumn they were living together.

It is a warm summer's day and Naru is now fully grown. Eru is sleeping on his wooden box on top of the hill, while Naru occupies a more peripheral spot by a tree stump at the edge of the enclosure. While zoo

staff believe that this spatial arrangement indicates Eru's dominance as the more senior and well-established of the pair, my observations of their interactions reveal that it is in fact Naru who is top fox here. Whenever the two foxes meet, Eru immediately sinks to the ground, grins widely and thrashes his tail – all behavioural indicators of a non-fearful submissive greeting in the presence of a larger, stronger, younger male (Hovland *et al.*, 2008).

A small crowd has gathered by the transparent plastic fence that forms the lower boundary of the enclosure, which allows visitors to get within inches of the foxes. Eru is trying to rest, lying with his back against the fence, but Naru seems to be in a playful mood. He lies down in front of Eru and then rolls onto his side, as if to make his harmless intentions clear. Eru accepts the invitation to play by rushing in and gnawing gently on Naru's neck, at which point Naru rolls over onto his back and starts kicking Eru with his hind legs. Naru then rears up, towering over Eru who sinks back to the ground submissively.

After a few minutes of play fighting, Eru lies down to rest again. Naru tries to entertain himself, sniffing at one of the large logs, but keeps looking over towards Eru and eventually runs back over to him. The old fox appears drowsy in the heat, his eyes barely open. Naru begins nibbling at his ears and gently pawing his back, but Eru does not respond (Fig. 11.2). Although Eru usually accepts Naru's invitations to play, I have only observed Eru soliciting play on one occasion. Naru generally seems the most eager to interact and potentially derives greater benefit from these encounters as, due to his youth, he has more energy to expend and is more driven to establish his position within the social hierarchy.



**Fig. 11.2.** Naru (right) attempting to solicit play from Eru (left). Photo taken by author.

Some children crouch down and place their hands against the clear panel of the lower fence, causing Naru to pounce at them. Emboldened by this encounter, one of the children locates a small gap in the fence and starts poking a dry leaf through it, which Naru bites and then snatches with his mouth. It is only Naru who interacts with visitors in this way, much to their delight, while Eru appears unresponsive and indifferent to them. I wonder whether Eru has grown habituated to visitors after so long in captivity, or whether their presence is less stimulating due to possible age-related sensory decline. I call his name, but Eru keeps his gaze locked straight ahead, perhaps tired from so many social solicitations.

### **Scar, Tod, Momo: aggression and survival in a ‘fox village’**

In the walk-through enclosure at Miyagi Zao Fox Village, a small vixen is attacking another fox. She repeatedly bites the platinum fox’s back, towering over her in an assertion of dominance, and gekkering loudly. The fight only ends when a member of staff approaches the foxes and scolds them. This appears to be a deliberate attempt to lighten the mood and reassure onlooking tourists that this behaviour is nothing to be



concerned about; foxes are just bad tempered. The attacking vixen has a bloody wound in the centre of her forehead that will likely leave a scar, so I decide to call her 'Scar' (only a few of the foxes appear to have official names). Many of the foxes have wounds or scabs in the same place as Scar, while others can be seen limping or with bloody ears.

Suddenly, all of the foxes start rushing through the woodland towards the entrance to the enclosure. A man emerges carrying a large bag of dry dog food, which he scatters on the ground as he walks, creating a feeding frenzy in his wake. The foxes run around at great speed shoving, attacking and screaming at each other. I watch in horror as a fox is attacked by two others simultaneously, each aggressor biting onto an ear and thrashing it violently (Fig. 11.3). The scene is a poignant reminder that red foxes are naturally private eaters who also like to cache (bury) surplus food (Macdonald, 1987); both instincts are denied by this feeding practice. There is also competition over water: with a 47:1 ratio of foxes to water troughs in the walk-through enclosure, foxes can frequently be seen queuing for a drink and fighting often ensues.



**Fig. 11.3.** Red fox being attacked during communal feeding. Photo taken by author.

At the feeding platform, foxes are fighting noisily over small dog treats thrown down to them by tourists. I notice one fox sitting at a distance who only makes his move when food lands near him. He is a large dog fox who is easily recognized by his dark muzzle, slightly mournful expression and floppy ears. I decide to call him 'Tod' after the Scottish dialect word for fox. After a while, Tod traverses the enclosure, marking various structures with urine, and communicating vocally with other foxes. He mostly keeps to himself, stays out of trouble and avoids injury. When interacting with other foxes, the communicative movements of Tod's floppy ears are less noticeable than in normal foxes. I do not know whether this causes him social problems. Many of the foxes here possess phenotypic traits indicative of domestication syndrome, including small/floppy ears, shortened muzzles and curly tails (Trut, 1999).

Some months later, I spot Scar once again. She sits alone, watching tourists file past her on the central path. The small wooden platform she sits on near the entrance is clearly 'her' spot, and this time there is no competition to ward off. She seems relaxed in the sunshine and fur has grown back over the wound on her forehead. Like Scar and Tod, other adults in the walk-through enclosure exhibit a striking lack of social grooming or play. When not fighting, these foxes spend long periods of time sleeping or resting, sometimes in close proximity to each other but with minimal interaction. The atmosphere is tense and the foxes seem aware of how easily a potentially dangerous fight can start.

Just beyond the enclosure, a red fox scratches furiously at a wooden board inside her otherwise barren cage, which shakes with the force of her movement. Momo is a 12-year-old vixen who appeared on a TV show as a cub and was 'hugged' by the presenters. Unlike many other individually caged foxes here, she is no longer used for commodified 'fox hugs' (Crossley, 2022). Instead, it seems that the sole purpose of Momo's isolation is to boast, through two signs on her cage, about her fame. Momo stops scratching and stares intently out of her cage, ears pointing forward and nose twitching with curiosity. She is watching some playful cubs who have been temporarily separated from their mothers to be displayed in cages. She responds repeatedly to the sound of the cubs barking with a contact call: 'a-woo-woo-woo!'.

A few weeks later, a photograph is published on the village's website showing Momo in an enclosure being clambered on by a group of cubs (Zao Fox Village, 2022). The cubs are clearly not hers; for a start, she is far too old to breed, and two of the cubs are platinums. The website confirms that Momo is simply looking after the babies, and comments that she 'looks happy' (*shiawase-sō* 幸せそう) to be surrounded by them. What must it be like to go from such extreme isolation to feeling the touch of so many little paws on your back, being so eagerly sniffed, being adored by the ones to whom you were calling? And what must it feel like to return once more to that barren cage with nothing more than a wooden board for company?

### **Suzu, San, Fuku, Nana: companionship and interspecies sociality**

At Kitakitsune Farm, in the walk-through enclosure, two vixens are curled up together and preparing to sleep (Fig. 11.4). They look comfortable, enjoying the soft warmth of each other's body, which provides such a contrast to the hard artificial ground. They are Suzu and San, who have become inseparable. San nuzzles into Suzu, nibbling her belly fur and making little chirping noises. For San, whose tail was bitten off by her mother at birth, this close contact may serve a functional purpose of keeping her warm. But such functionality is, surely, only a small component of the vixens' relationship, which has blossomed just as they are approaching 1 year of age. At other times, they play fight or chase one another, as they do with the other young red foxes. But there is also a quiet intimacy that seems to be reserved for Suzu and San alone, such as when they snuggle, groom one another or simply sit together.

There is an enigmatic quality to this bond – this animal friendship – that makes it difficult to ascertain why the two foxes became companions. Raised together by the staff, along with other cubs, San and Suzu could be observed interacting even when they were very young. As juvenile vixens have a tendency to seek out one another's company in captivity (Hovland *et al.*, 2008), I was intrigued to see whether Suzu and



San's friendship would last into adulthood. However, just weeks after their first birthday, San managed to escape during renovation work at the farm and was never seen again. The next time I see Suzu is the following autumn. She appears to have grown more independent and spends long periods of time wandering around by herself. She interacts with one of the newly released juvenile foxes and most likely has numerous interactions with other foxes too. However, to my knowledge, Suzu has not formed another social bond as close as the one she had with her friend San.



**Fig. 11.4.** Suzu (left) and San (right) snuggling together. Photo taken by author.

A worker pulls a cart down the central path, stopping along the way to replenish the feeding stations and tossing handfuls of dry dog food onto the lawn. The foxes feed peacefully together, with only minor scuffles occasionally breaking out between them. Food appears to be abundant. A fox steps into one of the feeding stations and emerges with a mouthful of kibble, which she carries to the edge of the lawn before starting to bury it. This is Fuku: a 3-year-old vixen and San's maternal grandmother. She covers the food with leaves and earth using her nose, before marking her cache with urine. A dog fox watches Fuku work, peering so closely that

he is almost touching her face, yet there is no conflict. With a 24:1 ratio of foxes to water troughs, there is also no competition over drinking water.

The president of Kitakitsune Farm is passing through the enclosure, as he does several times a day. Foxes flock to the president whenever he enters, running after him and demanding his attention. As he stands chatting to a young couple, Fuku jumps up at him and, standing on her hind legs, holds onto the president's leg with her front paws. He strokes her head and then, without hesitation, scoops up the fox and proceeds down the path with her under his arm. Fuku wriggles a little at first, but quickly relaxes in the arms of her handler; I can tell this is not the first time she has been carried in this way. The visitors and I laugh in delight at the unusual spectacle.

The foxes at Kitakitsune Farm are separated from their mothers shortly after birth and hand-raised by the staff; the president explains that this is done primarily in order to protect the cubs from adult foxes. The cubs become imprinted upon their human caregivers and many, like Fuku, continue interacting with the staff as adults. However, only a few foxes are similarly at ease with tourists. At the entrance to the enclosure, a large dog fox with piercing eyes stands next to a worker. The man bends down and calls the fox's name: 'Nana!' He reaches out his hand, into which Nana places his paw for a quick 'handshake'. Nana is then rewarded with a dog treat. But as visitors arrive, Nana becomes skittish and runs off when they get too close. Fuku, on the other hand, regularly seeks out interactions with tourists (Fig. 11.5). She jumps up at them, allows herself to be stroked, and involves them in her play by snatching personal items such as gloves (including mine).

A tourist enters the enclosure wearing a long mustard-coloured skirt. The skirt, which sways temptingly as the woman walks, is immediately spotted by Suzu who proceeds to bite onto it and start pulling hard. As the tourist struggles to free her clothing from Suzu's grip, a worker approaches and intervenes. It can be difficult for young foxes, like Suzu, to understand that visitors want to interact with them but not be chased or bitten, given that chasing and biting are ways that foxes naturally play. But Fuku seems to understand that there are boundaries that should not be crossed when interacting with unfamiliar humans, as doing so may

result in punishment. When present, staff usually warn tourists to be careful when in the presence of tame foxes, but will only ward them off if a tourist is distressed or at risk of being harmed.

## Discussion

These multispecies ethnographic stories produce novel understandings of red foxes in captive wildlife tourism. Through them, we come to appreciate not only the complexity of red fox sociality, but how these social dynamics are co-created and subjectively experienced by individuals with their own unique personalities, life histories, relationships, thoughts and feelings. Storytelling breathes life back into encounters that would conventionally be recounted in more distanced and generalizing ways (Greenhough and Roe, 2019). Instead, these stories invite you to imagine the violent energy of Scar's attack, sense Eru's tiredness, share in San and Suzu's joy. They push the boundaries of representation in order to create new ways of knowing, feeling and caring about animals (Van Dooren and Rose, 2016).



**Fig. 11.5.** Fuku interacting with a tourist. Photo taken by author.

The individually caged foxes both exhibited stereotypies – Hokuto’s pacing and Momo’s scratching – that may indicate boredom, frustration or stress (Mason and Latham, 2004). What is unclear is the respective roles of social isolation and other environmental factors in causing these behaviours. In terms of enhancing their welfare, I believe that Hokuto would benefit most from a larger retreat space, while Momo is in desperate need of a significantly larger, enriched habitat. But these solitary foxes also appear to have unaddressed social needs, as evidenced by the ways in which they each sought out social connection: Momo by calling to the cubs; Hokuto by interacting with the zookeepers.

In group-living situations, companionship sometimes emerged in red fox dyads. Suzu and San’s affiliative interactions aligned with the observed pattern of young captive vixens seeking social contact with same-age vixens (Hovland *et al.*, 2008). Naru and Eru’s connection is more unusual given the age difference and the fact that they are both males. It seems that they became playmates by necessity rather than by choice. While Suzu and San’s friendship (Dagg, 2011) was characterized by a strong bond and reciprocity, Eru and Naru’s relationship appears more shallow and unequal: the males sleep apart, rarely groom one another, and their play is almost always instigated by Naru. While Naru’s presence has provided companionship for Eru following the death of his brother, the pair are rather mismatched and it is possible that sharing an enclosure with such a young, energetic, dominant fox is tiring for Eru.

Contrary to the beliefs of some tourists, in large-group settings population density appears not to be the most reliable predictor of conspecific violence. Given adequate provision and dispersion of food and water, red foxes can live together in relative peace. The foxes at Kitakitsune Farm regularly engage in affiliative behaviours, such as social grooming and play. Here, surplus food limits competition and allows the foxes to follow their instinct to cache, as demonstrated by Fuku. In contrast, the foxes at Miyagi Zao Fox Village must compete for sustenance, which leads to widespread aggression and fighting. Scar and Tod are forced to navigate this hostile environment on a daily basis, often choosing solitude in order to minimize their risk of harm. It is also possible that being hand-raised by humans positively influences the

conspecific social tendencies of foxes at Kitakitsune Farm (Addams and Miller, 2007).

The red foxes responded in a variety of ways to the presence of humans. Hokuto and Nana happily interacted with staff but were fearful of tourists. Whereas Naru, Suzu and, in particular, Fuku seemed equally at ease with unfamiliar humans and involved tourists in their play – sometimes against their will. Younger foxes, particularly juveniles, were the most playful around humans. While the public zoos attempt to minimize contact with staff in order to preserve the foxes' natural behaviours, at Kitakitsune Farm animals are handled by staff like pets, which reinforces their socialization with humans (Addams and Miller, 2007). It is also possible that there is a genetic component at play in the tamest foxes, given that some hand-raised cubs still go on to be fearful of humans in adulthood (see Yoshimura, 2021).

It is important to acknowledge that these interpretations have been limited by my own human perceptual and interpretive capacities. While I was able to observe the foxes' physical movements and vocalizations, my sense of smell was insufficient to pick up on how scent marking was used communicatively. The process of interpreting the observable behaviours was also challenging and imperfect. Even highly experienced experts have noted the bedevilling 'superficial similarity of aggression and play' in red foxes (Macdonald, 1987, p. 45). The captive environments also gave rise to social interactions not documented in ethological studies of free-living red foxes, meaning that at times I was unable to confirm my interpretation of the foxes' behaviours. Finally, I recognize that the stories were shaped by my chosen focus on particular foxes whom I was able to identify and found behaviourally interesting.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has presented a set of multispecies ethnographic stories featuring ten captive red foxes, with the aim of demonstrating their sociality and evoking their subjective experience of participating in Japanese wildlife tourism. These narratives illustrate red foxes' innate

social capacity, dispelling pervasive myths of them being antisocial loners. They show that while red foxes can be violent rivals, under the right conditions they can also live together harmoniously as companions, playmates and even friends. I believe that both conspecific and interspecific companionship can bring joy and meaning into the lives of red foxes. This finding is significant because captive red foxes are routinely housed in solitary enclosures or cages that provide few opportunities for social contact. Such isolation is one of several welfare concerns raised by this research; another being the inadequate provision and dispersion of sustenance, which can incite potentially dangerous fighting. In addition to advocating for the needs of captive red foxes, this research has responded to calls for a taxonomic, epistemological and methodological broadening of animal-related tourism research. I have used multispecies storytelling as a way of engaging with the more-than-human social, exploring animal individuality and bringing in animal perspectives.

## Acknowledgements

This research was generously supported by a Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) Postdoctoral Fellowship for Research in Japan and JSPS KAKENHI: Grant Numbers 21F20797 and 22F20797. I also wish to thank Johan R. Edelheim for facilitating this research.

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# **12 Mapping the North with Reindeer in 1930s British Travel Writing: Olive Murray Chapman's *Across Lapland with Sledge and Reindeer* and Halliday Sutherland's *Lapland Journey***

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© CAB International 2024. *Emerging Voices for Animals in Tourism* (eds J. Hooper and C. Kline)

DOI: 10.1079/9781800625259.0012

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## **Abstract**

This chapter examines human–animal relationships in two 1930s British travel texts set in Lapland in which reindeer play a significant role during their narrators' journey through northern space. The representation of the North in Olive Murray Chapman's *Across Lapland with Sledge and Reindeer* (1932) and Halliday Sutherland's *Lapland Journey* (1938) involves particular images of landscape, its inhabitants and human–animal relationships. The texts foreground the role of the reindeer that is as a species at the core of the conventional imagery of the region. This chapter discusses the travelogues in the context of human–animal studies, paying attention to

their animal representation in the context of colonial discourse, modernity, and the possibilities of challenging the established view of the Otherness of the animal. The texts' representation of human–animal interaction and identities reveals ways of rethinking human–animal relations in the North through moments of joint interspecies action.

## Introduction

While Finland has never been a destination for mass tourism in the way that the coastlines of the Mediterranean have become, it has appealed to travellers and tourists of various kinds. One group of travellers has been fascinated by the nation's closeness to Russia and memories of World War II, a second set search for the midnight sun in the Finnish summer when the sun shines 24/7, while a third group looks for the land of contemporary heavy metal bands (Silkroad Workforce Management, n.d.). One destination that has remained attractive for decades is Lapland with its coldness, snow, Santa Claus and reindeer. Representations of the North pay particular attention to reindeer, making them an element in the imagining of such a peculiar space. The North, as Ridanpää (2019) suggests, is an imaginary site constructed discursively through the arts and science, and in the Finnish context its stereotype is one of 'a cold, snowy wilderness with reindeer herding Saami people and blazing Northern lights' (Ridanpää, 2019, p. 123).

In conveying representations of locations such as Lapland and the North, travel writing has long played a major role by transmitting images and stereotypes to audiences interested in foreign travel and exotic cultures. Rather than innocent or objective, such texts are embedded in diverse historical, political and discursive contexts that contribute to the genre's representation of issues such as gender, 'race' and Otherness (Phillips, 2009). Such representation has continued into the 20th century, and until 1940 many travel texts often reproduced British discourses of colonialism and nation (Carr, 2002). In such texts, the foreign and the strange often emerge as the Other to be despised and mocked, both in the Empire as also in Europe. So Mrs Alec Tweedie's *Through Finland in Carts* (1896) juxtaposes the rural and primitive Finns with the civilized British travellers to promote an Orientalizing view of

Finland (Nyman, 2000). Human–animal relationships also emerge as a part of such Othering. In the context of colonialism, animals were associated with primitivism, and the non-human was linked with class-based, sexual and racial Otherness (Nyman, 2003; Youngs, 2013).

This chapter links the fields of human–animal studies and travel writing studies through an analysis of two 1930s British travel texts set in Lapland in which reindeer play a significant role. The texts are *Across Lapland with Sledge and Reindeer* (1939, originally published in 1932), one of painter and travel writer Olive Murray Chapman's (1892–1977) numerous books, and *Lapland Journey* (1938) by the Scottish medical doctor and social reformer Halliday Sutherland (1882–1960). Their representations of the North involve particular images of landscape, its inhabitants and human–animal relationships. The works are seldom studied: Borm (2017) examines Chapman's volume in the context of primitivism and gender, and Lurcock (2015) discusses the key themes in Sutherland's book. While both texts are typical interwar travelogues that narrate an individual's subjective travel experience in an impressionistic manner (Carr, 2002), they represent two different approaches. The former is adventurous and explorer-like, whereas the latter is more embedded in the period's emerging tourism in Finland. While Chapman enters Finland from Norway as a part of her expedition and focuses on the North in general, Sutherland represents a more modern type of traveller. He visits key sights in Helsinki, travels to Lapland accompanied by the director of the Finnish Tourist Association, and enjoys the recent development in touristic infrastructure such as new hotels. In the late 1930s, the British were the fourth largest nationality to visit the country, their number reaching 9496 visitors in 1937 (Sandberg, 1941, pp. 49–50), although travel to Lapland was expensive and limited to the elite (Hirn and Markkanen, 1987).

This chapter argues that these two texts explore the ambiguity of modernity in northern spaces through their different representations of journeying and animals. In both travelogues the reindeer are at the core of travel in Lapland because movement in snowy surroundings is impossible without sleighs and reliable animals to pull them. The reindeer are central to representations of the Arctic North and Lapland in particular. As Elina Arminen (2021) writes in her analysis of Lapland-

related travel advertising from the 1920s to the 2000s, the reindeer, owing to their significance for the northern way of life, is at the core of its imagery. Reindeer are the most popular animal and nature motif depicted in advertising posters, but it is also most often represented as anthropomorphized. Reindeer, however, mark more than imagined northernness as they are also strongly associated with ethnicity and ethnic difference. Nika Potinkara (2012) claims that representations of reindeer herding in museum exhibitions construct a shared sense of ethnic exclusiveness by linking the animal with the cultural heritage and the contemporary way of life of the Sámi. Potinkara (2012) underlines that the human–animal relationship is not merely a premodern one, but the species interaction is central to contemporary Sámi identity. Such identities can be described by using Donna Haraway's (2003) notion of natureculture, which challenges established dichotomies and makes visible how culture and nature depend on each other and form relational and interspecies subjectivities.

The choice of the North and the reindeer signals the ambiguity that the period's imaginings of the North associate with modernity. This ambiguity is encapsulated in the image of the reindeer: while the animal represents the past and is associated with both primitive and non-human Otherness, it also problematizes such binary categories and transgresses its conventional and instrumental role. The two travelogues negotiate established anthropocentrisms and emplace humans in the non-human world. While the texts do not present strong mixing between species, they open up ways of rethinking human–animal relations in the North.

Since Descartes and his insistence on the primacy of human reason, animals have often been seen as the Others of modernity (see Badmington, 2000). Because of this, animals provide an important perspective on the ambiguity of modernity since their presence may challenge and disrupt modernity's established orderings and understanding of human–animal relations. The animal is linked with Arctic discourses identified by Hansson and Ryall where 'the Arctic [is] perceived as the exotic opposite of modernity' (2017, p. 4). In the travelogues published in the 1930s, the idea of modernity and its exotic northern Other is present. Reflecting on the history of Arctic exploration and its relationship with modernity, Hansson and Ryall claim that

Fridtjof Nansen's death in 1930 is key, 'mark[ing] a symbolic end of the masculinist heroic age' (2017, p. 5). The times of exploration are past, and modernity with its technologies and practices such as tourism are now all pervasive. As a sign of this, in travel writing, narratives of quest and adventure gradually transform into travels in the footsteps of the famous explorers, referred to as 'second journeys' by Maria Lindgren Leavenworth (2020, p. 86).

Studies of animals in travel literature are quite rare, although much travel writing has addressed encounters with animals. While many narratives, especially those produced in the colonial era, have addressed animals as objects (e.g. in safari texts), the presence of animals in travel writing is much more multifaceted. Animals may assume the role as travel companions, as in John Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley: In Search of America* where the narrator travels through the USA with his dog (Rutkowska, 2004). In an overview of animals in travel writing, Elizabeth Leane (2020) presents a tripartite model of human–animal relations in the genre. According to Leane, animals may function as 'quest-objects', 'instruments of travel' and 'companions' (2020, p. 306), a division that can be applied to many travel narratives.

From the perspective of this chapter, Leane's second category, animals as instruments of travel, appears as highly significant, as the reindeer often functions as a means of transport. García-Rosell and Tallberg (2021) write that such an instrumentalist view needs to be replaced with an ethical understanding of animals as stakeholders. Today's entrepreneurs who work with huskies and reindeer in Lapland display 'a caring relationship' and consider their work as collaborative (García-Rosell and Tallberg, 2021, p. 114). Limitations of the instrumentalist view can also be found in travel writing from various historical periods. As Leane's (2020) reading of R.L. Stevenson's *Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes* (1879) suggests, the narrator's reliable Modestine is more than a mere instrument or vehicle needed to move in a foreign space. For Leane (2020), this shows how travel texts are 'part of a complex ongoing negotiation of species relationships' (2020, p. 313). Such texts addressing human–animal encounters at a concrete level offer more opportunities for dialogue and refuse to reproduce the genre's established representational practices (see Nyman, 2014).

The two texts discussed in this chapter represent these ambiguities in various ways, ranging from their reliance on Arctic discourse and the North as a premodern Other to the gradual presence of tourism. I will first address Murray Chapman's text and then Sutherland's book, which together offer different but occasionally complementary perspectives on human–animal relations in the North.

### **Exploring the North in Olive Murray Chapman's *Across Lapland with Sledge and Reindeer***

Chapman's *Across Lapland with Sledge and Reindeer* is a narrative of exploration and adventure and its representation of the North partially conforms to the attitudes of the era of colonialist explorers. This 'proto-ethnographic' Borm (2017, p. 164) text telling of a journey to Finnmark and Lapland was accompanied with photographs, paintings and a 1933 film that remains one of the first non-Nordic filmic representations of the Sámi (Sjöholm quoted in Borm, 2017, p. 161). Rather than a real explorer, Chapman is performing a 'second journey', to use Leavenworth's term, as the narrative refers to texts by earlier explorers and other specialists (see Chapman, 1939, p. 48). What links Chapman's narrative to proper explorers is her objective of travelling to Norwegian Lapland, in her view a 'comparatively unvisited part of Europe', without railway and with only a few roads, and whose interior 'is, owing to the rigours of the climate, practically uninhabited' (1939, p. 15). The colonialist legacy framing the narrative is seen in its references to its inhabitants, 'the Lapps', referred to as 'a primitive folk' (1939, p. 18), 'gnomes' (1939, p. 28) and 'quaint little folk' (1939, p. 28), who represent 'a picturesque race of nomads' (1939, p. 17). Further signs of their racialized status include references to their religion (Laestadian Lutheranism) as 'a curious Christian sect' (1939, p. 40) involving trance-like states, and their like of strong alcoholic drinks. These are examples of the stereotypes often associated with the Other in colonial discourse that indicate their lack of self-control and limited rationality contrasted with the qualities of the idealized Western self (Loomba, 1999).

The text addresses the ambiguities of modernity in various ways. The narrator's wish to travel to a non-modern world is challenged by the Stockholm travel agent, whose view, representing modernity, contrasts with the traveller's aim to join the ranks of explorer-adventurers. Rather than travel 'by sledge and reindeer for great distance over the frozen fells, lakes and rivers' (Chapman, 1939, p. 18), the narrator is advised to take the train to Abisko in northern Sweden with its excellent tourist hotel. Rather than a tourist, the narrator identifies with an anthropologist or ethnographer, weaving into her text factual information and observations concerning cultural practices. For instance, the reader is provided with information on local livelihoods, the natural landscape of Lapland and its fauna, and the roots of the word 'Lapp' (see Chapman, 1939, Chapter II), and local mythology (see Chapman, 1939, Chapter IV).

The discourse of colonialism is evident in the vignettes that clearly distinguish the traveller from the local inhabitants. For instance, the description of Sámi clothing introduces local terms in a way that underlines cultural differences. While such a strategy constructs the narrator's status as an expert on the topic, the passage below also reveals how the Sámi clothing is Othered and described mockingly as a 'costume':

They all wear Bellinger (leggings of reindeer fur reaching above the knee), skaller (fur boots secured with scarlet ankle bindings), a kufta (blue cloth tunic or underdress often embroidered with red and yellow), and a blue cloth cap – or in the case of the women, a little scarlet bonnet – also gaily decorated, while an ornamental belt completes the costume. [...] Slung from the belt are their tobacco and snuff pouches, and a long knife used for all and sundry purposes, including eating, scraping snow off the bottom of their sledges and slaughtering their reindeer.

(Chapman, 1939, p. 36)

With surprising ease, the narrator quickly comes to think of herself as an expert able to distinguish between 'taller and better-looking' Karasjok Lapps from 'short and bow-legged' Kautokeino Lapps with 'a more Mongolian cast of feature' (Chapman, 1939, p. 38). Here, the text is clearly applying Victorian racial taxonomies to the Sámi and reproduces colonialist discourse in the context of the North. In so doing, it excludes the Sámi from Nordic whiteness and places them firmly outside of the

popular 19th-century view understanding the British and the Scandinavians as members of the same racial formation (Kassis, 2015).

The use of the colonialist lens becomes literal in the text when the narrator tells of the effects of her camera. The following passage is indicative of the significance of the visual in tourism and thus exemplifies what Urry calls 'the tourist gaze' (2002, pp. 2–3) that is focused on landscape and other elements associated with the touristic site that construct a vision of what could be called the primitive North: 'As soon as they noticed it was directed towards them, they would often become scared, hiding their faces and running away' (Chapman, 1939, p. 39). The example also reveals the power of the colonial gaze objectifying those who are looked at and reveals a clear colonialist distinction between the travelling Western self and a native Other. Borm (2017) underlines that the narrative pays attention to the ambiguities of modernity since it contradicts the image of childlike native inhabitants of Lapland: the Sámi in Sweden have been 'spoilt' by modernity and its effects as they no longer pose in pictures without payment.

What challenges the effects of modernity in the narrative is the role of the non-human. While the non-human environment provides an appropriate setting for the adventure, it is also dangerous since the first leg of the journey is by boat across a stormy North Sea. In the North, she is warned, there are 'frequently terrible blizzards, making travelling both difficult and dangerous' (Chapman, 1939, p. 18). Several scenes confirm this notion and challenge the rationality associated with modernity: she nearly freezes her face while skiing (Chapman, 1939, p. 58) and is forced to travel in challenging circumstances. Chapter VI provides the best example of the dangers of the non-human environment as 'the evening glow on the mountains' and 'the clear frosty air' (Chapman, 1939, p. 65) transform at sunset into extreme coldness, icy wind, and what Chapman thinks may be 'the baying of wolves' (1939, p.65). Although saved by the 'Jotka fjellstue', one of the organized and state-run cabins used when overnighing, the winter storm continues the following day in a different form so that the travellers have to navigate the wilderness in a fog so dense that the sledge riders are unable to see the reindeer in front of them. By the end of the 'nightmare ride' (Chapman, 1939, p. 70), the blizzard has turned into 'the worst gale and snowstorm of that winter':



No reindeer could possibly have moved a yard against it. The whistling wind drove the snow in great drifts against the side of the little hut, soon completely blocking out the window and half covering the door, and making me feel thankful indeed that I had at least a roof over my head. [...] During the night the storm increased in fury, and I heard afterwards that the mail boat "Hear", sister ship to that I sailed from Trondhjem, had been wrecked near Hammerfest, six people being lost, together with all the mail and cargo [.]

(Chapman, 1939, p. 72)

What the narrative indicates is that – as is typical in wilderness adventures – the non-human environment assumes the role of the Other and threatens the safety of the narrator. The blizzard is represented in a way that provides it with non-human agency, threatening the sledge riders' ability to see their way in the storm as well as causing a fatal shipwreck. This can be examined in the light of Pieter Vermeulen's (2017) view, who suggests that the increasing significance of non-human agency characterizes the fictions of the Anthropocene. Like the sea and ocean discussed by Vermeulen, Chapman's gales and blizzards indicate a 'confrontation between human and nonhuman scales' (Vermeulen, 2017, p. 183). The natural forces challenge anthropocentric discourses and remind humans of death and danger that are beyond human control. In the case of Chapman, the cabins – which have been systematically placed in the wildernesses of Finnmark by the Government at regular intervals (Chapman, 1939, p. 68) – reveal a human attempt to prepare for meetings with the uncontrollable Other under extreme conditions.

A further indication of the Arctic North as a site of modernity's Other is the role allotted to animals in the narrative. In lieu of such forms of modern transportation as cars and trains, the spaces of wilderness demand reliance on traditional modes such as reindeer sledges. While the text indicates that technology will eventually find its way to remote places such as Karasjok and change the way of life forever, practically all travel represented by Chapman takes place with the help of the reindeer (apart from the last leg in Sweden, where a motor car is used). In so doing, the text addresses the ambiguities of modernity by showing the North as modernity's Other, as a primitive and underdeveloped space populated by non-Western races and animals. However, the non-human Other of modernity is what makes the human presence possible and guarantees the narrator's survival.

While non-human animals are to some extent absent from the Chapman text, as they are not provided with a voice, the role of the reindeer is key to life in the North. The travelogue reveals the importance of the reindeer in traditional Sámi culture, informing the reader of how they function as markers of wealth ('A Lapp's wealth depends on the number of deer he owns'; Chapman, 1939, p.34) and provide material support: 'The reindeer is the Laplander's most valued possession, and his main support, providing him with food, milk and clothing, and being the sole means of transport through the winter snow both for himself and his goods' (Chapman, 1939, p. 34). The emphasis, however, is on instrumentality rather than the material, the reindeer being a mode of transport.

The travelogue also indicates how the narrator is embedded in the animal through her fur clothing and sleeping bag, as well as in the mentions of reindeer meat and milk, which she invariably refuses to devour and sees as abject. As the 'queer messy-looking object' in a Sámi dwelling turns out to be a 'cleaned-out stomach of reindeer [...] filled with milk which we presently should have in our coffee' (Chapman, 1939, p. 131), the narrator looks at the object in awe, her 'eyes fixed uneasily' (Chapman, 1939, p. 132). She is relieved to receive a drop of cow's milk – associated here with purity, modernity and domesticity rather than the dirtiness, primitivity and wilderness linked with reindeer milk and especially the vessel it is served from – from her driver's bottle. A similar culinary boundary between the traveller and the locals is represented in the same chapter in her rejection of Sámi food: while she finds the reindeer broth – *bouillon* – quite tasty, even 'extraordinarily good' (Chapman, 1939, p. 133), the boiled meat is inedible, 'raw and tough' and suitable only for the dogs (Chapman, 1939, p. 133). The passage indicates how the culinary border limits the narrator's sense of trans-corporeality, to use Alaimo's (2010) term, and shows the fixedness of her identity, separating the traveller from the Other.

For Chapman, the reindeer usually appears as a species rather than as named individuals. They also appear to challenge human mastery. The descriptions of acts of harnessing and the Western traveller's inability to control them reveal the animal's resistance and non-human agency. The narrator's descriptions of the reindeer as wild beasts, exhibiting violent

behaviour and prone to bouts of madness, are strategies to underline their Otherness. The following excerpt illustrates the issue and emphasizes alleged human mastery over animals:

My animals strongly objected to being harnessed, and as the Lapps cautiously approached them they became very excited, kicking out in all directions and butting at the men with their horns. I happened to have a particular lively creature. He reared up on his hind legs, placed his forefeet on Per's [the driver's] shoulders and tried to trample him down. There was quite a wrestling match between the two before my wild steed was finally pushed between the wooden shafts of the sledge, whereupon he immediately quieted down and became quite docile.

(Chapman, 1939, p. 63)

Yet the travelogue also shows how the interaction between the reindeer and their drivers challenges anthropocentric ideas of sole human mastery and control. In Leane's (2020) typology, the reindeer are primarily instruments for the narrator's journeying, but the relationship between the drivers and the reindeer is different and based on experience and expertise. Driving them is a 'fine sport' (Chapman, 1939, p. 62), and it is only with the assistance of the experienced local drivers that the overland journey is made possible. The drivers' knowledge of the environment and management of the reindeer caravan, which tells of their interspecies knowledge, solves potentially dangerous events, cited in belittling terms as 'amusing incidents' (Chapman, 1939, p. 69) by the narrator when the reindeer are frightened and the sledges start bouncing and bumping. In narrating the Sámi drivers' expertise, the text recognizes how humans and animals are entangled and form an interspecies dyad – or even a triad – that works together in the potentially dangerous space:

The Lapp is very skilful in his management of the reindeer on a cross-country journey. He is helped by his dogs, which often lead the caravan and find the winter tracks, cheering on the reindeer when they begin to tire by running backwards and forwards in front, and barking as if to encourage them, or snapping at their legs should they prove lazy.

(Chapman, 1939, pp. 33–34)

In contrast, the narrator's presence in this world of northern Otherness is merely temporary, and she cannot develop similar interspecies relationships. When Chapman describes her last glimpse of the reindeer in Sweden, however, the phrasing used indicates fondness and gratitude (1939, p. 152) for the animal – 'I was quite sad to say

good-bye' (1939, p. 153) – but their instrumental status remains primary. However, close to the end of the travelogue, the significance of her exposure to the non-human world is finally addressed. In the scene the narrator re-enters the civilization in the Swedish town of Kiruna, 'as if [...] just awakening from a dream' (Chapman, 1939, p. 170), and is described as holding onto her symbolic trophies, 'Lapp fur pesk and a large pair of reindeer horns' (Chapman, 1939, p. 170), which link her symbolically and materially with the space of Otherness that has been travelled through. Yet the reference to the time spent journeying with the reindeer as 'a dream' makes clear that her world of modernity is separate from the enchanted time belonging to non-Westerners and non-humans.

### **The Touristic North in Halliday Sutherland's *Lapland Journey***

Sutherland's *Lapland Journey* is a record of its narrator's episodic journey to Finland and Lapland, including Pechenga and Finnmark, in the spring and summer of 1937. Written in 'an attractive anecdotal style' that is both 'informative and personal' (Lurcock, 2015, p. 103), Sutherland's travelogue observes diverse aspects of life in Finland. While Chapman's travelogue attempts to explore uncharted spaces and observe vanishing groups of people, Sutherland's is unashamedly touristic in its focus on the pleasures of travel such as food and drink and reports of visits to touristic sites. It is a mixture of an informative guidebook with factual information for tourists and a narrative of unexpected events in the northern wilderness. As a tourist, Sutherland observes the replica of the cenotaph of St Henry of Finland at the Finnish National Museum in Helsinki with the local Anglican chaplain, and frequents Helsinki restaurants with an English lecturer at the University of Helsinki, his Newfoundland dog and students. Rather than a narrative of exploration, the book is a 'second journey' narrative as defined by Leavenworth (2020), seen in particular in the references to the 18th-century British explorer E.D. Clarke (Sutherland, 1938, pp. 15, 88). Sutherland also frequently refers to historical work on northern mythologies.

If tourism is a characteristic of modernity resulting from the emergence of 'modern mass leisure' (MacCannell, 1989, p. 3), Sutherland's travelogue is a further link in the chain of narratives of modern tourism in the North, thus confirming the suggestion by Hansson and Ryall (2017). Tourism is present in the narrative from the very start. The days preceding his journey to Lapland are filled with meetings with and mentions of significant cultural figures of the time, including Professor Yrjö Hirn from the University of Helsinki and the writer and politician Hella Wuolijoki. Sutherland also describes the city's key touristic sights such as churches, the university and the Parliament House, and also writes about visits to various restaurants and other locations in the Helsinki nightlife. The early chapters also provide current information on what to do in Helsinki, current hotel prices, music and the visual arts. The book also contains descriptions of Finnish food, with a particularly favourable evaluation of the Finnish *voileipäpöytä*, a buffet with a large selection of various hors-d'oeuvre, and drink – a local alcoholic drink specifically mentioned is a rowanberry cocktail known as Sorbus (Sutherland, 1938, p. 37). As a specialist in tuberculosis, Dr Sutherland also comments on the nation's modern hospitals 'amid the pinewoods on the outskirts of Helsinki' (Sutherland, 1938, p. 22), mentions Finnish veterinary research on cow milk and tuberculosis, and learns about the relatively high numbers of cases of venereal disease in Finland (Sutherland, 1938, p. 35). What, however, reveals that the book is aimed at people who wish to travel to Finland is Sutherland's attempt to correct errors in British conceptions of Finland and the mix-up between Finns and the Sámi. Triggered by a comment made by Professor Hirn, the narrator looks up the 14th edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* to discover that its discourse reproduces racialized claims linking Finns with Mongolians and uses the image of a Sámi and a sledge to represent the Finnish nation (Sutherland, 1938, p. 21).

C. Wolter Stenbäck, director of the then Finnish Tourist Association, who also personally accompanies Sutherland on the journey, plays a particularly important role in the travelogue. When the tourist officer suggests that Sutherland should accompany Stenbäck on his journey to the North, Stenbäck, a former revolutionary and political prisoner who had been married to a British woman, warns him about the roughness of

the trip. Stenbäck examines the tourist critically to assess his potential to engage in demanding travel: 'He turned and gave me a swift, intent glance. I knew of old that look. It was the 'once over' that is usually given by sergeant-majors and inspectors of police' (Sutherland, 1938, p. 18). That Sutherland's northern journey is fully based on modern tourism is evident: whereas Chapman was forced to travel by reindeer, and willingly did so as an explorer, Sutherland chooses to do so out of curiosity and is assisted in his task by the expertise of Stenbäck and the Tourist Association, which continues until his return from northern Norway in late June. With the opening of the Arctic Ocean Highway in 1931, connecting the city of Rovaniemi and the port of Liinakhamari by the Arctic Ocean, the route to Finnish Lapland was operated by regular motor buses. Similarly, apart from the reindeer journey from Muonio to Inari, the traveller is accommodated in purpose-built inns and hotels run by the Tourist Association that employed staff able to speak foreign languages. For instance, the staff at a brand-new hotel in Inari where Sutherland stays after his reindeer journey is able to communicate with international travellers: its 'manageress' has spent several years in Canada and the 'waitress' has a BA in Anglo-Saxon and art history from the University of Helsinki.

Unlike in Chapman's book, in Sutherland's text the reindeer journey covers no more than six chapters that take the narrator from Enontekiö to Stenbäck's house in Inari. Following a train ride of over 25 hours from Helsinki to Kauliranta and a 6 hour bus ride (with several interruptions for coffee) to an inn in Muonio, the rigours of the journey are eased with modern technology and a developing tourist infrastructure. Already in the 1930s Finland was marketing its tourist trade internationally (see Arminen, 2021) and Sutherland also meets several British and American travellers in the North. Sutherland, unlike Chapman, is not primarily interested in observing and documenting the vanishing way of life in Lapland but adopts the role of an adventurous tourist.

In contrast to the representation of Helsinki and modern Finland, the sections addressing the narrator's experiences in Lapland and its non-human environment provide interesting perspectives on human-animal relations in the context of travel writing about the North. Like Chapman's book, the book provides factual information about the

reindeer, describing their appearance, behaviour and cultural significance for the people of the North. Sutherland's narrative gives detailed information about their body, antlers and hooves (1938, p. 96), telling the reader about what they eat (1938, p. 101) and how their hooves are such that they may move about in the snow (1938, pp. 96–97). In addition to this, the text pays attention to their role in the northern way of life, and not solely as a means of transport. To endure the coldness, Sutherland's narrator is dressed up in a 'Lapp outfit' with 'moccasins [sic] (Säpikkäät) of reindeer skin with the hair outside' (1938, p. 96), a form of dress completed with 'nutukkaat', 'pavlat', 'kintaat', a reindeer 'Peski' and also a 'Cap of the Four Winds' (1938, p. 96). While the clothing may be appropriate for the harsh conditions and links the human with material traces of the non-human, as in Chapman's book, the mention of the distinctive headgear in particular is also indicative of the period's Finnish appropriation of indigenous Sámi culture for the purposes of marketing and tourism, frequently involving crudely stereotyping representations (see Arminen, 2021; Niskala and Ridanpää, 2016). While the journey by reindeer is not similarly touristic in the text, it may be assumed that such descriptions have paved the way for the later reindeer safari culture and marketing of exotic adventures. The description of Lapland as a land with its own 'Law of the Wild' (Sutherland, 1938, p. 80) and its own moral code constructs a similarly mythologized and romanticized image of a remote place where the laws of civilization are not completely valid.

As in Chapman's travelogue, Sutherland's reindeer are also wild creatures, prone to sudden galloping and bolting, and difficult for beginners to drive:

Then I pulled on the rein, and my animal, galloping at the time, turned so quickly that the sledge overturned on its side and I was thrown out. I landed face downwards prone on the snow, and thought, "Now for the dragging". Yet I was not dragged more than a yard when the reindeer stopped, and I rose unhurt to right the sledge.

(Sutherland, 1938, p. 99)

Rather than a tragic accident, this reveals the narrator's tongue-in-cheek attitude and is a more general humorous feature in the narrative. The reader is already aware that the narrator's travel insurance covers

any costs arising from reindeer-travel-induced accidents whenever they are not related to 'Winter Sports' (Sutherland, 1938, p. 95), so when the reindeer is used as a means of transport the narrator is safe. The insurance company's guidelines quoted in the text place the narrative in the world of economic modernity and its pastimes such as tourism: 'if a reindeer sledge is used mainly for travelling from one place to another [...], then the risk of accident caused through the sledge would be covered' (Sutherland, 1938, p. 95). In this sense, the reindeer functions in the role of the Other of modernity, challenging its rationality and recalling the limitations of human control. Only experts – and here the role is adopted by Stenbäck rather than limited to native drivers – are able to manage their way in the wilderness and master their beasts. The human–non-human dyad becomes also a triad in *Lapland Journey* when the crucial role of reindeer dogs in herding at various times of the year is mentioned (Sutherland, 1938, pp. 124–125).

While at the general level the reindeer plays the role of instrument in Sutherland's text, as suggested in Leane's (2020) categorization of animal roles, the travelogue challenges such representation when it introduces and names an individual reindeer that becomes the narrator's travel companion, the final category to feature in Leane's taxonomy. Upon leaving Hetta, the reindeer are changed and one of the new animals, Little Bread Eater (Pikku Leupukka), raised alongside humans and taught to eat bread, is harnessed to draw the narrator's sledge, and it has distinctive features. This 'excellent animal' (Sutherland, 1938, p. 123) – the only reindeer given a name in the text – is trustworthy and does not gallop or suddenly bolt. Rather, his elegant movements remind the narrator of the fauna of his homeland and he is thus removed from the space of Otherness to one of familiarity, if not of affective animal patriotism:

Little Bread Eater began to gallop and I watched his feet. For an instant on the edge of the ditch he had all four feet together, and was poised as are the roe-deer when they leap from one rock to another in the Highlands of Scotland. Then he leapt, and there was not the slightest jolt when the sledge landed on the other side.

(Sutherland, 1938, p. 140)



The special importance of Little Bread Eater for the narrator as a non-human companion, in what Pratt (1992) defines as the contact zone and Haraway (2008) as a space of joint identity formation, is clear; and in this text it is made possible by tourism. This is addressed when the reindeer takes him into otherworldly spaces beyond the everyday whereby the motif of enchantment is used in a way that is comparable with the ending of Chapman's narrative. In Sutherland's text, the reindeer takes the human on a ride to an uncanny land of mythology and fairy tales, one that is accessible to those who closely follow the instructions of 'the great explorers of Fairyland – Hans Andersen, the Brothers Grimm, and Topelius' (Sutherland, 1938, pp. 149–150) – Topelius being a Finnish example of the collectors of the fairy tale tradition. In the chapter 'The Enchanted Forest', set in the wilderness between the Ivalo and Repo rivers in Inari, on a clear night, the human–animal dyad meets with 'bright light[s]' and 'coloured lamps [...] lit under the snow' (Sutherland, 1938, p. 145) as well as speaking trees: 'I knew now for a certainty that all the fairy talks were true' (Sutherland, 1938, p. 145). The realities of Lapland transform into Fairyland, a fantasy space with 'an enormous Castle' owned by a Giant (1938, p. 146) as well as a 'stuffed Pterodactyl', a 'thin Hobgoblin' (Sutherland, 1938, p. 147) and 'three black-cowled figures' (Sutherland, 1938, p. 149) with malicious intentions and skeleton heads. The human is only saved by the vigilance and speed of the trustworthy Little Bread Eater that pulls the sledge back to the present time and space.

Although this episode is later defined as a 'phantasmagoria' (but of a kind also known to Stenbäck and seen in Lapland; Sutherland, 1938, p. 152), it has relevance for the concerns of this chapter. While it does not construct such close human–animal identities as those described as 'becoming with' by Haraway (2008), it shows an imaginative version of joint human–animal agency and is an example of what Leane refers to as 'a more positive sustained examination of interspecies interaction' (2020, p. 315). This means that there is a space beyond modernity where human–animal relationships challenge the binaries of the period's conventions. This is hinted at in Sutherland's description of his Fairyland narrative as a 'Subjective Truth' (Sutherland, 1938, p. 149) which challenges dominant narratives and appeals to 'Objective Truth'

(Sutherland, 1938, p. 149). In the context of human–animal studies, the space travelled through together allows for new and more equal performances of joint action, and such equality is possible when the non-human animal is no longer an instrument and its agency and subjectivity is recognized. Such a space functions as a contact zone (Pratt, 1992) where the species meet (Haraway, 2008).

The final chapters of Sutherland's book are vignettes of the rest of his summer journeying further north, in Petchenga and Finnmark, and in these travels animals play a limited role, apart from his leisurely salmon fishing at the Kolttaköngäs rapids, an activity marketed to British tourists in the period (Hirn and Markkanen, 1987). The chapters confirm the interpretation of the presence of modernity in the North through their references to communications technology, tourist infrastructure with hotels and buses, and the appeal of modernity to international tourism. Unlike Chapman, Sutherland does not lament the advent of modernity and its technologies, although on one occasion he expresses some reservations about where extreme professional specialization and loss of simple skills may eventually lead should a time of crisis be at hand: 'A specialized civilisation is more vulnerable than a simpler civilisation' (Sutherland, 1938, p. 159). Here the comparison between modernity's forerunners such as industrial Britain and its latecomers such as Lapland serves to recall the need to maintain relevant skills: rope-making and house building remain everyman's skills in the North but have been lost by many in Britain, although they may turn out to be useful at some time should progress come to a halt. Regardless of this reflection, the attitudes of Sutherland's and Chapman's travelogues towards the presence of modernity in the North are quite opposite: while Chapman laments the loss of the premodern, Sutherland's travel shows the pervasive presence of modernity and the touristic infrastructure all over the North that he personally benefits from.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has suggested that in their attempts to narrate the North in the 1930s, the travelogues by Olive Murray Chapman and Halliday Sutherland struggle with the problem of animal representation and human–animal relationality in the context of travel and tourism.

The general view the texts construct of human–animal encounters in the North in the period is rooted in the West-centred and anthropocentric discourses of modernity and colonialism that prioritize the human and construct the animal as Other, but they also reveal ruptures in that discourse.

Chapman's travelogue tends to reproduce values and views concerning modernity's Others, partially owing to its status as a narrative of exploration and colonization. These views are particularly clear in its descriptions of non-human animals and non-Western people that are explicitly related to those of colonialism and Western expansion. By reproducing such binaries and projecting them onto northern animals, Chapman's narrative remains unable to fully escape the discourses of colonialism that are both West-centred and anthropocentric in their hierarchies. In her work the human–animal encounter takes primarily a place at the level of the species, not between individuals, and underlines the role of human and colonial mastery. There is, however, a rupture in the narrative that hints at the possibility of forming a more relational view of human–animal interaction through its discussion of the role of interspecies knowledge that understands its relevance in the extreme conditions of the North. As a sign of this, Chapman admires the human–non-human dyad evident amid the Sámi and their skill in working with animals, but there is no such bond between the reindeer and the British traveller. The shared human–animal space is therefore seen as belonging to indigenous peoples and associated with a primitivism that will soon disappear from the modern world.

Sutherland's narrative is rooted in tourism and the role of the reindeer is markedly different from that in Chapman's text. The journeying by reindeer is not a necessity but a choice, and hints at the future commercialization of the North with developed animal tourism. Sutherland's position can also be examined from a posthumanist perspective: he develops a close interspecies relationship with Little Bread Eater, one of the working reindeer, and imagines an otherworldly space

of joint adventures. In so doing, he both problematizes the anthropocentricity of instrumental human–animal relationships and shows the possibility of a more relational understanding of humans and animals that may emerge in a shared space (Nyman, 2012). This new attitude exemplifies the formation of a hybrid identity that Haraway (2008, p. 19) refers to as ‘becoming with’. Further, from the perspective of the concerns of this volume, Sutherland’s case reveals the significance of what García-Rosell and Tallberg (2021) discuss as an ethic of care as a mode of relating to animals working in tourism. For Sutherland, the human–animal encounter is capable of challenging established and hierarchical juxtapositions between humans and animals, albeit to a limited degree.

From the perspective of the British travel writing of the 1930s, the two travelogues are indicative of change. As the genre was attempting to carve out new representations and create new, often political links beyond Britain (Youngs, 2019), the attention to the animal is another indication of how the genre turns to new topics and issues. The personalized narratives of encounters with animals are both rooted in the subjective turn in the genre and reveal that animals are no longer mere instruments of travel. Through their presence, the animals challenge the anthropocentric thinking dominating the genre and the colonialist world view, even though moments of joint interspecies action are temporally restricted, exceptional, and only available in enchanted space, as in Sutherland’s work. However, such possibilities indicate that interwar travel writing set in the North reveals that animals in tourism are not merely instruments: signs of an evolving ethic of care are also part of the tourist–animal relationship and not limited to the close interspecies relationships between the Sámi and their reindeer as described by Chapman.

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# 13 ‘Meet and Greet’ Animal Experiences in Zoos: Are They Sending the Right Message?

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DOI: 10.1079/9781800625259.0013

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## Abstract

It is common for zoos in the UK to offer opportunities for visitors to interact with animals in the form of ‘Meet and Greet’ (M&G) experiences; which may include feeding, petting and posing for photographs. There is limited research investigating the impact of these experiences on the animals or people involved, particularly in terms of the messages they send to the public. This chapter reviews the existing literature on M&Gs in zoos to recommend priorities for future research. The authors suggest that UK zoos are given insufficient guidance on the messages that M&Gs should send to the public and how to achieve this. Five potential wrong messages that UK zoos could inadvertently be sending by advertising M&Gs, and the potential consequences of these messages are discussed. Future research should explore how the general public perceive M&Gs offered by zoos, depending on what the experiences involve and how they are advertised, so that

zoos can make informed decisions to reduce the likelihood of sending the wrong message to the public.

## Introduction

Zoos are one of the most popular forms of animal tourist attraction worldwide, with over 700 million people visiting zoos globally every year (Gusset and Dick, 2011). There is huge variation in zoos around the world, including their type, standards of animal welfare and reported mission (Patrick *et al.*, 2007; Nekolný and Fialová, 2018; Safina, 2018). These differences make it difficult to generalize about zoos, and because of this we have chosen to focus specifically on UK zoos for this chapter, but we believe that the issues discussed are also relevant to the wider zoo and animal tourism industry.

Zoos in the UK are subject to the Zoo Licencing Act 1981, which requires the licensing and regular inspections of all zoos in Great Britain, according to the *Secretary of State's Standards of Modern Zoo Practice* (DEFRA, 2012). Over 100 UK zoos are represented by the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA), which provides policies and guidelines to help its members achieve high standards of animal welfare, education, research and conservation work. Due to these requirements, we will continue under the assumption that BIAZA zoos can be considered as examples of 'good' zoos. The purpose of good zoos and their role in society is complex, but is often simplified into four main goals: (i) conservation; (ii) education; (iii) research; and (iv) recreation (Spooner *et al.*, 2023). Ultimately, the overall mission of good zoos is biodiversity conservation, and all aspects of zoo operations should support this mission (Rabb, 1994; Conway, 2003). While we acknowledge that all forms of animal captivity and use of animals in tourism can be considered morally ambiguous (Fennell, 2013; Browning and Veit, 2021; Kline and Fischer, 2023) we believe that there is a need for research to scrutinize those zoos with the highest standards to challenge them to continuously improve and ensure that they have a positive impact for animals and society.



BIAZA zoos play a key role in the UK tourism industry. Four of the top ten most-visited paid tourist attractions in England in 2021 were zoos, with the most popular zoo in the UK, Chester Zoo, the second most-visited paid attraction after Kew Gardens (VisitBritain, 2021). BIAZA-member zoos attracted a total of 25.1 million visitors in 2021, and 35.7 million in 2019 before the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic (BIAZA, 2021). BIAZA zoos have great potential for contributing to species conservation, with a reported spend of £26.5 million by BIAZA zoos to directly support conservation projects in 2021 (BIAZA, 2021). However, to be able to donate directly to conservation, as well as uphold high animal welfare standards, conduct meaningful research and engage the public with conservation education, zoos must remain commercially viable tourist attractions (Mason, 2000; Tribe and Booth, 2003; Catibog-sinha, 2008).

One way that zoos can increase their income, either by boosting visitation or charging an additional fee on top of the entrance price, is by offering opportunities for animal–visitor interactions (AVIs), which are defined in Table 13.1. Such opportunities are extremely common – 75% of zoos globally offer AVIs (D’Cruze *et al.*, 2019) – but there is limited research into what AVIs zoos offer and the impact of these opportunities on the animals and people involved. The terminology used for AVIs is inconsistent between different zoos, zoo associations and the existing literature, which may hinder research developments. For example, BIAZA provides its members with a ‘close contact’ policy, where close contact can be considered a synonym for AVI, as shown in Table 13.1. We have included Spooner *et al.*’s (2021a) definition for ‘animal ambassador encounters’ (AAEs) in Table 13.1, which could also be considered equivalent to the term AVI, as the authors describe animal ambassadors as ‘those used specifically in close-contact experiences with visitors’ (Spooner *et al.*, 2021a, p. 42) and the authors cite D’Cruze *et al.* (2019) using ‘AAE’ in place of ‘AVI’. However, Spooner *et al.*’s (2021a) study does not include walk-throughs or animal shows, so AAEs may in fact be a subset of AVIs, but this is not addressed directly in the study itself.

As shown in Table 13.1, AVIs encompass a broad range of activities. D’Cruze *et al.* (2019) is currently the only study to categorize AVI types,

where they found ‘petting’ to be the most commonly offered activity, advertised by 43% of zoos globally. However, Doodson *et al.* (2022) showed that over 60% of BIAZA zoos offer AVIs that are often simply called ‘experiences’ or ‘encounters’, that are advertised as an opportunity to ‘meet’ a specific animal species, which they refer to as ‘Meet and Greets’ (M&Gs). M&Gs are offered at an additional cost to the zoo entrance fee, take place under staff supervision and may include feeding, physical contact or increased proximity to the animal, but zoos do not always specify exactly what the interaction involves (Doodson *et al.*, 2022).

M&Gs may provide photo opportunities for participants, including the chance for animal selfies, that may be posted on social media. While it is possible to have animal selfie opportunities that do not compromise animal welfare, there are plenty of examples of harmful selfie opportunities in tourist settings where animals are used as photo props; in many cases these animals may have been removed from the wild and are subjected to cruelty, neglect and suffering for human entertainment (World Animal Protection, 2017; Lenzi *et al.*, 2020). Even if animal welfare is not compromised by tourist selfie opportunities there is still an issue of exploiting animals for profit and use as status symbols (Belicia and Islam, 2018; Kline and Fischer, 2023) and good zoos should want to differentiate themselves from such exploitative animal tourism.

In November 2019, Hanwell Zoo in London released a statement on their Facebook page that they would no longer be offering M&Gs because:

**Table 13.1.** Similar terms used for animal–visitor interactions that may be synonymous

Term	Definition	Examples	Reference
Animal–visitor interactions (AVIs)	‘Categories of activities that provide visitors (i.e. untrained non-staff members of the public) with the opportunity to have indirect and direct contact with live captive wild animals (both inside and outside of their	Feeding; petting; riding; walk or swim with; non-hand feeding; walk through or swim through; drive through or cage dive; show and performance.	D’Cruze <i>et al.</i> (2019, p. 2)

	permanent enclosures).’		
Close contact experiences	‘The close proximity, with direct or indirect contact, of a member of the public to a live animal that is part of a collection, either in the absence of a safety barrier or through or over barriers.’	Feeding experiences; touch pools; walk-throughs; drive-throughs; displays and presentations; work-experience opportunities; diving and other experiences; education sessions; free-roaming animals and outreach.	BIAZA (2019, p. 1)
Animal ambassador encounters (AAEs)	‘Involve one-to-one interactions (also known as an encounter) between visitors and individual animals who are deemed to be acting as (animal) ambassadors for their species or a conservation cause.’	Behind the scenes – touch; behind the scenes – no contact; feeding experience; protected feeding; keeper for the day; touch pools/tanks; animal rides; educational handling; hands on encounter; swim with animal; photography – no contact.	Spooner <i>et al.</i> (2021a, p. 41)

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we felt these sessions portrayed the wrong message [...] how can we ask people not to ride or take selfies with wild animals when on holiday, but then offer a similar experience here? Even if we can ensure their welfare, the message gets lost.

(Hanwell Zoo, 2019)

There has been no published research into public perceptions of M&Gs, but Hanwell Zoo make a legitimate point about the danger of sending the ‘wrong message’ to the public which hasn’t been investigated. Due to the lack of research in this area we do not know whether other BIAZA zoos are likely to follow Hanwell Zoo’s lead, or indeed whether they should. There is limited research into the popularity of M&Gs and whether this is increasing or decreasing. It is therefore unclear what factors affect the popularity of M&Gs as there is no research into people’s preferences for different aspects of M&Gs, despite the variation in what they involve. Zoos need to consider that the animal interaction in M&Gs (such as

physical contact or posed photo opportunities) and the way M&Gs are advertised or shared on social media (including the images and language used online) may affect people's perceptions of M&Gs, the animals involved in M&Gs, and zoos offering M&Gs.

Is Hanwell Zoo leading the way in responsible zoo experiences by discontinuing to offer M&Gs, or is this an unnecessary reaction based on assumptions rather than research, that could potentially be losing Hanwell Zoo a valuable source of income? We believe that there is a need for further research into M&Gs offered by BIAZA zoos and the message that they portray to the public. In this chapter, we will examine the messaging of M&Gs, highlight key gaps in the zoo AVI literature and discuss the potential impact of M&Gs on public perceptions of zoo animals, and the implications this could have for zoos and the wider wildlife tourism industry.

## **Methods**

To identify priorities for further research, we have reviewed the existing literature on zoo AVIs and the messages that they may send to the public. We will discuss who is impacted by M&Gs and why research into their impact on people, including the message they receive, is so important. We will look at the guidance provided by BIAZA on the 'right' message that M&Gs should send to the public and explore some of the possible 'wrong' messages that zoos may inadvertently be sending through the M&Gs they offer.

We propose that future research should explore the possibility of BIAZA zoos undermining their missions by sending the wrong messages to the public through the M&Gs they offer, and suggest the following as examples of those wrong messages that must be investigated further:

1. Zoos prioritize entertainment over education.
2. M&Gs compromise animal welfare.
3. All M&Gs are acceptable including unethical captive-animal tourism and photo prop opportunities.

4. Animals involved in M&Gs would make good pets.
5. Animals in M&Gs are not endangered.

## **Who Receives the Message?**

Research into the impact of M&Gs in zoos is extremely limited, but most existing studies have focused on the impact of M&Gs on the welfare of the animals involved. Many of these studies have found no negative effects on a range of species, including studies on lemurs (Jones *et al.*, 2016), penguins (Saiyed *et al.*, 2019), giraffes (Orban *et al.*, 2016), and elephants, tapirs and meerkats (Martin and Melfi, 2016). Further research into the welfare of animals used in M&Gs is undoubtedly necessary, however, as highlighted by Hanwell Zoo's (2019) statement, zoos may be able to ensure the welfare of individual animals involved in M&Gs, but if those M&Gs send the wrong message to the public then there could be other negative repercussions that must be considered.

A few studies have looked at the impact of M&Gs on participants, generally looking for positive changes to zoo visitors' knowledge, attitudes or behaviour. For example, Clifford-Clarke *et al.* (2022) measured the educational value of penguin M&Gs at Twycross Zoo in the UK, but suggest that the M&G did not increase conservation knowledge or behavioural intentions in participants any more than viewing an exhibit did. Whitehouse-Tedd *et al.* (2021) measured knowledge change in visitors to a South African zoo and while they found cheetah M&G participants did have a small knowledge increase, this was significantly lower than for visitors who attended a guided tour instead. The problem with these studies is that the results are not necessarily generalizable, as there is variation between individual zoos in what they offer. De Mori *et al.* (2019) propose a protocol for assessing whether zoo AVIs can be considered ethical, which includes an animal welfare assessment and a human outcome assessment – consisting of a risk assessment and visitor experience survey. What is missing from this protocol, and from the M&G and zoo AVI literature in general, is consideration of the impact on non-visitors.

Zoos have a wider reach than just the people who visit the zoo in person. ‘Vicarious’ zoo visitors are those who may experience aspects of the zoo without physically being there, whether intentionally or not (Crilley, 2011). This may include accessing the zoo’s website, seeing photos or videos shared online, viewing advertisements or watching TV programmes. BIAZA zoos advertise M&Gs prominently on their websites (Doodson *et al.*, 2022) and many are active on social media (Rose *et al.*, 2018). The way zoos choose to present M&Gs to the public, including the images and language used to advertise them online, will affect who decides to participate, as well as affecting public perceptions of the M&Gs on offer, the zoo itself and the animals involved.

We suggest that the existing zoo AVI research neglects to consider the impact of M&Gs on the wider public, including non-participating observers and non-visitors, which we define below.

- *Participants*: zoo visitors who take part in a M&G.
- *Non-participating observers*: zoo visitors who may watch the M&G taking place from a public viewing area without taking part in the M&G.
- *Non-visitors*: members of the general public who may view photos or videos taken during a M&G that are shared online, without visiting the zoo.

M&Gs are staff-led experiences, so could provide an educational opportunity where staff can deliver an intended conservation message to participants. However, non-participating observers and non-visitors viewing images of M&Gs won’t get that intended message directly, so are therefore more likely to misinterpret or get the ‘wrong’ message from M&Gs offered by zoos.

M&Gs are often advertised on zoo websites using photos showing animals and participants in close proximity or physical contact (Doodson *et al.*, 2022). However, previous research has shown that viewing images of animals in close proximity to humans can affect people’s perceptions of those animals, including increasing the desire for pet ownership and decreasing conservation concern (Ross *et al.*, 2011; Leighty *et al.*, 2015; Shaw *et al.*, 2022), and viewing videos of animals being handled has also

been shown to decrease people's perceptions of animal welfare (Minarchek *et al.*, 2021). Zoos need to consider not only the education message to deliver to M&G participants, but also the message that may be interpreted by seeing M&Gs out of context.

## **What Is the Right Message?**

The *Secretary of State's Standards of Modern Zoo Practice* (DEFRA, 2012) provide guidance on 'animal contact areas' (another synonym for AVI), which includes ensuring animal welfare and public safety is prioritized during AVIs. Some of the benefits of AVIs described are:

the public may gain a better understanding and awareness of the species by being in closer contact [...] As a result, the public's appreciation of the zoo and its educational value may be enhanced; controlled handling of suitable animals can be an important learning experience.  
(DEFRA, 2012, p. 38)

Although this suggests that AVIs can be learning opportunities for participants, there is no legal requirement for them to be educational, or any guidance provided on the messaging accompanying AVIs. The *BIAZA Close Contact Policy* does discuss the message of AVIs, and states that they must be educational:

in providing close contact experiences BIAZA member institutions [...] MUST ensure that the message of each close contact situation is linked to education and public engagement and is not purely for entertainment/income generation  
(British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA), 2019, p. 2).

However, this is the extent of their guidance on messaging and the policy does not include more specific recommendations on what the message should be.

The summary of the *BIAZA Close Contact Policy* is included in Box 13.1, which states that AVIs should support the zoo's mission and be tailored to education. However, this is open to interpretation and subject to individual zoo expertise. There is no advice provided on what AVIs, including M&Gs, should or shouldn't involve, or how they should be advertised.

At the time of publication, the *BIAZA Close Contact Policy* is being updated, as well as a new Conservation Education Policy being launched. By the end of 2023 both of these should be available at: <https://biaza.org.uk/policies-guidelines> (accessed 12 April 2023).

While these updated policies may provide better guidance for UK zoos, the lack of research on AVIs means there is limited knowledge to base these guidelines on. We suggest that UK zoos are given insufficient direction on the messages that AVIs, including M&Gs, should send to the public and how to achieve this, and that research is needed to rectify this. Simply stating that M&Gs should be educational isn't enough, and there is a need for research that doesn't just measure the learning outcomes of M&Gs, but is open to uncovering unexpected and negative findings (Moss and Esson, 2013).

**Box 13.1. Summary of BIAZA Close Contact Policy. From BIAZA, 2019, p. 1, with permission from publisher.**

Engaging the public with interactive animal experiences can be invaluable in achieving an institution's mission. In providing these experiences it is critical that these three aspects are addressed:

1. Animal Welfare: ensuring that the close contact experience does not impede on the general welfare of the animal.
2. Staff and Public Safety: ensuring that staff and public safety is considered and reasonable precautions are taken.
3. Ethical Considerations: ensuring that the close contact experience achieves clear outcomes for the organization's mission and vision and manages public perceptions; i.e. is tailored to education.

## **What Is the Wrong Message?**

The BIAZA guidelines assert that M&Gs should have an educational message, but educational messages may not be received by visitors in the way intended by the zoo, and information may be ignored or misinterpreted. Examples of zoo visitors 'getting the wrong message' include a study by Heinrich and Birney (1992), who found that around a quarter of the audience at a zoo demonstration thought that the monkey featured in the show would make a good pet, despite the narrator stating



that monkeys should never be kept as pets. Spooner *et al.* (2021b) showed that sea lions performing tricks in a show caused misconceptions about natural behaviours among zoo visitors; and Bettinger *et al.* (2010) found that children visiting a chimpanzee sanctuary misunderstood the intended message of images of chimpanzees being exploited by humans in educational graphics, because they were not reading or understanding the accompanying text explaining the context of the pictures.

Learmonth (2020) discussed the risk of unintended consequences of AVIs in zoos, including: (i) normalizing interactions with animals in other settings, such as harassing wildlife or encouraging unethical, poorly regulated captive-animal tourist opportunities with low welfare standards; or (ii) even increasing people's desire for exotic pet ownership. People's perceptions of viewing images of M&Gs out of context could affect their opinions and support for zoos and conservation, but this has not been fully explored. We currently do not know what messages zoo visitors receive from M&Gs or how M&G images are interpreted by people exposed to them. There is a need to explore the risks and potential consequences of the public getting the wrong message about M&Gs in good zoos. In the following sections we discuss examples of the wrong messages that zoos may inadvertently be sending by offering M&Gs.

### **Potential wrong message 1: Zoos prioritize entertainment over education**

*Consequence: M&Gs could decrease support for good zoos*

The primary benefit of offering M&Gs for zoos is income: they are money-making experiences offered at an additional cost to the zoo entrance fee. Doodson *et al.* (2022) found that the average price of a M&G offered by BIAZA zoos was £71.40 per person, up to a maximum of £600 for a polar bear M&G at Yorkshire Wildlife Park. To successfully attract visitors and make a profit M&Gs must be entertaining. However, there is a risk that if M&Gs are marketed as primarily entertainment opportunities then this could reinforce an idea that all zoos are solely entertainment attractions, and that the animals are exploited for human entertainment.

This means that good zoos could lose credibility as conservation organizations and lose public support (Carr and Broom, 2018).

The *BIAZA Close Contact Policy* (British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA), 2019) specifies that M&Gs must be educational and not purely offered for entertainment, however, this requirement is vague and subjective, and there is a risk that individual zoos may not fully adhere to these guidelines. We also need to consider how zoos advertise M&Gs to the public. Do people perceive M&Gs to be educational experiences or purely offered for entertainment? There is currently no existing research on the general public's perceptions of zoos offering M&G experiences, but Carr and Cohen (2011) found that zoos primarily present themselves with a focus on entertainment on their websites. There is a need for further research into how zoos advertise and promote M&Gs, to ensure that conservation education messages are not lost.

## **Potential wrong message 2: M&Gs compromise animal welfare**

### *Consequence: M&Gs could decrease support for good zoos*

One of the most important aspects of public perceptions of M&Gs is the animals' welfare. If visitors perceive welfare issues with animals in M&Gs it could reduce their support for zoos and negatively impact zoo missions. Unfortunately for good zoos, this is not as straightforward as ensuring the animals' well-being; they must also consider the public's interpretation of the animals' well-being. Most people are not qualified to make accurate assessments of animal welfare and are likely to make unscientific judgements based on limited knowledge and flawed emotional responses, influenced by social and cultural values (Moorhouse *et al.*, 2017; Carr and Broom, 2018). Because of this it is important to understand how people rate zoo animal welfare and how their judgements may be influenced (Ward and Sherwen, 2019; Chiew *et al.*, 2021).

Research has shown that factors affecting people's perceptions of animal welfare include exhibit type (naturalistic enclosures are perceived to be better) and observed behaviour (such as pacing) (Melfi *et al.*, 2004;

McPhee and Carlstead, 2010; Godinez *et al.*, 2013). Miller (2012) found that viewing a video of a tiger pacing (compared with resting) decreased zoo visitors' perception of the animals' level of care and decreased their interest in supporting or visiting zoos in the future. The author suggests that zoos use staff presence at the enclosures of animals prone to pacing behaviour, to discuss the behaviour and ensure a positive experience for visitors. In the case of M&Gs, as they are staff-led AVIs, staff may explain measures that are in place to maintain animal welfare to participants, but the wider public may miss this message. Chiapero *et al.* (2021) found that while information provided through a talk did influence visitor opinions on lesser anteater welfare, observing the animals' behaviour made more difference to visitor perceptions, suggesting that providing information may not be enough to ensure people interpret animal behaviour correctly.

Emotional connections with zoo animals and visit satisfaction have also been shown to affect people's perceptions of animal welfare, which may be increased by interactions with animals (Woods, 2002; Miller *et al.*, 2018; Packer *et al.*, 2018). However, a study by Minarchek *et al.* (2021) found that zoo visitors had higher empathy and positive perceptions of welfare of armadillos when not handled compared with viewing videos of armadillos being handled. The implication for M&Gs is that the public may have more positive perceptions of 'hands-off' M&Gs than viewing ones that allow physical contact with animals, but Doodson *et al.* (2022) found that only 5% of BIAZA zoos specify that no physical contact is allowed with animals in M&Gs. Research is needed to compare people's perceptions of M&Gs involving physical contact with those that do not allow participants to touch the animals.

Good zoos should want the public to be aware of welfare issues and not support bad zoos or other captive-animal tourist attractions with poor welfare standards. Research by Sampaio *et al.* (2021) suggests that good zoos can 'anchor' public perceptions of bad zoos by setting an example for animal welfare, which could decrease support for bad zoos. This makes it even more important that good zoos offer responsible M&Gs to send the right message to the public about animal welfare.

### **Potential wrong message 3: All M&Gs are acceptable including unethical captive-animal tourism and photo prop opportunities**

*Consequence: M&Gs could encourage support for bad zoos*

There may be debate over whether M&Gs and other zoo AVIs can be ethical (Kline and Fischer, 2023), but there is no question that unethical captive-animal tourism exists. Unethical animal tourism, such as unregulated ‘roadside zoos’ and animal photo prop opportunities, has negative impacts on welfare and species conservation (Moorhouse *et al.*, 2015). Animals are often not only kept under poor welfare conditions, but are frequently taken from the wild, abused and exploited for human entertainment (Belicia and Islam, 2018; von Essen *et al.*, 2020). So how do the general public perceive good zoos offering M&Gs in comparison with exploitative and unethical captive-animal tourism opportunities?

As Hanwell Zoo’s (2019) statement highlights, there is a danger that good zoos may be giving mixed messages to their visitors by offering M&Gs involving physical contact with animals but attempting to discourage visitors from interacting with wild or captive animals in other settings. In fact, many zoos may also be giving mixed messages to their staff; the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria’s *Social Media Tool Kit*, intended to advise zoo staff on the use of promoting their work on social media, states:

Seeing people on social media up close and personal with wild animals make more people wish to do the same. This can promote illegal or dangerous animal/tourist experiences, which undermine the anti-poaching and conservation messages pivotal to zoos/aquariums. Despite the engagement brought by a selfie with an adorable animal, it’s important to consider the messages you promote.

(Kristiansen and Camus, 2021, p. 12)

This seems contradictory when so many zoos offer M&Gs that may involve selfie opportunities for visitors. The toolkit suggests that providing captions with context to images shared online can ‘help signify that this behaviour is only appropriate when done by animal professionals’ (Kristiansen and Camus, 2021, p. 12), but as previously discussed, providing information does not mean that the public will receive or understand the intended message.

Research by van der Meer *et al.* (2019) found that photos of people interacting with wild cats encouraged members of the public to want to interact with wild cats themselves. Seeing images of M&Gs in good zoos could make unethical animal interactions seem more acceptable, and it may not be obvious to the public if there is a difference between a good or bad AVI.

#### **Potential wrong message 4: Animals involved in M&Gs would make good pets**

*Consequence: M&Gs could encourage the exotic pet trade*

Viewing images or videos of M&Gs, either participant photos shared on social media or zoos advertisements M&Gs, could impact people's perceptions of the animals' pet suitability, as research has shown that viewing pictures of an animal with a person can increase the opinion that the species make good pets (Ross *et al.*, 2011; Leighty *et al.*, 2015; Shaw *et al.*, 2022). Watching chimpanzees in entertainment commercials has also been shown to reduce understanding that chimpanzees do not make good pets (Schroepfer *et al.*, 2011), and comments on viral videos of primates suggest that viewing these videos increases the desirability of those animals as pets (Nekaris *et al.*, 2013; Clarke *et al.*, 2019).

Conversely, however, some similar studies have not found the same result with images of pythons, sloths or wild cats with humans (van der Meer *et al.*, 2019; Cronin *et al.*, 2022), and Spooner and Stride (2021) suggest that images of zookeepers interacting with animals do not increase zoo visitors' desire for pet ownership. Cronin *et al.* (2022) found that: (i) people's generation, gender and the animal species affect ownership desire; (ii) younger generations are more interested than older generations in exotic pets; and (iii) male survey participants were more interested in python ownership than female participants. There is a need for more research on the factors affecting public desire for pet ownership to explore whether, and in what contexts, images of M&Gs may encourage inappropriate interpretations of the animals involved.

It should also be considered that while there is a danger that M&Gs could potentially increase the exotic pet trade, desire for pets may not actually translate to an increase in pet ownership. There is a need for further research into both public perceptions of exotic pet suitability and the effect on the actual pet trade, considering species, geographic and cultural differences, as M&Gs may not increase the demand for certain exotic pets in some countries or cultures but may have a greater effect in others.

### **Potential wrong message 5: Animals in M&Gs are not endangered**

*Consequence: M&Gs could decrease conservation concern*

There is some evidence that M&Gs may increase conservation outcomes in participants, as studies on zoo visitors' opportunistic interactions with animals at exhibits have shown increases in positive emotional responses and concern for conservation (Hacker and Miller, 2016; Luebke *et al.*, 2016; Miller *et al.*, 2018). Increased concern for conservation could then translate into increased donations; as Tisdell and Wilson (2005) found that visitors to a sea turtle ecotourism experience who touched live turtles were willing to pay more for marine turtle conservation than visitors who did not see turtles during their visit.

However, while M&G participants may gain conservation awareness, non-participants' perceptions of M&Gs may undermine conservation objectives. Both Ross *et al.* (2011) and Leighty *et al.* (2015) found that people viewing images of primates in the presence of a human were less likely to think the animal was endangered compared with viewing an image of the animal alone. This suggests that there is a real danger that viewing photos of M&Gs, depicting people interacting with animals, could decrease people's concern about the conservation status of the animals involved (Ward and Sherwen, 2019).

Schroepfer *et al.* (2011) also found that people who watched videos of 'entertainment' chimpanzee commercials were less likely to donate to conservation than a control group who watched a video of wild

chimpanzees. Although images and videos of M&Gs in zoos may not show such extreme unnatural behaviour or human–animal interaction as the commercials included in the study, it is worth investigating further the types of images and videos that may affect people’s willingness to donate to conservation.

In contrast, Spooner and Stride (2021) found that zoo visitors had a higher willingness to donate to conservation (based on amount and likelihood of donation) when viewing images of zoo animals with a person compared with images of the animal alone. However, this study was conducted only on zoo visitors so it is unclear whether non-zoo visitors would have the same responses. While there are only a few existing studies suggesting that M&Gs could have a potentially negative impact on the public’s conservation concern, this is an important aspect for further research since increasing conservation awareness is essential to zoo missions and zoos should avoid offering M&Gs if they could undermine that mission.

## **Conclusion**

M&Gs are a popular form of AVI in BIAZA zoos and they have the potential to have a positive impact for conservation; they can increase zoo income to help further improve animal welfare and exhibits, as well as contributing to conservation and research projects, and M&Gs also provide an education opportunity for participants that could increase pro-conservation attitudes and behaviours. However, zoos need to ensure that the M&Gs they offer do in fact support their conservation mission and send the right message to the public. Unfortunately, because of the lack of research into M&Gs, BIAZA zoos do not currently have enough information or guidance to be able to ensure this. If M&Gs do not send the right message to the public then there is the potential that offering M&Gs could undermine zoos’ conservation missions by: (i) decreasing support for good zoos; (ii) encouraging support for bad zoos; (iii) encouraging the exotic pet trade; and/or (iv) by limiting peoples’ understanding of species conservation.

While an increase in research into the impact of M&Gs on animal welfare and on participant outcomes is needed, we believe that the priority for research in this area should be to explore the messages that M&Gs send to the general public. There is a need to investigate how BIAZA zoos advertise M&Gs to the public, including the types of images and language used online. Research is needed to explore public perceptions of M&G adverts and images, to see whether the way M&Gs are advertised and the type of interaction they involve affects people's attitudes and opinions. Research should focus on the five potential wrong messages proposed in this chapter but should also be open to other, both positive and negative, findings.

Further research into public perceptions of M&Gs can help provide BIAZA zoos with the knowledge necessary to develop and advertise M&Gs that do not send the wrong message to the public. Hanwell Zoo have taken the safest option to avoid sending the wrong message to the public by discontinuing M&Gs completely. For zoos that choose to continue to offer them, we suggest responsible M&Gs should avoid physical contact with animals, and that zoos should not promote M&Gs using images showing physical contact, at least until further research can show whether or not such images do in fact send the wrong message to the public. Good zoos must ensure not only that participants get the right message from M&Gs, but also that the M&Gs they offer do not inadvertently send the wrong message to the wider public.

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# 14 Poster of a Hyperreal Monster and the Evolving Eras of White Shark Image

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© CAB International 2024. *Emerging Voices for Animals in Tourism* (eds J. Hooper and C. Kline)

DOI: 10.1079/9781800625259.0014

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## **Abstract**

This chapter proposes seeds of thoughts for white shark image eras and contextualizes it through visual images and advertisement literature created in and around cage-diving tourism in New Zealand, and other shark–human tourist contact zones. Cage diving as a microcosm of interactional space becomes symbolic of the grander discourse of shark image. Primarily based on a multispecies ethnographic fieldwork with the New Zealand white shark cage diving, the chapter argues for four intertwined eras of the image, from a ‘Pre-Jaws’ era, ‘Jaws’ era, ‘Post-Jaws’ era, to a hopeful ‘Post-Post-Jaws’ era. It reflects on how a hyperreal image of white sharks attracts people to cage diving, as well as how such a practice, along with other strategies, can support challenging such an image. Furthermore, it also reflects on how these images are shaped by the agency and individuality of the sharks themselves and the human–shark interaction created in cage-diving practices as the tourists encounter them in the ocean.

## **Welcome to the Southernmost White Shark Cage Diving in the World**

On any chilly morning in 2016, if you wanted to visit me you would walk up the old Bluff Wharf at the very end of New Zealand (NZ), where Highway one ended. If not transfixed by the smell of the sweet and salty seawater, and the antics of the resident sea lion, from a distance you would see my usual struggle to unrope a blue boat and fend off the seagulls who were after my breakfast meat pie. As you got closer, you had to be careful, or you might have been startled by the open jaw of a giant great white shark coming for you. Welcome to the southernmost white shark cage diving in the world, 1600 km from Antarctica. This was the boat of Shark Experience, Bluff, NZ, and this poster was a symbol of the grander than life, in other words, a hyperreal image that we know as the 'great white shark' (Fig. 14.1). In this reflexive narrative, I aim to initiate a discourse about the conflicting ideas of the ever-evolving white shark image eras and contextualize it based on these forms of images and advertisement literature present in cage-diving practice of NZ, and shark-diving tourism endeavours in aquariums and other human–shark interactional spaces. Furthermore, I comment on how this image is shaped by the agency and individuality of the sharks themselves and the human–shark interaction created in cage-diving practices as the tourists encounter them in the ocean. Finally, I discuss current and possible future strategies for altering this hyper-negative/hyperreal image of sharks. The term 'image' here represents two interrelated concepts – first they are the visual images, and secondly, they are perceptual and emotional constructs. The visual images are symbolic of the global social image, and indeed the personal cognitive image of them that individuals hold in their minds.



**Fig. 14.1.** Printed flex image on the boat hull symbolizing the hyperreal open jaw of a great white shark (Shark Experience boat, New Zealand (NZ)). Photo taken by author.

## **Methodology and My Positionality**

For the last decade, I have been submerged in the applied and theoretical challenges of human–shark interaction, and their dynamic image making as a transdisciplinary human-shark researcher. I have collaborated, and discussed with local experts, natural and social scientists, and the global general population affected by sharks symbolically and physically and spent years among the sharks themselves in NZ, India and Australia. In the process, I have come to realize the lack of a formalized integrative-transdisciplinary approach vital for real-life alteration in human-shark research. Consequently, I have created the concept of SHHRKS (shark–human holistic research and knowledge system) (Aich and Weber, 2023). SHHRKS is a methodology of transdisciplinary human–shark research, education and application attempting to address real-life issues of shark population degradation and human–shark conflict.

A methodological approach fundamental for the SHHRKS system and this book chapter is multispecies ethnography (ME) (Aich, 2022). In classical social scientific research and ethnographies dealing with



human–non-human animals (hereafter ‘animals’), the focus has been on the human dimension of the discourse, with them having an exclusive agentive impact in shaping the political, sociocultural and economic environment of the lived worlds we are all part of. There has been a recent shift in contemporary ethnographic investigations with an emerging dialogue of a continuum of agency among humans and non-humans with scholarly approaches like ME (Aisher and Damodaran, 2016; Ellis *et al.*, 2018; Ameli, 2022). Even though there have been ME investigations with many species (Haraway, 2003; Fuentes, 2012; Baynes-Rock, 2013; Birke and Thompson, 2017), the focus on sharks from a multispecies perspective has been virtually non-existent. Hence, there is a need for an epistemological alteration in studying human–shark physical and symbolic interaction, cohabitation and conflict, informed by a multispecies, posthuman approach, and consideration of humans and sharks in the same continuum of agentive impact. This chapter aims to add to this discourse and argues for sharks being as much agentive entities in the creation of action in cage-diving practices as humans.

Besides a literature survey, and archival research on human–animal conflict, shark-bite incidents, shark tourism and human-animal research – this reflection is primarily shaped by two aspects of data collection and analysis. First, it is experience at the field site of Bluff, NZ from 2014 to 2017. I worked as a participant observer among the cage-diving operators and conducted video and photo documentation, as well as interviews (details can be found in my book *Iridescent Skin*; Aich, 2022). The second aspect is the investigation of the language used in promotional materials of global aquariums facilitating shark diving. Utilizing a random sampling method, I conducted content analysis investigating the language in the advertisement strategies used among the 43 webpages of global aquariums which were providing the opportunity for shark diving. I transcribed the write ups in a Microsoft Word file and categorized, coded and analysed them utilizing the thematic content analysis (TA) method. The TA method is instrumental in analysing qualitative data into patterns of meanings, and I did that using the qualitative data analysis software QDA Miner Lite. The different stages of such a method of analysing qualitative data broadly are: (i)

familiarizing oneself with the data; (ii) generating initial codes from the raw data; (iii) searching for themes among the codes; (iv) reviewing the themes and altering where necessary; (v) defining and naming themes; and (vi) producing the report (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

## **The Hyperreal Monster**

We live in the time of the hyperreal, where our reality is created from a metamorphosis of various often conflicting images. In this kind of image making, the real and the unreal merge together seamlessly, and the distinction between them blurs. Hyperreality is a concept proposed by Baudrillard, where when simulation of simulations happen, they lose their link with any form of reality (Baudrillard, 1994), which is hyperreality. Such simulations have given rise to various globally recognized hyperreal images. One such image and global marketable commodity in the last three or four decades has been the image of the great white shark (*Carcharodon carcharias*). If *Jaws* (Jaws, 1975) was a simulation of the real shark, every image that has been created of sharks after the release of *Jaws* is a simulation of the image created by *Jaws* itself, and hence is hyperreal (Aich, 2022). There has been a social classical conditioning of eliciting ‘fear of the marine scape’ from the visual symbol of the ‘Jaw’, and a reminder of dangerous sharks from the term ‘Jaws’. I have even had tourists explain to me, before seeing white sharks in the flesh, that they felt white sharks had a disproportionately ‘huge’ jaw. Hence, the image of the shark jaw has become a sellable commodity, where the majority of the images that are shared focus on the open jaw, and the shark ‘lunging for you’. Furthermore, the term *Jaws* has also become such a commodity with shows and news articles using it to raise interest in the public like Discovery Channel’s *Air Jaws (Air Jaws: Sharks of South Africa, 2001)*. At the same time, white sharks being the ‘poster child’ of sharks globally has caused all other sharks to come under a similar umbrella image in the public imagination. So much so, in my expeditions with shark attacks of Sundarbans, I found photographic images of white sharks were used in posters to symbolize the presence of

sharks in the Sundarban delta (Fig. 14.2), where white sharks were never present or seen (Aich and Chakraborty, 2022). In television, films, books and other media platforms, sharks are a big business commodity. *Jaws* was the seventh highest-grossing film of all time. The Discovery Channel's Shark Week spanning 35 seasons has millions of viewers each year and creates hundreds of millions of dollars in advertising revenue, indeed 'The 35th annual event averaged 22 million total viewers' (Seitz, 2023). Social media platforms are also filled with shark interest groups and promote shark-related photographs, accessories and other art. Photographs, in particular, are mostly of the hyperreal image of the sharks, with open jaw and trying to 'eat us' (or the camera for that matter) even though some groups call themselves 'Shark Lovers'. Neff (2015, p. 115) notes 'No other animal, on land or in the water, generates the entertainment income that shark species do ... the human-shark relationship presents a well-known story predicated on a primal battle for survival between human and shark'. One of the most controversial and dynamic industries this image has given rise to – white shark cage diving – claims that they intend to demystify them.



**Fig. 14.2.** Image of white shark representing *Kamot* – the local term for sharks in the Sundarban region of West Bengal. Photo taken by author.

## Significance of Shark Image Introspection

Social scientists point out that the negative and hyperreal image of white sharks in the public imagination is causing hindrances in their conservation efforts (Neff, 2014, Le Busque *et al.*, 2021). The fish that this image is based on are highly threatened with a reported decrease of 70% in the last 30 years, as are the majority of other sharks (Simpfendorfer, 2000; Chapple Taylor *et al.*, 2011; Ebert *et al.*, 2015; Roff *et al.*, 2018; Queiroz *et al.*, 2019). As Beryl Francis from Murdoch University puts it:

The media has played a dominant role in shaping [the] attitude towards shark conservation, shark attack representations, and government policies around the world. When Steven Spielberg's film *Jaws* about a 'rogue shark' was released in 1975, very little was known about sharks and the media exploited the public fear that it evoked for commercial gain ... The result was a plunge in shark populations worldwide.

(Francis, 2012, p. 59)

If indeed the negative white shark (sharks in general) image has a significant effect on their conservation, which drastically endangers healthy marine ecosystems, introspection on such image creation becomes pertinent instead of keeping them at the fringes of academic investigations, especially in contexts of tourism activities that use and shape shark images and 'on the surface' promote shark conservation.

Generally, it is argued that there are two primary ways of demystifying and altering the *Jaws* image – public education and direct-controlled encounters through shark tourism (Friedrich *et al.*, 2014; Apps *et al.*, 2016, 2018), which in the case of white sharks is achieved generally through cage diving. The practice of white shark cage diving creates a unique contact zone (Pratt, 1991) among the liminality of the real fish and created images, and air and water, where two apex species meet – humans and the largest predatory shark on the planet. This microcosm of interactional space becomes symbolic of the grander discourse of shark image.

## The Journey to Meet a Monster

White shark cage diving is a dynamic touristic endeavour, where people from all over the world fly down to a handful of places on the planet, cross treacherous waters, and get in small cages for a chance to encounter the ‘monster’ of their imagination. It is practised in South Africa, Mexico, Australia, the USA, NZ and Halifax, Nova Scotia. The southernmost cage diving in the world is off the coast of Bluff, at the very end of Highway 1, and the last point of the South Island, NZ. The journey to meet white sharks is more than a physical displacement; for many it is a journey which lasts a lifetime, starting from a very young age to now. Some even learnt to scuba dive precisely for this encounter. On the same note, it is also their journey through the various transforming images. Often travelling from the image of white sharks seen in *Jaws*, and over the decades, in other media, and then finally waiting to see them in the cage-diving boat. This evolution is symbolic of the evolving global shark image.

Sharks were not always such a hyperreal concept; they have had a constantly evolving image. Furthermore, most non-human animals might have a para-real (parallel to ‘reality’) image depending on the group and individual that encounters them; the same has been the case for white sharks. To fishers, they are sometimes prey, at times just another fin in the water, or trophy; for marine scientists they symbolize a healthy ecosystem; at the same time, they are symbols of strength, beauty and excitement for individuals who are fascinated by them. However, for the majority of the global population since *Jaws*, they have been a symbol of terror and danger of the ocean (Aich, 2022). Hence, taking *Jaws* as the point of reference, I propose the seeds of thought of four intermingling eras as conceptual platforms for theorizing the evolution of the white shark image. The borders between these varied images of the same fish are permeable, as are the eras of image formations in a constant state of evolution and flux.

The white shark image eras I propose are the ‘Pre-*Jaws*’ era, the ‘*Jaws*’ era, the ‘Post-*Jaws*’ era, and hopefully a ‘Post-Post-*Jaws*’/‘Beautiful Shark’ era. In the ‘Pre-*Jaws*’ era, sharks were not always considered ‘villains’ of the sea. This era was symbolized by unpredictability, adventure and cultural identity. Historically sharks were revered by various ocean-going communities, and often were the personification of virility, and the

unpredictability of the marine world, as much as gods, and resources (Codrington, 1891; Doak, 1975; *The Sharkcallers of Kontu*, 1982; Jøn and Aich, 2015). However, with the advent of modern audio-visual technology, sharks started to get a representative image where even if they were not villains, they certainly were part of ‘adventure’ and mystery, and more than anything the ‘potential of danger’ out in the ocean. Being hardly studied by biologists in depth till the early 20th century, the lack of knowledge also affected our sense of mystery towards them (Castro, 2016). Interestingly enough, the first ever underwater video is by English explorer John Williamson, who successfully collected underwater moving images including shots of a man killing a shark (*In the Tropical Seas*, 1914). Similar tropes can be seen in Cousteau’s underwater expeditions, especially with the use of exhilarating music, which has a significant effect on our perception of danger in movies and videos involving sharks (Biancorosso, 2010). But still, they were not promoted as monsters.

The release of *Jaws* ushered in the ‘*Jaws*’ era and created an entirely new paradigm of shark image formation and helped the creation of the monstrous image. The ‘*Jaws*’ era was symbolized by the ‘hyperreal monster’. The movie itself used Hitchcock-like tropes of danger and suspense, and music by John Williams which played a significant part in creating the ambience (Biancorosso, 2010). Maybe the timing was also right; the world might have been primed to have a monster close enough to exist in reality, which tapped into our deepest fear and uncertainty of the ultimate unknown – the ocean (explored in depth in my book *Iridescent Skin*; Aich, 2022).

Beyond the scholarly evidence, two pieces of comparative circumstantial evidence were apparent to me from my fieldwork about the significance of *Jaws* in the creation of the hyperreal image. After *Jaws* was screened in NZ, some long-term Bluff (Southland, NZ) fishers stopped diving permanently, even though there has never been a shark fatality to date in Southland. Alternatively, English movies (let alone *Jaws*) were never (still are not) screened in the Sundarban region of West Bengal, India. The public notes the intensity of shark bites increased in the region after the introduction of the meen industry (prawn larva harvesting) 40 years ago, about the same time *Jaws* was released. But

there was no larger-than-life image of them in the community, even if there were regular bites (potentially hundreds in the last few decades, however, no official data exists). Furthermore, people still went in the water and took them as hazards of work, rather than monsters (Aich and Chakraborty, 2022). Indeed, in my expeditions, I have not found a single art or folklore depiction of sharks from the region pre- or post-*Jaws* (Aich, 2021) (besides the recent poster referred to in Fig. 14.2). Incidentally, this same hyperreal image which had such a devastating effect on shark conservation gave rise to a new group of shark scientists (Castro, 2016). Even celebrated shark researchers like Greg Skomal (TEDx Talks, 2015) reminisced about this phenomenon.

The ‘Post-*Jaws*’ era was ushered in by conservationists including the same scientists who themselves were inspired by *Jaws*. The era is symbolized again by ‘adventure and unpredictability’ harking back to the elements of the ‘Pre-*Jaws*’ era, as much as efforts of shark conservation. In the ‘Post-*Jaws*’ era, there are still diverse versions of the sharks present in the media and shark tourism industries. On one hand, there is still a promotion of hyperreal images in movies and books. Even television shows which are supposedly about shark education/awareness still aim at creating situations where sharks play the role of ‘shark’ derivative of the *Jaws* image and cater to ‘Shark-porn’ (Metz, 2007). Much like humans play certain roles while creating their image, and catering to their audiences to achieve a certain desired effect (Goffman, 1959), sharks are made to perform the ‘shark’ (the hyperreal monster) either physically or through the magic of photographic or videographic editing. Discovery Channel’s Shark Week is still a treasure trove of such shows. For example, in the 2022 season, a white shark was put in a situation where she/he was instigated to hit a glass cage with a diver in it and break it, further promoting the image of the monster wanting to intentionally come after a human as food (Discovery+, 2022). Even the famous documentary *Blue Planet II*, which did not overtly focus on the ‘monstrous’ image of sharks, still used similar tropes, especially with sinister music.

Alternatively, tourism bodies claim that they want to demystify sharks. Physical and digital posters and advertisement materials now promote the ‘adventure’ aspect of meeting sharks, more than the ‘monster’. This

sense of perceived danger from close physical proximity is evident on the website home page of Shark Experience with whom I conducted my research (Shark Experience, n.d.), using such terms as ‘We’ll get you *that close up*’. A similar advertising strategy is prevalent across all diving experiences with other predatory sharks. For example, cageless tiger-shark diving activities at Tiger Beach use similar tropes – ‘Join us for an extreme shark diving encounter at Tiger Beach, Bahamas with no cage between you and the action’ (Sweeney, n.d.). A similar trend can be seen in virtual posters and literature on web pages of aquariums that cater for shark diving at their facilities. Most of the time, they also use the trope of danger and proximity with terms like ‘Face to Face’, ‘Face to Fin’ and ‘get up close’ (Aspro Parks UK, 2022a; Ripley Entertainment Inc, 2022; SeaVentures, 2022). Perhaps at a subliminal level, the intention here is to create an allure for the adventure-seeking nature of the tourist, where more than the interest in sharks, it is about a quest for the identity where one is unafraid to put oneself in danger facing ‘The Ocean’s Ultimate Predators!’ (Aquarium Of The Pacific, 2022). Enticing this form of adventure-seeking tourist, aquariums use terms like ‘Take the plunge’, ‘Descent into the deep’, ‘Ready for a heart-racing experience’ and ‘Experience an adrenaline surge’ (Merlin Entertainments, 2017, 2022; Landry’s, Inc, 2022; MGM Resorts International, 2022; Palma Aquarium, n.d.; Resorts World at Sentosa Pte, n.d.). This attraction towards an adventurous identity is deeply ingrained within the cage-diving tourists too, who also mention how it defines the individual; and at times whole families come together for the adventurous experience. In the aquarium setting, the perceived danger of sharks is further promoted by, ‘Surrounded by sharks ... Dare to cross shark bridge’ and ‘most dangerous sharks known to man’ (Newport Aquarium, 2022; Oklahoma Aquarium, n.d.). This again is a hyperreal experience, where the aquariums are feigning an image of the real experience. As a matter of fact, one of the fundamental aspects of a ‘real’ encounter with sharks in natural settings like cage diving is there is never a guarantee of sighting a shark, but in aquarium settings ‘Shark sightings are guaranteed’ (West Australian Ocean Park, 2022). At the same time, there is certainly promotion of shark conservation, with statements like ‘Maintaining



healthy ocean ecosystems', 'Standing Up for Sharks' and 'help sharks' (Adventure Aquarium, 2022; Shedd Aquarium, 2022).

However, there are no white sharks in aquariums, and cage diving is the only possible avenue for observing white sharks in the flesh. To take part in this pilgrimage for shark lovers, as tourists drove down Highway 1, they were greeted by three posters of white sharks (the one on the front, and two on the port and starboard sides of the boat; Fig. 14.3). Pilgrimage is often recognized as taken in search of beauty and love, and often needs of self-clarification or quest (Stewart-Kroeker, 2014, 2017). Here too, some came in search of this beauty, while some were in search of an adrenaline rush, and a quest to know themselves by facing the ocean's ultimate predator. Most people who came to the encounter had never seen a white shark, and they had never been in the presence of their size and had only seen them on their phones or television. The two posters on the sides of the boat are about 5m (17 ft) long, the size of a mature white shark, which gives tourists the first impact of their 'real' size. However, the one poster on the hull at the front with an open jaw (Fig. 14.1) is much larger than that of a white shark – this is hyperreal. Yet again, the jaw itself becomes the symbol of the monster at the recesses of our vision in the vast marine wilderness and our minds. Not only as a hyperreal poster on the front, but even the logo of the team is an image of an open jaw, as is the jaw again focused on other pages of Shark Experience's website. On that note, at times the *Jaws* theme still exists even if at a more subtle level in aquarium advertisements, with the use of terms like 'Jawesome' (Aspro Parks UK, 2022b). Hence, even if the entire *Jaws* image was not apparently focused on, it was still an agentive image creating intrigue 'below the surface' in shark tourism networks.



**Fig. 14.3.** Captain Mike, the owner of Shark Experience, NZ, walks beside his boat *Southern Isle* covered in vinyl posters of the great white shark. Photo taken by author.

## The Meeting

The Shark Experience boat set off at 6 a.m. from Bluff Wharf, travelling about 30 km to reach Edwards Island in the middle of the Foveaux Strait. Foveaux Strait is one of the most turbulent stretches of water on the planet and is a regular shipping channel – more than 250 ships have gone under in these waters in the last two centuries, including the latest one in 2021 claiming the life of my friend's father. After we reached Edwards Island and anchored about 200m from the landmass, all the equipment was checked, and the cage lowered in the water. The shark wrangler attracted the shark with chum (fresh chunks of fish meat with bone and blood) in the water and a bait of a tuna head (Fig. 14.4), then the shark wrangler and the tourists waited patiently. And when the sharks came, it was all hands on deck, to come face to face with the monsters of our imagination, only separated by a couple of inches of aluminium.

## The Creation of New Images

Besides the art and visual representation on the boat itself, cage diving becomes the point of contact where future visual images are created which further shapes the global image of sharks. A successful cage-diving encounter was one where the tourist could get a clear window of opportunity to see the sharks up close. This effective embodied experience between two beings mitigated by the environment was a mutual interspecies communication that shaped the images that were created in the minds of the tourists and often the visual images they captured.

The main point for the operators was that the divers got to see the sharks at least once underwater. The environment within the cage was intricately related to the weather. If the weather was turbulent, people could not even get into the water. Once they did get in, if the weather got too hostile, the cage would move vigorously, and they had to get out immediately. If there were too many suspended particles in the water, and the visibility was poor, tourists could not see the sharks, or take photographic images even if the sharks were there. The water was a dance hall where ‘the weather acts as a dance orchestra, providing music for the dancers. The rhythm of the music, in turn, orchestrates the circumstances of the dance hall, that is, the waterbody’ (Markuksela and Valtonen, 2019, p. 355).



**Fig. 14.4.** The shark wrangler attracting the shark. Photo taken by author.

For the tourist, the shark-diving experience was often life-changing, however, here I specifically focus on the effect of the encounter on their perceived image of the sharks. Scholars have argued that fear, proximity, variety of species, the animal size and emotional connection are significant for a meaningful experience (Dobson, 2007; McIntosh and Wright, 2017; Parreñas, 2018). Cage diving and the human–shark encounter that occurs through it is a dynamically created encounter where both species act on each other and the interaction is mediated through the material and the semantic world around them. Indeed, fear, proximity and the individuality of the sharks played a significant role in shaping the interaction, and hence the image formed in the tourists' minds, but the boundary between fear and fascination was often hazy.

When the sharks were close and paid personal attention, it elicited varied reactions from the tourists. Some tourists showed a desire for attention and recognition from the centre of their attention – the sharks. When that happened, it could be perceived from the shark's gaze and bodily movement. This personal recognition often provided a strong reminder in the tourist's mind that indeed the sharks were at the top of the food chain underwater; this was particularly noticeable to the humans if they were in the cage by themselves. The tourists felt that the individual recognition by the shark of the human could also have an adverse effect on the interaction when the sharks left the vicinity after noticing the individual tourist inside the cage. For the divers, often there was a cognitive dissonance between two conflicting ideas – 'great white shark' the monster in their imagination created by the media, and the white shark the fish in front of them. Often there was the resolution of this conflict after the humans calmed down from the anticipatory phase of the meeting, by the aesthetic beauty of the animal, their apparent slow and calm movement, and non-threatening demeanour.

The way the shark wrangler behaved with the sharks dictated the movement of the sharks near the cage, and hence how the tourist inside the cage encountered them. This human–shark interaction had an effect on both the image people had of them in their minds and the visual images they captured of the sharks. When I started my fieldwork, there were two white shark cage-diving operators in NZ. Often, the two boats were anchored close to each other. Standing on top of our boat, I would

often observe the same shark acting differently in front of the two boats. When the sharks were close to the other boat, they would be more 'excited' and lunge more for the bait, while when they were close to our boat, they would move more slowly around. It was soon apparent to me, the reason was that the other cage-diving operator kept the bait close to the shark for much longer and lifted it the moment the shark lunged for it, which is why he lost more bait too. On the other hand, my operator had no interest in that, and he made sure he took the bait out long before the shark went for it.

Furthermore, the individuality of the sharks played a vital part in the shaping of this interaction. White sharks are specifically identifiable individuals both physically and behaviourally; their behaviour around the boat, and with the bait, will be different based on their age and gender. Even if the sharks came near the boat, they may have decided to not come close to the cage, and hence people could not see them and take their photographs. A shark could be just 10m away and be virtually invisible due to their camouflaging strategies. Furthermore, the individual behaviour of the sharks could be different from day to day. The younger sharks seemed to be more playful, aggressive and voracious. While older individuals, especially females, were more careful, often going deeper and then swimming up to the bait.

If the shark was too 'aggressive' and banged the cage (because of the strategies of the shark wranglers, the sharks' personalities, or a combination of both), they would be playing the part of the 'shark' and the 'monster'. If they did not, it was just large potentially dangerous fish swimming around you. Similarly, the visual images that were taken were also affected by this. Most of the open-jaw images we have of white sharks are produced moments created from precise instances of sharks coming in to bite the bait provided for them (Fig. 14.5). The more baits there are that are close to them, or being snatched out at the last moment, the more images of them with their mouth open and extended jaws can be taken, edited to intensify the monster, and then shared – further proliferating the monster and indiscriminate killer image.



**Fig. 14.5.** The shark with the open jaw. Photo taken by author.

## **The Predicament of Image Formation and Disintegration**

I had hypothesized in my research that cage diving helps demystify sharks and alter the negative image in people's minds, hence I had set up strategies to conduct quantitative and qualitative investigations for testing this. Yes, results indicated that people did get a less negative, and a more positive image of sharks after the encounter, however, herein lies a predicament. When I compared the data of the tourists with the control data of the normal population, it was evident that the people who were coming to the cage-diving tourism activity already had a more positive image of sharks in their minds than the general population. Hence, first, the general population who had more negative images of sharks in their minds were not being exposed to the sharks, and there was no alteration of the negative image. Secondly, the tourists with more positive images in their minds still carried the baggage of the hyperreal image, hence, even if the claim for cage diving was to demystify the sharks, it is the hyperreal image that was bringing the tourists to them. Still, as I mentioned before, cage diving is the only avenue through which photographic and videographic images of white sharks are created and distributed. This is especially the case for images focusing on the sharks lunging at the bait

or biting the cage, in effect further promoting the hyperreal image as profit-making products for mass consumption, creating a vicious cycle of image creation and apparent claimed disintegration.

## **Hope for a ‘Post-Post-*Jaws*’ Era**

A potential ‘Post-Post-*Jaws*’ era is not a *Jaws* era at all, with the emotion this term elicits lost in the ash heap of time. I think such an era will be symbolized by ‘beauty’ and ‘cultural identity’ more than any other facets of shark symbolism. Only the hands of dialectics shall shape what will be the true name of such an era, perhaps something like the ‘Beautiful Shark’ era. Such an era and the images created and shared through it will come from the work of visual and literary artists, and tour operators, as much as scientists and policy experts.

It may be contended that there is another alternative to the ‘Beautiful Shark’ era. Perhaps the opposite of deadly shark imagery is the absence of shark imagery (as opposed to a new type of shark imagery). Is there a scenario in which the best outcome for sharks and people is for a space to be maintained between them – allowing sharks to swim off into the depths of the ocean where our minds don’t often go? That may be true under certain contexts, but unfortunately in the Anthropocene, anything we/the general population are ignorant about, as humans we feel we have an intrinsic right to exploit. This was apparent to me again in the Sundarbans, where I found there was disastrous decimation of the shark population, and very little initiative of practical conservation particularly because the public was not aware of their existence. Hence, considering the dangerous scenario of their global number, it is pertinent we are aware of them, and feel they are worthy of our affection, attention and hence are worth saving, much like whales.

Although the two primary concepts of shark demystification have very important roles to play, there may be value in rethinking them. Regarding first-hand encounters, I do agree that meeting white sharks in the ocean through cage diving does help alter tourists’ attitudes towards them, however, there are some questions to be raised. First, it is only the



people who were interested in meeting the sharks who came to see them and had a more favourable opinion about the sharks and the marine environment, rather than the general population. Furthermore, cage diving is the avenue through which white shark photographic and videographic images are created and distributed – focusing on the sharks lunging at the bait or biting the cage, further promoting the monstrous image.

As for sharing information, it is pertinent to alter disinformation about sharks, especially white sharks. However, the most important question is, did mere disinformation create this image? In my book *Iridescent Skin* (Aich, 2022), I explored how it is a combination of multiple factors from their behavioural and aesthetic traits and the environment they hunt in which tapped into our instinctual fears. The shark was merely the right vessel to commodify our primal dread of the unknown, hence it had such a long-lasting cognitive effect on mass consciousness. To counter that, yes, it is pivotal to spread unbiased and factual knowledge, however, the more I have contemplated on it, Dostoevsky's words have come back to me: 'Beauty will save the world' (Dostoyevsky and Arad, 2004, p. 561). If the image was not created from mere misinformation, how do we expect merely information to change it? The argument is if you love something, you tend to take care of it. Is love related only to the data and information we have about something/someone? Or is it related to our emotional connection with them, often beyond objective reasoning? As Sousa argued, 'Love does not derive from reason, virtue, or Kantian core rationality'. If anything, beauty, and our personal connection with it are integral parts of love (Sousa R., 2015, pp. 191–192). Furthermore, there is also evidence that emotions have more effect on decision making than cognition (Shiv and Fedorikhin, 1999). Have there been global efforts in focusing on the beauty of sharks and our cultural relations with them? When has there been a major motion picture that has shown sharks in a positive light or as a protector, a thing of beauty, and related to our ancestry? Alternatively, other major marine megafauna such as whales, which create more favour for global conservation, have been often shown in such light (e.g. *Free Willy*, 1993; *Whale Rider*, 2003).

Hence, in my humble opinion, the key is love and beauty. In my communications with people across the globe, I have found, when I



shared the sense of beauty through my visual art, writing and sensory expressions, it had more effect on people's feelings towards sharks than the data I provided. Similarly in cage-diving practices in NZ, I found in most of the cases, people who came to see them came because of love, love of their family and friends, the marine environment, and at times a fish which they had not even seen before (even if there was a hyperreal image of them in their mind). And when they did encounter them, that love often overflowed, through their tears shared with family, laughter with friends, and kisses among partners. There is knowledge and emotion that cannot be communicated only through verbal communication, which, hence, has to be expressed through art, abstract and sensory expressions. A lot can be lost in translation when one is trying to communicate something verbally, that was not perceived and imagined verbally. Maybe the key is to share our stories and images of sharks, emphasizing their beauty, and our love, admiration and cultural relationships with them and the marine environment.

## **To Conclude**

This has been merely my argument on the potential diverse eras of shark image. However, these seeds of thought need to be fleshed out in more detail through further intellectual discourse and fieldwork experiences. We are on the verge of a dialectical change in shark image creation and distribution. Perhaps practices like cage diving can also play a more crucial role, both in the material they use in their advertisement, and in the kind of images that are captured from such experiences. In the literature cage-diving operators share, and in the language they use while talking about sharks, perhaps there has to be more emphasis on the beauty of the animals, and the narrative has to focus on stories of our cultural relations with sharks. Furthermore, cage operators can encourage photographs to focus on the beauty of the sharks, their skin, vision, movement and calm demeanour – an antithesis of the ferocious man-eater images. At the same time, there may be sponsorship endeavours to create opportunities for community and stakeholder heads

to encounter sharks in their natural environment through cage-diving practices.

Aquariums can also focus on the beauty of the animals, and the deep bonds and love it can create among families. Furthermore, there are organizations like PangeaSeeds who have taken it upon themselves to collaborate with local communities to paint large seaside murals with marine animals including sharks to focus on their beauty and remind us of our cultural connection with them (PangeaSeed Foundation, 2022). As long as some organizations and individuals intentionally produce and distribute images of sharks focused on their aggression, there is a need for images that focus on the alternative perspective; thankfully we are seeing that more and more.

Finally, scientists are already pointing out that ‘experts’ need to communicate more with media houses so that misinformation about sharks is not shared (Muter *et al.*, 2013; Sabatier and Huveneers, 2018). Perhaps it is about time now to discuss governmental and private intervention with some form of disclaimers when videos, images and stories filled with misinformation about sharks are shared in the mass media. In the recent past, some social media groups in the USA have put disclaimers of ‘potentially misleading’ information, in case of ‘alternate facts’. Similarly, why should there not be disclaimers about the misinformation that is spread through this hyperreal image of sharks in the media? This image is potentially related to the devastating decline in numbers of this apex species, which in turn affects the global marine ecosystem. Besides providing a chance for direct exposure to sharks, cage diving can play a crucial role in altering the hyperreal shark image. This could be achieved by promoting the disintegration of the use of *Jaws* as a bait to attract people, and instead connecting people with sharks’ cultural relationship with us, and encouraging the production of images focusing on their beauty (Fig. 14.6) rather than the monster they have been perceived as for the last 40 years.



**Fig. 14.6.** The shark and the sun. Photo taken by author.

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# 15 Conclusion and the Way Forward

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© CAB International 2024. *Emerging Voices for Animals in Tourism* (eds J. Hooper and C. Kline)

DOI: 10.1079/9781800625259.0015

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## **Abstract**

This concluding chapter will synthesize the research described in Chapters 2–14 of this volume, which collectively represent an important contribution to tourism research. After first making some general observations about animals in tourism, the chapter will go on to identify three distinct themes threaded through the previous 13 chapters. The final section will suggest how this emerging field of research might develop in the future by proposing a regenerative-tourism-based research agenda.

## **Introduction**

Research in tourism has increased in complexity and interdisciplinarity over the last few decades, giving rise to many sub-fields of study. These fields are typically gestated by a community of scholars with a passion for



the field and its importance. This volume represents such a field – animals and tourism – which began about a decade ago and is now gaining momentum and traction. Animal well-being, tourist behaviour, planetary health and the links between them are the focus of the *Emerging Voices for Animals in Tourism (EVAT)* community and this edited volume. Two passionate animal advocates and scholars, Carol Kline and Jes Hooper, created the EVAT community and this book to add new dimensions to our understanding of the animal–tourist nexus. The editors are to be congratulated for their vision in building the community of scholars, guiding their activities and editing this important book. They have encouraged and mentored researchers who may not otherwise publish in mainstream academic journals to contribute their work, adding new voices to an important debate.

The chapter authors unanimously voice a deep concern for animal well-being in tourism and have provided rigorous and insightful research in Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Brazil, Nepal, the USA, Hungary, the UK, Spain, India, Finland, Greece and the Czech Republic. Their topics are diverse and include studies on many species such as seagulls, white sharks, foxes, elephants, dogs, cats, jaguars, giant otters, rabbits and fighting animals such as cocks. They call for more ethical treatment of animals in touristic experiences, and give us different ways of thinking about actions and policies that might enhance the well-being for all creatures in tourism encounters.

The field was pioneered about 10 years ago by Fennell (2012), Carr and Broom (2018), Kline (2018) and others writing on animal rights in tourism. Their work on animal welfare and ethical treatment in touristic settings, regulation and certification of animal attractions, education and awareness of animal behaviour for tourists, and tourism's role in animal conservation have been foundational to the development of the field. Blending all the established voices for change (summarized by Winter (2020)) with the voices of these chapter authors will bring animal welfare more centrally into the tourism literature where it is needed.

Enhancing animal health and well-being globally and obliterating the abject cruelty of the past is critical to a healthy planet for the future. Animal welfare is crucial to building planetary sustainability. As species

decline, we all suffer, and the average 68% decline in animal population sizes from 1970 to 2016 is distressing (WWF, 2020). Our treatment of animals in tourism is also shocking with ‘more than 500,000 wild animals worldwide ... suffering for tourist entertainment’ (ABTA, 2013, p. 1). As the world strives for a more sustainable future, it is alarming that the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) barely mention animal well-being and human treatment of animals. In SDG 14 (Life below water) ocean acidification due to climate change on marine life is mentioned, and in SDG 15 (Life on land) the loss of biodiversity (40,000 species are at risk of becoming extinct) is the focal point. International tourism organizations have done a little better: the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) and United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) have both created animal welfare guidelines for tourism, however, their effectiveness is unclear and needs support from more tourism agencies and enterprises. Consequently, there is a need for louder voices supporting animal welfare in tourism operations and in tourism research.

The next section will weave together the research described in Chapters 2–14 of this volume, and organize them into three themes. The first theme covers the topic of animals as stakeholders in tourism with a discussion of the various types of animals, their characteristics and how these affect their treatment in tourism. The second theme integrates the work of the chapter authors on different places where animals interact with tourists and how they may be designed for animal welfare. The third theme examines tourist behaviour when interacting with animals and ways in which it can be modified to be more responsible and caring.

## **Themes**

### **Animals as stakeholders**

Animals are important stakeholders in the quest for planetary balance and sustainable futures, and yet we live in an anthropocentric rather than bio-centric world. In Chapter 9, Hill reminded us that ‘tourism

predominantly prioritizes the human and pays little attention to other-than-human animals beyond how they serve or affect tourist experience'. Various authors discussed the need to transform this mindset by improving animals' autonomy, their degree of agency, and their right to exist in a diversity of contexts and places. Their research includes various different animal types which are summarized below.

Animals in the *wild* are a main motivator for tourism and authors discuss various species such as elephants (Chapters 5 and 6), jaguars, anteaters, foxes and otters (Chapter 8), red foxes (Chapter 11) and sharks (Chapter 14). They have the most autonomy and agency in the wild, although some may find themselves in captivity.

*Captive* animals (in zoos etc.) have the least agency and autonomy and their existence and welfare depend heavily on the values of the humans operating the facility and the nature of the interaction with tourists. Sanctuaries and their role in animal welfare by rehoming animals are a common theme of the book (Chapters 4, 5, 6, 13) and authors discuss their responsible management.

*Stray* animals such as cats (Chapter 9) often found in tourist destinations together with *feral* animals such as rabbits or seagulls (Chapters 2 and 7) and *rescue* or *homeless* animals such as dogs (Chapters 4 and 10) are explored in different locations. Authors ask whether such animals should have autonomy and agency and even the right to exist as they can be a nuisance in tourist destinations. Authors also question to what extent tourists or tourist enterprises (hotels or restaurants) should encourage, discourage or take responsibility for them, and whether standards are needed. Another category is *familiar* or *companion* animals which comfortably coexist with humans (Chapters 4 and 10) and tend to have more dependency and less agency. This category overlaps with *domesticated* animals which may be self-domesticated (approaching people for survival) or those actively domesticated by humans (Chapter 4).

Yet another category is *working* animals including those at festivals, shows and circuses, and animals used for transportation. They receive training and food for their efforts and have much less agency and autonomy. An extreme and disturbing example of the working animal category are fighting animals that are used for tourist spectacles (Chapter

3). Other types of working animals in tourism are found at festivals, shows sporting events and circuses (e.g. horses). They are not given much attention in this volume and are ripe for more research to determine ethical behaviour in that context.

A separate category of special relevance to tourism are *emblematic* animals that are uniquely found in a particular destination. They are often associated with a destination's history or its cultural heritage, particularly indigenous cultures where animals are revered and integrated into community life. Examples discussed in this volume are reindeer in Finnish culture (Chapter 12), foxes in Japanese Shintoism (Chapter 11), dogs in Turkish culture (Chapter 10), and elephants in Thai and Indian cultures (Chapters 5 and 6). These animals are particularly sought after by tourists, making them more vulnerable and in need of ethical policies of care, including regenerating their habitats and regulating their interaction with tourists. They may even be rare or in danger of extinction such as the Hawaiian monk seal.

Animals have different natural tendencies related to when and how they interact with humans. Crossley (Chapter 11) stresses the importance of knowing whether an animal's natural tendency is to be solitary with full agency and autonomy, or more social and dependent. While it varies with species, she shows that foxes in Japan previously considered solitary, actually are social animals. Meanwhile, Baptistella (Chapter 8) concluded that in Brazil 'wild animals understand that they need to be submissive in order to survive in a human-controlled society'. Both Nyman (Chapter 12) and Barna (Chapter 10) addressed the issue of animals as intentional and unintentional travel companions. Further scientific research to determine healthy levels of interaction for all animals is important as we explore the sustainable interactions of animals and tourists.

### **Settings and places of interaction**

Place is a central organizing element in regenerative tourism thought and animals are important stakeholders that co-create a tourism place (Bellato *et al.*, 2022). Barna (Chapter 10) suggested that 'places have a

multispecies meaning' and animals can change the human experience of a place or setting in complex ways. The management of settings where tourists and animals come together depends on the type of animal, tourists' motivations and the nature of the interaction. Tourist–animal interactions are not always sought-after by tourists: they may be unwanted or met with indifference. This section examines the authors' conclusions on tourist behaviour with animals in different settings.

Extant work by Cohen (2009) offered a four-way classification of such settings: (i) fully natural; (ii) semi-natural; (iii) semi-contrived; and (iv) fully contrived. Building on that classification, this volume's authors covered a more specific array of settings including:

- wildlife and ecotourism settings;
- open public areas such as seaside resorts, tourist neighborhoods or hiking trails;
- visitor attractions such as sporting events; and
- captive areas such as zoos, sanctuaries, shelters and rehoming locations.

It also covers the issue of feeding animals which can occur in all settings.

Observing animals in *fully natural or wild spaces* is a strong tourist motivator. World Animal Protection International estimated that 82% of travellers prefer to see animals in the wild, and 76% think profit should not be made if wild animals suffer (World Animal Protection International, 2023). However, complex issues arise when observing animals in the wild. Authors in this volume questioned whether the often-recommended observation without contact or coercion is actually free of abuse. When observation is manipulated by attempted or actual feeding or petting, negative impacts can ensue. Safaris, birding trips, dolphin or whale watching, shark cage diving, or general wildlife spotting can provide tourists with a sense of wonder even though there is no interaction with the animals (Sadashige, Chapter 5). While noting that tourists may be disappointed when animals are not sighted, Baptistella (Chapter 8) suggested that even though feeding may seem to be compassionate, it changes animal behaviours making them more

submissive to humans. This is echoed by Barna (Chapter 10) who noted that contact with humans can cause dogs to become dependent and therefore vulnerable.

When the setting is visitor-frequented *open public spaces*, different issues emerge. Public open spaces studied in this volume include hiking trails in Turkey where dogs roam, Spanish tourist resorts where many cats exist, and British coastal towns where seagulls live. In each of these cases the tourists were not seeking to interact with the animals – in fact they may even detract from their experience. Dogs in Turkey attaching themselves uninvited and voluntarily to day-hikers create difficult emotional bonds that have to be broken at the end of the day. Hill (Chapter 9) studied free-roaming cats coexisting with humans in Spanish resort areas and found they generated positive, negative and indifferent responses from visitors. Tully and Carr (Chapter 7) examined the coexistence of tourists and seagulls in the British coastal town of Scarborough. They found that local media seem to question the seagulls' animal sentience and their right to exist, and local councils attempted to reduce their populations. Usui *et al.* (Chapter 2) studied open spaces in an island off Hiroshima, Japan where tourists actively seek to feed feral rabbits for their own enjoyment.

*Hotels and other tourist facilities* in public spaces may attract stray or wild animals due to intentional or unintentional feeding (e.g. seagulls eating fish and chips; cats or dogs rummaging through trash cans). Research that is based on the animals' welfare is needed, to investigate whether this activity should be regulated to discourage animals being used for tourists' benefit. In summary, issues that arise in open spaces in tourist destinations are: (i) the agency or right to exist of the animals; (ii) whether feeding and other interactions are appropriate; (iii) what kind of regulations are needed for the well-being of both animals and tourists; and (iv) what are the appropriate sizes of animal populations.

Research on animals in various kinds of *captivity* are frequently reported in this volume (Chapters 5, 6, 13). At the mercy of their captors and often living unnatural lives for the enjoyment of tourists and the bottom line of operators, they are indeed deserving of more research and attention to enhance their well-being. Ideally when in captivity, animals should be protected and conserved under conditions that will regenerate

individual animals and whole species. The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) has accreditation standards to assist with care and ethics in zoos and aquariums. Zoo design and the design of spaces and enclosures is discussed by numerous chapter authors. In Chapter 11, Crossley investigated the issue of solitary or open cages for foxes, and Sadashige and Szydlowski studied the responsible management of tourist interactions in elephant sanctuaries such as hands-off policies (Chapters 5 and 6). Sanctuaries, rescue homes and rehoming facilities, if managed well, can be important regenerative places for animals and tourism, however, more understanding of visitor motivation and animal handling at sanctuaries is needed. Aich's study of sharks (Chapter 14) where the tourist viewed the shark in the wild from a cage may be a model for other species.

Only one author in this volume, Velenska (Chapter 3) discussed animals in *festivals or sporting events*. She focused on animals used in fighting events attended by tourists, representing the most abject cruelty of all. Animals engaged in this way either lose their lives in painful ways or are severely injured. She decried the argument made by proponents of these events that they are necessary as part of cultural traditions. They certainly are not in line with a regenerative model of the world. Animals used in less aggressive events such as festivals, shows, circuses and other attractions may not suffer the same violence as fighting animals, however, they represent a significant portion of maltreated animals in tourism. Their treatment is highly dependent on the morals and missions of their owners, and much more research is needed here.

*Animal feeding* is discussed in various chapters and is an issue in all kinds of settings. It is a common way for tourists to interact and develop emotional connections with animals thereby creating visitor satisfaction and providing tourists with a way to express altruistic values such as kindness and compassion. Usui *et al.* (Chapter 2) found, however, that tourists' desire to feed rabbits was mostly selfish and not altruistic at all. In the wild, feeding is often structured and managed by tour guides or rangers whose knowledge of correct foods and feeding habits disturb animal populations less than when tourists feed unsupervised. If unstructured and unmanaged, feeding can be detrimental and manipulative (Chapter 8) as it is used to attract and photograph animals.

## **Tourist behaviour and animal welfare**

Despite evidence that more tourists are seeking sustainable and responsible experiences in general, 110 million people still visit cruel wildlife attractions annually, either independently or through tour operators or travel agents (ABTA, 2013). This section synthesizes the authors' concerns about visitor behaviour with animals and how to improve it. The role of education and information is critical in informing tourists of correct behaviour. That private travel firms, tour operators and international organizations can play a role in influencing tourism behaviour is also covered.

Whether tourists really understand the level of cruelty or can judge what is best for the animals is raised by a number of authors including Baptistella and Crossley (Chapters 8 and 11, respectively). Fennell and Sheppard (2021, p. 323) identified the need for 'a robust set of criteria by which non-expert tourists' can determine the treatment of animals at an attraction. They call it a 'Scales of Justice Framework' which could contribute significantly to making tourist choices more responsible. Due to lack of knowledge, tourists often default to workers/staff at zoos or guides and rangers in wildlife tourist attractions (Fennell *et al.*, 2023). Tourists may not realize that their desires for intimacy with animals often conflict with the animals' welfare. Even if they do, there is a danger that some tourists set aside moral decisions when vacationing. Yet others have richly satisfying experiences with animals by combining altruism with tourism as described by Sadashige (Chapter 5). More research and action to regulate, coerce or nudge responsible tourist behaviour with animals is needed.

Altruism in tourism has led to the growing trend of voluntourism, and many volunteer travellers are animal lovers. Schuurman (Chapter 4) showed the power of volunteer networks which care for and rehome dogs from Southern and Eastern Europe to Northern Europe. This model could be replicated with other species in other locations but requires the commitment of many volunteers to make it successful. Women make up the majority of volunteer tourists and they predominantly constitute the voluntourists caring for animals according to Sadashige (Chapter 5). The intersection of animal welfare and voluntourism is a fruitful area for



research and the design of more trips involving voluntary contributions to animals are needed.

The need for more education and increased awareness about animal situations in tourism is covered by a number of authors. The key to becoming a responsible tourist according to Szydlowski (Chapter 6) in her study of elephants is 'educating oneself on the living conditions of animals in tourism ... and how tourism influences health, management and financial impacts'. She included the well-being of the animal carer as equally important as the well-being of the animal. The role of media and messaging to tourists is discussed by a few authors. Doodson *et al.* (Chapter 13) criticized the way that zoos design and message their visitor–animal interactions. They warned that 'Meet and Greet' experiences often prioritize entertainment over education and as a result provide misinformation and irresponsible messages to the public. Baptistella (Chapter 8) referred to 'mediated worldliness' to describe the impact of TV and other media on how tourists wish to interact with animals. It often portrays unrealistic close-ups that may not be appropriate for the animals and yet are desired by tourists. She coins a new term 'petification' to describe tourists' desire to engage with animals as if they are pets, which is not usually in the animals' best interests. How the media represents animals is also covered by Aich (Chapter 14) who advocated for 'experts' to communicate with media houses to avoid misinformation about animals, and for the focus to be on the beauty of sharks rather than their aggressiveness. Tully and Carr (Chapter 7) similarly reported the negative effects of media on seagulls by portraying them as a nuisance, dirty and frightening, and the need for a more positive approach. In a world of social media, these messages and tourist reviews and statements of satisfaction can influence how animals are managed. In this context the role of information technology, social media and artificial intelligence in animal welfare is ripe for study.

This volume's authors only lightly touch on the responsibility of *travel firms* to reduce animal cruelty and enhance their welfare and conservation, yet they can have a huge influence on visitor choices. Change is urgently needed to encourage these stakeholders to take action. A few initiatives are in place. For example, the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) advises on best practices for animals in

tourism, such as: (i) promoting venues to become observation only; (ii) increasing the supply of truly ethical, high-welfare wildlife venues; (iii) working on industry standards and government legislation to protect wild animals; and (iv) phasing out cruel wildlife entertainment practices (ABTA, 2013). Wild Welfare is a charity working to end suffering of captive wildlife through education and legislation. A handful of tour operators have made animal welfare part of their mission including:

- Intrepid Travel who have created an Animal Welfare Policy Toolkit with full details for practices including prohibiting elephant riding, captive wildlife interactions and animal performances; and
- G Adventures who promote responsible wildlife encounters and discourages activities that exploit or harm animals.

Despite these initiatives a more universal effort by travel firms and researchers is needed to facilitate the value shift from profit to compassion.

## **A Regenerative Research Agenda for the Future**

The excellent contributions of this volume have not only improved our understanding of animal welfare in tourism, they have prepared a fertile ground to extend that understanding to encompass *regenerative* thought and principles. A research agenda for the future can help design regenerative systems where the interdependence and interconnectedness of non-human and human stakeholders is honoured. In this way regenerative tourism policies can ensure that animals thrive in the long term. Placing animal stakeholders front and centre in research about tourism and planetary futures blends well with the regenerative tourism mindset. Regenerative tourism is holistic and sees ‘tourism as a subsystem of a larger system where collaboration with nature is central’ (Bellato *et al.*, 2022, p. 17). The growing debate on regenerative tourism, while implicitly including the long-term well-being of the animal kingdom, lacks explicit research on the topic. Therefore, this section will delineate the various principles of regenerative tourism and suggest

topics that animal tourism researchers might explore. The principles are: (i) a shift in values; (ii) the creation of networks and collaborations; (iii) place-based and community-based action; (iv) transformed tourist behaviour; and (v) learning from living systems models.

### **Value shift**

Scholars of regenerative tourism stress the need for a mindset or value shift of all stakeholders to transform tourism to become regenerative (Bellato *et al.*, 2022; Dredge, 2022; Sheldon, 2022). Values must evolve from a 'me' focus to a 'we' focus thereby showing empathy for all human and non-human creatures. Regenerative tourism requires a shift from greed to generosity, from competition to collaboration, from profit to compassion, and from commoditization to care (Sheldon, 2021). The commoditization of creatures for tourism must become a thing of the past. Research into this value shift for tourists, operators and destination managers is sorely needed. Voluntary methods of value change are preferable, but the effectiveness of coercion or nudging, or the use of regulation by local or national governments, are important to investigate. This value change includes the consumption of animals for food. While there are increasing numbers of vegetarians and vegans globally, the demand for meat worldwide is growing (Statistica, 2023). More research is needed on strategies to reduce meat consumption in tourism to build on the findings of Kline's (2018) landmark book *Animals, Food, and Tourism*.

### **Networks and collaborative action**

The development of networks and collaborative action is another key principle of regenerative tourism. As Baptistella says in Chapter 8, this volume, 'we should consider evolution as a codependent web of species'. Methods of collaboration between multiple stakeholders in a nested adaptive system for animal well-being is an important research topic. This includes identifying and transforming the nodes and branches of the

web for animal well-being in a particular touristic location. Community, animal populations, attraction managers, travellers, governments, tour companies and animal scientists are all part of the web and can work together for regenerative stewardship. Collaboration based on scientific knowledge can bind communities in a reciprocal relationship with their land and animals (Jamal and Stronza, 2009).

### **Place-based and community-based tourism**

Regenerative tourism practices are always place based (i.e. the issues, interconnections and relationships in a place are understood) and involve the community from the bottom up (Dredge, 2022). Balancing the benefits to local communities through animal conservation efforts while at the same time protecting wildlife and other species is challenging. Research is needed on how to engage the community and local organizations in animal welfare decisions in their area, and how to design settings and spaces for healthy tourist–animal encounters. The regenerative paradigm recognizes the economic power of tourism and considers nature and communities as equal partners in creating a flourishing local economy (Ateljevic and Sheldon, 2022). It requires that tourist firms move away from neo-liberal, short-term profit focus and instead embrace long-term decision making with stakeholder well-being as the goal. Business models must change and changemakers and social entrepreneurs who embody caring values should be encouraged to operate animal tourist attractions and tours (Sheldon and Daniele, 2017). A place-based research agenda must include the effects of climate change on animals and their habitats. Fires and droughts around the world are diminishing wildlife populations or forcing them into cities and tourist destinations. Research into tourism as a proactive tool to help save animal populations from the ravages of climate change is essential.

### **Responsible tourist behaviour**

Influencing tourists' behaviour to support animal regeneration is another part of the regenerative tourism model. Designing experiences that bring both transformation to the visitor and regeneration to the animal populations are needed (Sheldon, 2020). The creation of 'ambassadors' for animal welfare recommended by Sadashige (Chapter 5, this volume) could raise the positive profile of animals in tourism. Close encounters between tourists and animals may not be the most valuable type of interaction for species preservation. Baptistella (Chapter 8) suggested a model more in line with regenerative principles; one where animals and humans walk together with justice and dignity. She suggests that:

we build a future where the tourists are not so eager to interact and be so close to the animals:  
a future where tourism develops into an even more ethically oriented economic chain,  
providing entertainment that respects animal interests in all dimensions.

(Baptistella, Chapter 8, this volume)

Other authors recommend studying how storytelling and narratives can bring animals more fully into the tourist gaze. These are a few of ideas related to changing visitor behaviour that animal researchers could explore.

## **Living systems**

Living systems are a source of inspiration and knowledge for regenerative tourism (Mang and Reed, 2012; Bellato *et al.*, 2022). Regeneration puts life and connection at the centre of all decision making. The living systems of nature can inform the human system and the design of our relationship with animals. For example, living systems are self-organizing, leading to the question: What does self-organization mean in the context of animal tourism systems? We have much to learn from the animal kingdom, and perhaps this is the most powerful way that animal tourism research can contribute to regenerative tourism research. By examining living animal systems and their natural ways of being, patterns to inform humans' search for a regenerative future can emerge.

## Summary

In summary, there are many opportunities for the ‘turn’ in animal research to contribute to regenerative tourism research. In fact, the very theme of this book – *Emerging Voices for Animals in Tourism* – captures an essential principle in all regenerative systems. New directions, ideas and creations emerge spontaneously from the ground up in regenerative systems. This book supports these new directions in the sections that the volume is arranged in: (i) Emerging Motivations; (ii) Emerging Narratives; (iii) Emerging Cultures; and (iv) Emerging Reflections. Each of these sections has provided new knowledge in animal tourism that is foundational for future research. Because regeneration occurs mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually, culturally, socially, environmentally and economically (Bellato *et al.*, 2022) researchers from diverse disciplines will need to collaborate to lead this new research agenda forward. Crossley (Chapter 11, this volume) also calls for a ‘taxonomic, epistemological and methodological broadening of animal-related tourism research’. As researchers from different disciplines collaborate, it is hoped they will create knowledge to support mutually beneficial animal–human encounters in tourism focused on replenishing animal species and truly regenerating tourism destinations and our planet. This is a truly worthwhile goal and this volume has brought us far along that path.

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# **At the End ...**

**Gordon Meade**

We are branded.  
We are numbered.  
We are barcodes.  
We are tags.

We are shackled.  
We are prodded.  
We are driven.  
We are dragged.

We are slashed.  
We are clubbed.  
We are bludgeoned.  
We are stunned.

We are skinned.  
We are gutted.  
We are drawn.  
We are hung.





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# Emerging Voices for Animals in Tourism

Edited by Jes Hooper and Carol Kline

While the study of animal–human interactions within the context of tourism has been explored in a large variety of diverse ways within the last decade, the discourse remains divided between traditional tourism academia and outside disciplines ‘looking in’. Tourism academia has borrowed philosophical, ethical, gender studies, sociological, ecological conservation, and economic lenses to explore animals in tourism, however collaboration with authors external to tourism studies remains limited.

This edited volume strengthens the bridge between tourism academia and other disciplines by highlighting the fresh perspectives, emerging methodologies and innovative interdisciplinary conventions at the forefront of animals in tourism research, whilst critically working towards more ethical human–animal interactions within the tourism and leisure space. Split into four parts ‘emerging motivations’, ‘emerging cultures’, ‘emerging narratives’, and ‘emerging reflections’, this book offers readers a rich text grounded in progressive scholarly praxis including:

- Research focussed on a wide range of animal taxa, geographic locations, and touristic contexts to help move the conversation toward multi-faceted solutions.
- An eclectic selection of methodological approaches from multispecies ethnography to storytelling, literary and media analyses and participant survey that showcases the emerging interdisciplinary practices.
- Representation of emerging voices from various fields and disciplines around the world.

This unique text will be widely applicable to scholars working towards equitable human–animal interactions within tourism.



## **Fig. 9.6. Long Description**

The data are as follows in percent. All cat reviews: Positive, 61; negative, 23; and neutral, 6. Food and drink for n equals 61: Positive, 79; negative, 10; and neutral, 11. Hotels for n equals 36: Positive, 39; negative, 44; and neutral, 17.

Navigate back to the figure.