Flagships or Battleships: deconstructing the relationship between conflicts “involving” wildlife and species used as conservation flagships.

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Paper Outline

1. Research Questions
2. What are Flagship Species
3. Summary of Flagship-Conflict Relationship
4. Flagships as Symbols
5. Conclusions & Conservation Implications
Central Questions:

1. Does the flagship species approach invariably encourage social conflict with, and/or about species used as conservation flagships? If, yes:

2. Why does this relationship exist? and,

3. Is greater attention needed in flagship development and deployment to thwart such conflicts?
Conflict Definition:

We define conflicts broadly, and include what is traditionally classified as human-animal conflict (e.g. crop depredation), in addition to conflicts between humans about wildlife and their habitats.
What is a flagship species?

Species selected to act as an ambassador, icon or symbol...

for a habitat, conservation issue, or other environmental campaigns.

www.traveladventures.org/continents/asia/giant-panda08
http://wallpaper.wallpedia.org/15__African_Elephant.htm
http://www.firstpeople.us/pictures/wolves/1024x768/Snarling-Wolf-Montana
Why are flagship species important?

By focusing on, and achieving conservation of the flagship, the status of many other species which share its habitat may also be improved. For this reason some scholars believe that nature conservation is tied to the fate of particular charismatic species.
Flagships are developed for their potential positive influence on conservation behavior.
Flagships and Conflict

1) Animal behavior (foraging, space, attacks etc.) – many predate flagship designation.

2) Rising population numbers increases the frequency of unfavorable interactions.

3) Conservation selects large “charismatic” animals and/or those with large habitat requirements.

4) Social marketing increases the social visibility of animals and their behavior.

5) Conservation education creates disparate value-orientations towards wildlife.

6) Animals are mobilized as flagships in spaces of social conflict/issue politics.
Flagships and Conflict

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6) Animals are mobilized flagships in spaces of social conflict/issue politics – Symbols and Symbolism.
Symbols

- Symbols are things that stand in for other things.

- Flagships are symbols!

- The concept of symbol is neither clearly defined nor its relationship and significance to the flagship species approach well explained.
Symbols

- Symbols are an important aspect of “symbolic culture.”
- Humans think and communicate through signs and symbols.

**Sign**
Everyday cultural communication conveying conventional meanings without emotional involvement.

**Symbol**
Emotionally loaded and connected with ideas...which are frequently the most difficult to communicate and understand.

(Mach 1993)
Symbols

- Symbolic meaning is emotional and relatively arbitrary.

- “Arbitrariness” – the same symbol can represent multiple ideas, emotions and concepts, and the specific meaning will depend on the context within which the symbol is deployed.

- Symbols are vital aspects of social conflicts/politics.

- Symbols are effective ways of quickly communicating complex concepts, messages, histories, identities, values etc. 

(Mach 1993)
The Kishenganga dam project in Kashmir increases India-Pakistan Tension

Territorial dispute over Senkakus (Japan) and Diaoyu (China) island

Grey Wolf reintroduction dispute between ‘wise use’ groups and conservationists

Spotted Owl dispute between the timber industry and conservationists

The same symbol can represent multiple ideas, emotions and concepts
GLOBAL ACTION TO SAVE THE ARCTIC
Whose Flagship?

- Frequently deployed within volatile combinations of:
  1. completion for resources,
  2. unresolved grievances,
  3. territorial disputes,
  4. shifting balances of power that challenge economic interests, identities, social prestige and influence.

Habitat Destruction

Social Stresses and Marginalization
No “group” has exclusive rights to any symbol.

Different groups will appropriate the symbolic power of flagships for their own political interests (Frazier 2005).

Inordinate attention has been paid to the rare occurrences of open revolt, and too little to ordinary, everyday forms of resistance and their symbolic and ideological underpinnings. 

Flagship of what?

- The means by which the disenfranchised voice their dissatisfaction about their social environments/conditions.
- Flagships = threats, control and relative deprivation.
- This symbolism may have direct unintended consequences for the flagships species themselves.

Congoles rebels kill Mountain Gorillas.

Masai kill lion because of grievances
Conclusions and conservation implications:

- The flagships species approach can facilitate social conflicts by various mechanisms.
- Their role as key/dominant symbols make them particularly effective in human-human conflict systems.
- Flagships will only be efficiently deployed when conservation understands their emotional and “arbitrary” symbolic characteristics in local cultures.
- Proactively recognizing what flagships mean to key stakeholders will be fundamental to managing conflict.
- We are motivated by the need to further incorporate a body of research from political science and sociology into how we understand how and why flagships work.