Tourism, Conservation & Crime

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What is wildlife tourism?

- Tourism undertaken to view and/or encounter wildlife

- Commonly classified along three dimensions
  1. Captive, semi-captive, or wild
  2. Continuum between conservation and entertainment
  3. Consumptive or non-consumptive

- Heterogeneous and context-specific both in terms of environmental impacts and worldviews of visitors

Benefits of wildlife tourism

- Increasing conservation awareness of visitors (in certain circumstances)
- Providing opportunities for wildlife research, breeding and reintroduction
- Increasing socioeconomic value of wildlife
- Encouraging local communities to conserve wildlife

Fennell (2012): Tourism and animal ethics
Walpole and Leader-Williams (2002): Tourism and flagship species in conservation
Risks of wildlife tourism

- Ideological effects
- Alteration of animals’ natural behaviors (through avoidance, attraction, or habituation)
- Growth of tourist-related infrastructure
- Depletion of natural resources
- Increased demand for illegal wildlife products*

Fennell (2012): Tourism and animal ethics
Newsome, Dowling & Moore (2005): Wildlife tourism
Tourism, crime & conservation

- Why examine this?
  - Tourists venture into unfamiliar social and legal territory
  - What constitutes a crime and a sanction is dependent upon the social & cultural context
  - Research on tourists’ environmental impacts are focused on legal (although undesirable) behavior

- Conservation criminology
  - Emerged from work on coupled human and natural systems
  - Integrates fields of natural resources, criminology, and risk and decision sciences

Crime & elephant tourism in Thailand

- Tourists are a major contributor to Thailand’s ivory trade, one of the largest in the world.

- Mixture of legal and illegal markets: ivory from captive elephants is legal.

- Ivory and other elephant products available for sale at some elephant shows.

Stiles & Martin (2002): The trade in African and Asian ivory in South and South East Asia
Doak for TRAFFIC International (2014): Polishing off the ivory: Surveys of Thailand’s ivory market
Crime & elephant tourism in Thailand

- Wild elephants illegally smuggled from Myanmar to meet tourist demand in Thailand
  - Mortality of non-target elephants
  - Corrupt and easily manipulated certification process

- Domestic elephants are classified as livestock and have no legal protections
  - Subject to phajaan & severe abuse

Taylor (2004): The underworld of ivory
Nijman for TRAFFIC International (2014): An Assessment of the live elephant trade in Thailand
Conservation criminology and wildlife tourism

- Natural resources: how does tourism influence wildlife physiology, behavior, population levels, reproduction, and species composition?

- Criminology: what do tourists perceive as the sanctions for wildlife crime? How do sanctions and deterrence function in a cross-cultural context? How do legal and illegal markets intersect?

- Risk and decision science: what do tourists see as the risks associated with their choices? What do tourists perceive as the risks to wildlife? What objective risks do tourist practices pose?
Wildlife tourism policy

- Potential policy instruments
  - Motivational tools (education/awards)
  - Self-regulatory mechanisms (guidelines/eco-labeling)
  - Economic tools (fees/incentives)
  - Regulatory instruments (legislation/enforcement)

- Negative environmental consequences of a tourism practice may be due to lack of enforcement, market forces, consumer behavior (or a combination)
  - A successful policy matches sources of objective and subjective risk

Newsome, Dowling & Moore (2005): Wildlife tourism
Thank you

- Department of Sociology and Animal Studies Program, Michigan State University
- Save Elephant Foundation, Chiang Mai, Thailand