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Towards a Decommodified Wildlife Tourism: Why Market Environmentalism Is Not Enough for Conservation

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Abstract: Wildlife tourism is frequently touted as a solution to the problems of increased poaching, habitat destruction, and species extinction. When wildlife is able to pay for its right to survive through attracting tourists, there is an incentive to conserve wildlife populations and the habitats that support them. However, numerous reports in recent years have drawn attention to the potential negative impacts of wildlife tourism attractions. This paper examines whether market environmentalism diminishes the potential of wildlife tourism to contribute to conservation and the welfare of individual animals. Market environmentalism commodifies the animals involved in wildlife tourism attractions and fuels an anthropocentric worldview where animals are resources to be used by humans for entertainment or economic gain, potentially presenting a threat to long-term conservation. Instead, we call for a decommodified experience of wildlife tourism based on more than just economic value.

Keywords: wildlife tourism; market environmentalism; conservation; commodification

1. Introduction

Wildlife tourism can be understood as a form of tourism that is based on interactions between tourists and non-domesticated animals [1]. Tourism is a major driver of economic growth. In 2017, it accounted for over 10% of global gross domestic product (GDP), and provided 1 in 10 jobs in the global economy [2]. Tourism is the third largest worldwide export category and it is estimated that by 2030 international tourist arrivals will hit 1.8 billion [3]. In 1992, it was estimated that wildlife tourism accounted for 20–40% of global tourism [4]. While there are no recent reliable estimates of the global economic impact of wildlife tourism, it is clearly a lucrative industry with high levels of participation. In 2008, 13 million people took part in whale watching, generating an expenditure of \$2.1 billion [5]. Wildlife tourism accounts for an estimated 12 million trips annually, and this is growing at a rate of 10% per year [6].

Wildlife tourism also plays an important role in developing countries. In 2030, developing countries are expected to take over 57% of the market share of international tourist arrivals, amounting to over 1 billion visitors. Developing countries contain most of the world's biodiversity [7] and nature-based tourism is set to increase the most in these places. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) estimates that 14 African nations generate at least US\$168 million from tourists visiting protected areas, and it can be assumed that the actual figure is much higher [6]. Wildlife watching tours in Africa also make up 88% of tour operators' annual revenue [6].

Wildlife tourism is widely lauded as giving nature “the opportunity to earn its own right to survive” [8], where the economic benefits that wildlife tourism brings serve as an incentive for the conservation of wildlife and their habitats. In a world that is dominated by humans [9], there is

an imperative to protect what remains of biodiversity and to preserve animals and their habitats. Wildlife tourism has the potential to do this. However, recent research by the University of Oxford's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit (WildCRU) [10], the charity World Animal Protection (WAP) [11] have highlighted the ways that animals are being abused and exploited in various wildlife tourist attractions (WTAs). Concerns have also been raised about the negative impacts of attractions such as whale watching [12] and captive dolphin programs [13], just to name a few. This paper aims to examine the extent to which wildlife tourism is able to fulfill its potential for conservation when it is increasingly driven by the ideals of market environmentalism. Market environmentalism—also known as 'green capitalism' or 'environmental capitalism'—aims to protect the environment through markets, consumers, and corporations [14]. By pricing the environment correctly and creating monetized measures of environmental damage and health, we can better measure, offset, and minimize environmental damages, creating a win-win situation for both humans and the environment [15]. For the purposes of this paper, wildlife tourism will refer to non-consumptive forms that take place in both free-ranging and captive settings [1]. Non-consumptive wildlife tourism involves viewing or interacting with animals in natural or man-made environments, while consumptive wildlife tourism involves the deliberate killing of animals, usually in the form of hunting or fishing [1].

Much of the critiques of market environmentalism have focused on areas such as ecosystem services, or the commodification of other forms of nature like wetlands [16] or water [17]. This paper focuses on market environmentalism in wildlife tourism. By examining the dynamics of market environmentalism in wildlife tourism, we can understand how animals and animal encounters are commodified and subjected to market forces, and the effects that this has on welfare and conservation.

Following this introduction, this paper further discusses wildlife tourism, as well as the roles of non-human animals in tourism and society. It then expands on a theoretical framework that discusses market environmentalism, the commodification of nature, and Dunlap and Catton's human exemptionalism paradigm [18]. Following that, the impacts of wildlife tourism on animal welfare and conservation are examined. Finally, it reviews alternative, non-anthropocentric ethics that can provide us with a decommodified form of wildlife tourism.

2. Wildlife Tourism: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Wildlife tourism incentivizes the conservation of animals and their habitats through creating economic value from encountering animals. Revenue is created through the privatization of natural resources into goods that can be marketed to tourists, and this revenue can in turn be used to ensure the preservation of such resources. According to Curtin and Kragh [19], wildlife tourism has the potential to reconnect humans and nature, and allow for a deeper awareness and appreciation of the intrinsic value of nature. Oftentimes, wildlife tourism involves having to make trade-offs between factors such as impacts on animals, quality of the experience, conservation, and profitability [20].

2.1. *The Good*

There have been promising instances of wildlife tourism aiding conservation. Higginbottom, Northrope, and Green [21] identify four main positive effects of wildlife tourism: (1) financial contributions in the form of tickets, fees, or levies; (2) non-financial contributions, such as the monitoring of wildlife by operators; (3) increased socio-economic incentives for conservation; and (4) education of tourists about conservation or animal welfare. Ideally, WTAs should be able to positively impact both conservation and the welfare of animals. WTAs can positively impact conservation through direct actions such as providing funding for habitat management, taking anti-poaching measures, or through successful reintroduction of captive bred animals [10].

2.2. *The Bad*

WTAs can also be a cause for concern, even if they are not explicitly consumptive or exploitative in nature. Prior research has shown that the proximity of tourists to free-ranging animals can affect

their breeding, feeding, and foraging patterns [22]. Responses vary according to different animals, but human proximity can cause, among other things, increased stress and alertness, resulting in increased energy expenditure, which can affect breeding success or even survival [23]. Tourists also often engage in feeding animals, which, if unmanaged, can result in dependency or aggressive behavior [21]. WTAs can also indirectly affect animals through impacts on habitats such as littering, trampling of vegetation, or clearing of land for infrastructure to support tourism [23].

2.3. *The Ugly*

On the other end of the spectrum are WTAs that cause harm to both the animals involved and conservation efforts. WAP has released reports that detail how animals are used, abused and exploited in such WTAs [11,24,25]. Often, the animals involved are taken directly from the wild, kept in unsuitable conditions, and forced into interactions with tourists [24]. Examples would include interactions with tigers or ‘selfie safaris’ [25]. Animals can also serve as entertainment in circuses and shows, and are often subject to abuse during training and behind the scenes [24]. Finally, farms such as civet coffee farms or bear bile farms also negatively impact welfare and conservation [11].

2.4. *Tourism and Capitalism*

Wildlife tourism is frequently seen as a subset of nature-based tourism, which is usually associated with ecotourism [20]. With the growth of the environmental movement in the 1970s in the West, ecotourism also experienced an increase in popularity in the 1980s [12]. The United Nations General Assembly named 2002 the International Year of Ecotourism [26]. Since then, ecotourism has been hailed as a solution for both environmental degradation and sustainable development. In 2010, the UNWTO held World Tourism Day under the theme of Tourism and Biodiversity to underscore the importance of sustainable tourism to biodiversity protection [27]. 2017 was the International Year of Sustainable Tourism, described by the UNWTO Secretary-General as “a unique opportunity to advance the contribution of the tourism sector to the three pillars of sustainability—economic, social, and environmental” [28].

There are various definitions of ecotourism, with the International Ecotourism Society defining it as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people” [29]. However, in popular usage, the term ecotourism is usually conflated with most forms of nature-based tourism, including wildlife tourism [30].

Ecotourism today is thus seen to allow economic development, social inclusivity, and environmental protection. Higham and Neves [31] argue that ecotourism and wildlife tourism have been presented as ‘fixes’ to the many contradictions of capitalism. Ecotourism promises to contribute to the conservation of natural habitats, while contributing to the development of communities in the area. This thus presents a ‘fix’ for the second contradiction of capitalism, as described by James O’Connor [32], where the imperative for endless profit accumulation through production results in the degradation of the finite natural resource base that the production depends upon. Ecotourism also potentially provides a ‘social fix’ through the possibility of alleviating inequality and aiding development, while providing a ‘psychological fix’ by connecting humans with non-human natures [31] (p. 169). However, Fletcher and Neves [30] highlight how ecotourism itself is contradictory, since ecotourism attempts to overcome the contradictions of capitalism through the same processes that created them in the first place. Furthermore, they emphasize how ecotourism also creates more contradictions instead of resolving the earlier ones.

However, ecotourism and other nature-based tourism continue to be seen as vehicles for sustainable development, while also legitimizing capital accumulation [31]. Ecotourism thus “lies at the cutting edge of the commodification of natural resources around the globe” [31] (p. 166–167). The following section further explains the commodification of natural resources through market environmentalism.

3. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

3.1. Market Environmentalism

Market environmentalism comes in many forms, but the underlying assumption is that the environment can be saved through selling it. Although market environmentalism might seem like an oxymoron, the idea of a green economy has rapidly dominated discussions of the current environmental crisis. There is increasing widespread acceptance that in order to protect nature, the services and resources that nature provides should be priced, privatized, and traded in a global market [33]. By recognizing the ‘real price’ of natural resources, the best decisions for the long-term use of the environment can be reached [8].

Kenis and Lievens [34] have identified four basic ingredients of market environmentalism: firstly, the belief that the transition to sustainability will take place through the market, where existing markets are corrected or new markets are created, and tools such as taxes or labels steer consumers and companies towards making environmentally-friendly choices. The second ingredient is a belief that with ‘working’ markets, competition will drive the development of new technologies that will allow us to surpass the current crisis [34]. Thirdly, market environmentalism holds that companies have the power to change their practices to become more environmentally friendly [34]. The final ingredient, closely linked to the third, is that consumers can encourage companies to become more ‘green’ by choosing environmentally friendly products [34].

Similar arguments have been used to describe the potential that wildlife tourism has for the conservation of species and habitats. Putting a dollar value on animal encounters and experiences gives locals a strong economic incentive for protecting wildlife [35]. Wildlife tourism that is based around wildlife in a ‘wild’ setting, such as wildlife watching or even hunting is directly dependent on there being natural populations of wildlife. This creates an economic incentive for operators or those who benefit from the tourism to conserve wildlife and their habitats [1].

However, with market environmentalism inevitably comes the commodification of pieces of nature to be traded and sold in the global market. In wildlife tourism, interactions or encounters with wildlife also constitute commodities that can be marketed and sold. This commodification of nature subscribes to a worldview that can be termed as the human exemptionalist paradigm [18]. The following two sections discuss these dynamics.

3.2. Commodification

Capitalistic commodification can be understood as a process in which things (objects, creatures, ideas, etc.) are assigned an economic value and converted into goods for market exchange [36]. Important to the notion of commodification is the idea that these objects were not necessarily created for sale on the market—the commodity status of the object is not intrinsic, but has been assigned [37].

Leys and Harris-White [38] identify commodification as the dominant process since the mid-19th century that has transformed life in all societies. This stage of late capitalism is increasingly marked by the commodification of everything, as capitalism encroaches into ‘every nook and cranny of everyday, every-night life’ [39] (p. 151). Capitalist society places an imperative on the market, where what is valuable to the market becomes valuable to society, and anything that does not have a market value is dismissed [40]. Commodification thus leads to a re-evaluation of value—commodities come to be viewed in terms of their instrumental value, rather than whatever intrinsic value they might have previously possessed [41].

In wildlife tourism, animal encounters are brought into the marketplace of global tourism as products to be sold and consumed. According to Duffy and Moore [42], the global tourism industry allows for the spread and expansion of capitalist logic, since it allows new frontiers in nature to be targeted and opened up. Nature—and thus animals—are “drawn into the global economy where they enter the realm of commodities that are priced in monetary terms” [43] (p. 616). Tourism thus reconfigures nature in order to create economic value from the experience of encountering certain

landscapes or animals [43]. Büscher [44] suggests that the real source of value is not nature or animals, but the images, symbols, and meanings that these things represent, instead of what they are. This creates 'derivative nature', where the idealized values of nature are the focus, but the actual complex and contradictory reality of nature is alienated and forgotten [44].

3.3. The Human Exemptionalism Paradigm

The commodification of animals in wildlife tourism is fuelled by and fuels an anthropocentric worldview, which can be called the Human Exemptionalism Paradigm (HEP). First put forth in 1978 by Catton and Dunlap [45], the HEP was a worldview shared by most sociological theories at the time. In the HEP, humans are placed at the center of the natural world, where human ingenuity and technology allows humans to surpass the biophysical laws that hold other species in place, allowing the continued creation of opportunities for economic growth [45]. The HEP assumes that humans are able to control and use the environment, without regard for other inhabitants of the Earth [46]. This belief is evident in market environmentalism, where nature is valued based on its economic usefulness to humans.

In response to the HEP, Catton and Dunlap called for a paradigm shift to what they termed the New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) [45]. The NEP scale was also introduced in 1978 in order to determine the shifts in the consciousness of society as a whole [47]. In its most recent version, the NEP scale measured the recognition of the following facets: limits to growth, non-anthropocentrism, fragility of nature's balance, un-tenability of exemptionalism, and ecological crisis [48]. However, the NEP has struggled to take hold both in sociology and in society at large. The rise of different varieties of market environmentalism represents a new form of exemptionalism, where the nature of social relations remains the same but capitalism is able to adapt to environmental changes through technology and market fixes [49]. This thus allows for the use of animals in tourism as commodities for the profit and enjoyment of humans.

4. Humans and Non-Human Animals

This paper is concerned with wildlife tourism, but it is also necessary to highlight how the concept of 'wildlife' is one that has been problematized by scholars, especially when it is used to denote a nature that is separate from humans [50]. The categories of wild and domestic are not static and fixed, but are created by humans and contain within them numerous contradictions [51]. Non-human animals are part of human lives in a multitude of ways, from pets, to livestock, to strays, and to wildlife. Animals have been used by humans for centuries, whether in the form of food sources, laborers, companions, or products. For the vast majority of human history, animals were used or exchanged by humans for their use values. Animals or animal products were directly used to satisfy one's, or one's community's, needs [52]. However, with the increasing expansion of capitalism, and thus, commodification, the use value of animals decays [52]. Instead, animals are increasingly viewed in terms of their exchange value, with the goal of capital accumulation. Tom Ingold [53] argues that in hunter-gatherer societies the relationship between animals and humans was one based on trust and reciprocity, where humans were dependent on nature. However, with the coming of the modern era, a distinction between nature and society was created, where societies that were detached from nature were considered more civilized than those that were not [54]. Human and non-human animal relations thus came to be one of domination, where humans imposed their will on other animals [55]. Human-animal relations today are characterized by an ambivalence that arises from the contradictions in our relationships, where some animals are loved and cared for, whereas others are exploited and regarded as things [55]. Importantly, which category an animal falls into is dependent on humans and how they choose to impose meanings [56]. Thus, while individual animals may be able to resist the control that humans exercise over them, animals collectively cannot resist the human-animal relations of exploitation and oppression, fuelled by the current social and economic organization of neoliberal capitalism [57].

Today, the use of animals as a source of food in factory farms is the largest and most obvious result of this, with over 22 billion chickens, 1.5 billion cattle, and close to 1 billion pigs being produced worldwide in 2016 [58]. According to Gunderson [52], the shift from viewing animals in terms of exchange value rather than use value, and the accompanying imperative to increase profit margins has resulted in short, misery-filled lives for livestock animals, where efforts to increase profit margins result in stunted, deformed growth and inhumane treatment. This quest for profit has also extended towards wildlife tourism, where, as described above, wildlife tourism is increasingly advocated as a panacea for the contradictions of capitalism, but also serves to legitimize and promote capital accumulation [31].

It is important to point out here that not all forms of wildlife tourism are merely concerned with profit maximization, and not all wildlife tourists are self-serving individuals only seeking their own fulfillment and entertainment. Most wildlife tourists identify as animal lovers [59]. Fletcher and Neves [30] point out how many wildlife tourists seek one-on-one, almost spiritual experiences from whale watching, hoping to experience a connection with a non-human animal. Other tourists also engage in ‘volunteer tourism’, spending all or part of their holidays contributing to efforts in alleviating poverty, restoring environments or contributing to research efforts [60]. Similarly, there are WTAs that do not require the commodification of animal encounters. National parks and marine sanctuaries also make up a large proportion of wildlife tourism. The National Parks in the United States of America, for example, drew over 330 million visitors in 2017 [61]. Such forms of WTAs usually only charge entrance or parking fees, if any, and wildlife encounters that take place occur serendipitously, with minimal impact or control on wildlife. Thus, not all forms of wildlife tourism necessarily require the commodification of animals and animal encounters. However, the ideals of market environmentalism are increasingly being applied to wildlife tourism, and as the industry is set to rapidly expand, it is critical to examine the forms of wildlife tourism that do result in the commodification of animals and animal encounters.

5. Commodification and the Human Exemptionalism Paradigm in WTAs

This section examines some common forms of WTAs to better understand how the commodification of animal encounters can adversely affect the animals involved, as well as how animals are viewed as sources of entertainment, further entrenching the HEP.

5.1. Wildlife Watching

Wildlife watching can simply be understood as an activity that involves watching wildlife [62]. Some common forms include bird watching, trekking or safaris. The experience of encountering an animal in its natural habitat can have powerful effects. Curtin and Kragh [19] state that by observing animals in their natural environment, people are able to empathize with and care for animals. There have been several promising instances of wildlife watching aiding conservation. Nielsen and Spenceley [63] provide an account for how populations of mountain gorillas in Rwanda are growing at a rate of about 1.1%, in part due to tourism activities and research, while mountain gorilla groups that are not visited are doing less well.

However, wildlife watching is inevitably fraught with uncertainty and unpredictability, since it is difficult to completely control or predict the movements of free-ranging animals [64]. The commodification of animal encounters generates tensions between the tour providers and tourists, since tourists come with the expectation of seeing the animal(s) and have paid money to do so. In Margaryan and Wall-Reinius’ [65] study on wildlife watching tourism entrepreneurs in Sweden, tour operators experienced high amounts of pressure to meet tourists’ expectations of seeing an animal, even when disclaimers about the unpredictability of wildlife were used to mitigate such expectations [65]. Wildlife watching tour operators can circumvent such difficulties in two ways—habituation and attraction [64]. Animals can be said to be habituated when their initial disposition to flee from humans is replaced by tolerance, allowing the animals to be observed from a close distance [64]. However, habituation can also make animals more vulnerable to poaching.

Ménard et al. [66] found that populations of wild Barbary macaques in Morocco that were regularly visited and fed by tourists had fewer juveniles than those that were not regularly visited. The authors theorized that this was likely due to habituated macaques being less afraid of humans, thus making it easier for poachers to capture babies for the illegal pet trade [66].

Tour operators can also try to make animals more viewable by providing food and water to attract animals [64]. While this has been shown to create psychological, social, and economic benefits for the humans involved, feeding wildlife alters natural behavior, creates dependency, and increases health risks and aggressive behavior towards other animals and tourists [67]. While it is true that changes in animal behavior in response to humans are not always negative, there have been numerous studies that show how the proximity of humans to wildlife can create stress and anxiety. Meissner et al. [68] studied how tourism vessels affect the behavior of common dolphins in New Zealand, and found that vessel presence significantly affects the foraging behavior of the dolphins. Dolphins spent less time foraging during interactions and took a longer time to return to foraging when disrupted, which affects their feeding behavior. The presence of tourists can also affect the survival of juveniles. McClung et al. [69] found that the presence of tourists on the beaches of South Island, New Zealand, negatively impacted the foraging behavior of yellow-eyed penguins, causing the mean weight of fledglings at a beach heavily visited by tourists to be less than the fledglings at a beach with no tourists. Given that fledging weight is generally a predictor of survival, the presence of tourists might thus have long-term consequences for penguin populations [69].

5.2. Wildlife Interactions

Interactions between humans and non-captive animals can also negatively impact animal welfare in the long term and short term. In 2008, Semeniuk et al. [70] found that southern stingrays in ‘Stingray City Sandbar’ in the Cayman Islands who were frequently fed, touched, and held by tourists displayed sub-optimal health compared to non-tourist stingrays, due to overcrowded conditions, non-natural food, and higher injury rates. Another example of this is Amazon river dolphin tourism in Brazil, as documented by Alves et al. [21]. With the increase in tourism to riverside towns, several operators have created floating platforms that allow tourists to feed and swim with the dolphins. However, there is great potential for injury to both humans and animals, with observed instances of dolphins biting people, or people punching or hitting the dolphins. Furthermore, as the dolphins became accustomed to depending on humans for food, they became more aggressive towards people and to each other [22], and the dolphins at feeding or swimming sessions were often heavily scratched from fighting for fish [71]. In Shark Bay, Australia, the provisioning of fish to bottlenose dolphins resulted in increased mortality of dolphin calves compared to calves whose mothers were not provisioned [71]. Even after regulations were changed and the amount of food provided was lessened, mothers who were provisioned provided less care to their calves, resulting in the calves foraging more [71].

It cannot be denied that wildlife watching provides an alternative to other uses of land that are destructive in nature, such as mining and logging [1]. However, the commodification of animal encounters places value on the encounter, and not necessarily on the welfare of the animal or conservation in the long term. This thus creates the room for detrimental effects and the abuse and exploitation of animals.

5.3. Wildlife as Photo Props

Other forms of wildlife tourism serve to reinforce the view that animals are resources to be used by humans. Crossing the line from observing animals to interacting with them can often bring about negative consequences both for the welfare of individual animals and conservation [59]. A new worrying trend in wildlife tourism is the increase in wildlife selfies, where tourists take photos of themselves holding wild animals, to be posted on social media sites such as Instagram or Facebook [25]. This treats wild animals as photo props, to be exploited by tour operators and tourists alike for profit and as status symbols. Recent research by D’Cruze et al. [72] has revealed that wildlife-focused

activities in Amazonas, Brazil, allowed direct contact with animals 94% of the time. The use of animals as photo props for ‘wildlife selfies’ was particularly concerning, as researchers observed that animals involved—such as sloths, anacondas, and caimans—were poorly handled and subject to continual flash photography [72]. Research has shown that the capture, restraint, and repeated handling of animals in this manner induces fear and stress, causing physical and psychological damage [72]. Sloths are also much more vulnerable, since they are extremely fragile and repeated handling by tourists and handlers causes stress, anxiety, and fear [25]. Researchers estimated that sloths in such conditions do not live for more than six months [72].

Likewise, Osterberg and Nekaris [73] found that slow lorises used as photo props in Thailand frequently had their teeth clipped, greatly increasing the likelihood of death and making it impossible for rescued lorises to be returned to the wild. This also creates concern for conservation efforts as the captive animals are captured from the wild, often as babies. The photo prop trade, along with the illegal pet trade, has led to the decimation of wild populations [50,73]. Encounters with wild animals are thus commodified in the form of souvenir photographs.

Collard [50] highlights how such animals are turned into ‘lively commodities’, where their commodity status is dependent on them exhibiting signs of life, but at the same time the commodification process comes with the severing of the animal’s familial, social, and ecological relations, a process often marked by enormous violence. Thus, the use of animals in this way both negatively affects the welfare of individual animals and furthers the view of animals as being subordinate to humans.

5.4. Animal Shows

Animals are also used to provide entertainment for tourists. This can be in the form of animal shows, taking place in festivals, animal camps and even street sides, just to name a few locations, and often involve macaques, elephants, snakes or bears [11]. These shows are damaging to the animals in a number of ways. Firstly, outside of the shows, the conditions that the animals are kept in are often far from adequate. Macaques, highly social and intelligent animals in the wild, are either chained outside, or kept alone in barren cages [24]. Furthermore, in order for the animals to be able to perform in shows, they often have to undergo intense and often cruel training [24]. In an assessment of elephant, macaque and tiger populations used for tourism in Thailand, Schmidt-Burbach et al. [74] found that the majority of animals faced severely inadequate welfare conditions. The study found that in most venues animals were caged or chained for the majority of the time and not allowed direct social contact, resulting in behaviour such as pacing and self-mutilation. Only 10% of examined venues provided veterinary care for the animals [74].

Using animals as a form of entertainment also serves to reinforce animals as the ‘other’. Cohen [75] emphasises that the entertainment derived from these shows often comes making the animals simulate human activity, such as playing sports or riding a bicycle. However, the humour comes about not from appreciation of the animals, but rather because the animals do not ‘understand’ the games they seem to be playing; they merely “ape” humans [75] (p. 28). It is through emphasising the supposed gap between humans and animals that these shows entertain and amuse tourists.

5.5. Animals in Captive Sites

Zoos are perhaps the most ubiquitous form of wildlife tourism and the WTA that most people first encounter. One of the first roles played by zoos was to provide entertainment and leisure for visitors. While this is a role that continues today, many zoos have now shifted their focus to conservation, instead of just merely entertaining visitors [76]. Zoos and aquariums contribute to conservation first and foremost by inspiring and educating their visitors, thus fostering a love for animals. Zoos also aid conservation through captive breeding programs and research [77]. The standard of welfare in zoos varies greatly worldwide, with some zoos embracing enclosures with naturalistic designs that replicate the animal’s natural habitats. Other zoos, however, have concerning welfare standards. The practice of keeping captive animals for viewing raises many ethical considerations. Clubb and Mason [78] found

that certain species of wide-ranging carnivores such as tigers and polar bears fared poorly in zoos, displaying poor health, repetitive behavior and difficulties in breeding. The same holds true for captive cetaceans such as dolphins and killer whales, which have been observed to display stress-induced behavior in captivity [12]. Importantly, studies have shown that the motivations of visitors change when they visit captive animals as opposed to non-captive animals. Packer and Ballantyne [79] found that visitors viewed captive sites like zoos and aquariums as places for entertainment and leisure, whereas non-captive sites were seen as opportunities to learn about the natural world. Thus, while certain zoos can and do play an important role in conservation and education, it often comes at a cost to the welfare of individual animals, and serves to entrench the position of animals as being used for the entertainment of humans.

6. Towards a Decommodified Wildlife Tourism

Currently, commodification in certain forms of WTAs allows animals and animal encounters to be viewed as privately owned goods that can be marketed to tourists. Once animals are viewed as commodities to be used for the benefits of humans, their pain, suffering and loneliness no longer matters [80]. Thus, the best way forward, in our opinion, is to decommodify wildlife tourism. This would involve shifting the view of wildlife tourism from an experiential commodity that is exploited in the name of capital accumulation, to a decommodified experience where the intrinsic value of nature and animal lives are recognized and respected [81]. It would involve attentiveness to human-environmental relationships, as well as the well-being of both humans and non-humans [82].

There are various strands of thought that can guide the tourism industry towards a new relationship with animals. The Islamic ecological paradigm (IEP) [83] is a valuable framework that can shape how wildlife tourism relates to animals. According to the IEP, the relationship between human and animals is one of custodianship, not dominance. Although animals are considered to be blessings from God for the use of humans, they have the right to be protected and treated well, and these rights are precious and cannot be violated [83]. Wild animals should also be allowed to live their lives undisturbed by humans unless they pose a threat to human well-being [83]. This thus has implications for forms of wildlife tourism that are based on using animals for no reason other than the pleasure and entertainment of humans. Wildlife tourism according to the IEP would do away with forms of animal use that cause unnecessary pain or abuse, as well as those that restrict the freedom and autonomy of animals that are not domesticated. The IEP's principles for treatment of animals that are under human care are also important to consider in wildlife tourism, such as continuing to care for an animal when it is no longer economically useful, not overburdening animals, and putting the well-being of the animal first [83].

Another example of what human animal relations can look like is exemplified by the land ethic, which was developed by Aldo Leopold [84]. The land ethic calls for humans to treat each other and the land (plants, animals, waters, soils, etc.) with respect, for the mutual benefit of all. Leopold believed that nature had intrinsic value in and of itself, and that it was important for people to form close personal connections to nature so that they would develop an ethic of care [84]. Within wildlife tourism, this can come in the form of encouraging values such as stewardship, responsibility, and trust in local communities. Community-based natural resources management programs, such as the Northern Rangelands Trust in Kenya, have been successful in alleviating poverty and strengthening conservation efforts [85]. In Laguna San Ignacio, whale watching is a thriving industry, but the community has agreed to limit the number of boats allowed at once, and boats are not allowed to chase the whales. Such programs depend on tourism revenue for funding and benefits, but they also depend on making sure that local communities have a stake in caring for animals [86].

Animal rights are also central to decommodified wildlife tourism. The animal rights philosopher Tom Regan [80], called for the recognition that animals have inherent value. Animals, as conscious, living creatures, have inherent value regardless of species, usefulness or 'intelligence' [80]. An ideal wildlife tourism that respects animal rights would allow animals the autonomy to engage in or break

off any encounters with humans [87]. It would involve the rejection of animal capture, as well as forms of animal use that cause suffering just for the entertainment and pleasure of humans [88]. Respecting animal's rights to live a "wild life" is also important, where 'wild' refers to the autonomy and otherness of animals, as beings that are able to "work for themselves" [50] (p. 154). For wildlife tourism, this would mean minimal or no interference in the lives of animals just for the sake of exposing them to tourists [88]. Importantly, we are not calling for a complete separation of people and animals, or for the idea that what is 'wild' has to be untouched by humans, but rather a reconsideration of the relationship between animals and humans. In the highly urbanized world we live in today, wildlife tourism is one of the few ways that most humans are able to encounter wildlife. Such encounters have the potential to shape an appreciation for nature, an awareness of threats facing wildlife and a commitment to environmentally friendly behavior [89]. However, wildlife encounters should also be approached with respect and appreciation for non-human life, not just a focus on human experience and enjoyment.

7. Conclusions: Ways Forward

Despite all this, we recognize that it is not enough just to say that wildlife tourism should be decommodified—the reality is that in a system of capitalism, profit opportunities drive market changes [52]. There are numerous threatened species, especially mammals, whose conservation depends on the revenues from wildlife tourism [90]. Tigers in India, for example, are dependent on the revenue generated from tourism, which funds anti-poaching efforts [91]. While the tigers do face disturbances and behavioral changes due to the presence of tourists, the alternative is increased poaching [91]. We do not deny that this is the reality faced by threatened species across the world. However, a focus on profit cannot be the sole reason for the conservation of animals. Market forces are constantly in flux, and the valuation of animals according to the services they provide is thus similarly affected [92]. Using a market-based conservation strategy implies that these animals and their habitats are only worth saving when they are profitable. Should there be a dip in tourism, these animals would again be at risk [92].

At the same time, the commodification of animals in capitalist society is deeply-rooted, and there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the many types of problems faced by wildlife tourism around the world. It is hard to imagine the decommodification of animals in tourism without changes being made to the commodification of animals in contemporary capitalist society as a whole, and that is likely to require large, structural changes that are beyond individual choices and lifestyle changes [52].

However, there can be forms of wildlife tourism that respect animal rights, as long as the animal's interest is placed before that of profit maximization [88]. Some solutions have already been proposed. Moorhouse et al. [93] calls for tourists to be better informed and educated about the welfare and conservation impacts of the attractions that they plan to visit, in the form of a certification scheme or a guiding criteria. Such scoring systems could be hosted on review sites, such as TripAdvisor, that tourists use to guide their decisions [93]. Other studies have also called for more clarity about the legal status of wildlife attractions, such as the provisioning of food, in order to better manage the effects that they have on animals [72].

Shifting the focus of WTAs away from guaranteed encounters or interactions with animals is also another possible solution. As highlighted by Orams [94], the proximity of tourists to animals is not always the main determinant of a satisfactory wildlife tourism experience, and instead of trying to control the behavior of animals, tour operators can try to improve other factors such as services provided, the number of people on tours, and the information given. Furthermore, the demand for close encounters with wildlife is not simply an inherent desire that must be curbed or regulated—the tourism industry relies on creating and marketing new commodities that tourists will pay to see or experience [94]. Shifting the tone of advertisements away from guaranteed encounters could also help to curb tourist's expectations, and thus reduce the pressure on tour operators to fulfill said expectations. An excessive focus on market environmentalism and the relationship of dominance within it prevents us from practicing other expressions of the relationship between humans and non-human nature [14].

It is thus important for wildlife tourism and tourists to shift the relationship with animals to one of respect, reverence, stewardship, and love.

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