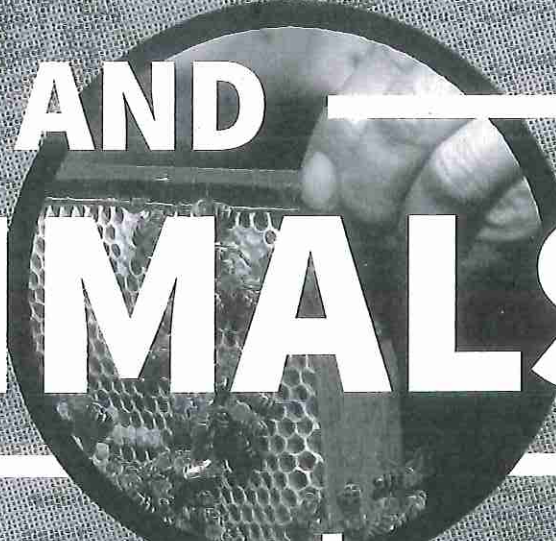
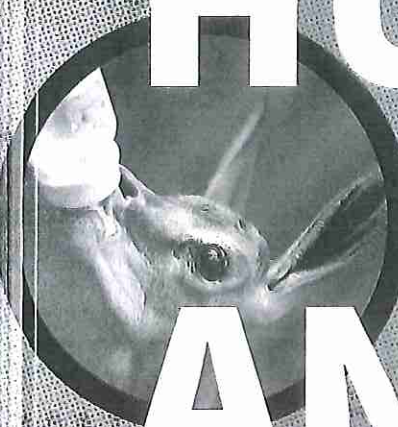


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# HUMANS — AND — ANIMALS

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**A Geography  
of Coexistence**

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**Julie Urbanik and Connie L. Johnston, Editors**

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## Ecotourism

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The practice of ecotourism is largely focused on nature and wild animals. In a world that is quickly urbanizing and full of environmental catastrophes, many people seek out an ecotourism experience because they are able to encounter wild animals without harming local environments or peoples. In fact, ecotourism's focus on protection means it is an important element in the preservation of (endangered) animal species.

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines ecotourism as "[r]esponsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education" (TIES 2015). The term "ecotourism" can be traced back to the late 1960s and early 1970s, when it arose as a consequence of dissatisfaction with mass tourism. Mass tourism favors a strictly profit-centered approach, often ignoring the social and ecological impacts of people visiting a particular destination. In contrast, ecotourism aims for tourism that impacts the environment minimally, protects animals, and respects and benefits host cultures, while giving tourists an educational experience and maximum recreational satisfaction. Altogether, the ecotourism model is meant to be ecologically and socially responsible and sustainable. With a very strong focus on the tourists' interaction with animals that live in nature, ecotourism is often built on human-animal relations, as the following example will show.

Creating a national park attracts tourists who want to see wild animals and are willing to pay to enter the park. Because of this financial return, the animals create an income for poor local populations, which leads to a different type of engagement between various local, indigenous groups of people and the animals. Protected parks such as the world-famous ecotourism destination Masai Mara National Reserve in Kenya and the adjoining Serengeti in Tanzania have been set aside for tourist use, which has resulted in many tourists passing through the area to watch for large predators and other African mammals. Although most of the Maasai people have never been into these parks themselves, some of them are able to get a job at a park and profit financially from the wild animals. Before ecotourism became the focus of these parks, the local communities were often excluded from tourism

initiatives and were further disadvantaged because they had to leave their lands so the national park could be created. Today, when Maasai speak to tourists, they explain that wildlife has now become a source of income that they need to protect (Wijngaarden 2012).

Ecotourism, despite its very broad and good intentions, has its limitations and cannot always satisfy everybody, either human *or* animal. For example, for international nongovernmental conservation organizations, ecotourism can be a means to save and protect natural habitats and animal species; for ecotourists it can provide an interesting travel destination where they can encounter wild animals in nature in a sustainable way; for tour operators it can increase their green, eco-friendly image through marketing; for countries it can be a welcome addition for their national economies; and for local inhabitants ecotourism can be a provider of jobs. But for other local people it can also mean that they lose land because their traditional homes have been converted to parks where visitors do not expect to see people, thereby creating poverty. When indigenous people lose grazing or gathering lands, this too changes their relations with the animals that live in their environment. In the Masai Mara and Serengeti, local Maasai will explain to tourists that they do not hunt for wild meat, but off the record it turns out that this still happens because they must provide for their families—the fact is that, while couched in ecotourist ideals of supporting local peoples, the revenue from ecotourism bypasses most Maasai; only a small number are able to profit from the wildlife financially, while the majority experience various restrictions due to ecotourism regulations (Wijngaarden 2012).

With respect to animal species, while they are often protected through ecotourism, they can also be disadvantaged. For example, studies of boat tours to watch whales and dolphins have increasingly been shown to affect the behavior and stress levels of these large sea mammals, sometimes even causing deaths. With an enormous expansion of tourists joining such trips (from 4 million in 1991 in 31 countries to 13 million in 2008 in 119 countries), this type of tourism, often considered ecotourism, has become a troubling activity (Cressey 2014). Along these same lines, it was also found that wild dolphins in an Australian resort that were fed every day for tourists became dependent on the food from humans. This created lower birth rates and a shorter life expectancy (Brockington, Duffy, and Igoe 2008). The financial value of animals increases even more in the case of trophy hunting. In countries like Botswana and Canada, wealthy tourists shoot large mammals (such as elephants, antelopes, or polar bears) for sport so they can have the animals mounted on the walls of their homes. This is often considered ecotourism by hunting operators and tourists because the revenues that it creates are partly returned to local communities and conservation activities (Dowsley 2009; Gressier 2014).

Altogether, ecotourism is an instigator of change and its value depends on a person's viewpoints, values, and socioeconomic position. All these different interests

are important in their own way with regard to the changes that ecotourism can bring to human-animal relations.

Stasja Koot

See also: Indigenous Rights; Taxidermy; Trophy Hunting; Wildlife

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## Elephants

There are two families of elephants: African (consisting of the Savanna elephant and Forest elephant) and Asian (composed of the Borneo Pygmy elephant, the Sri Lankan elephant, the Sumatran elephant, and the Indian elephant). Elephants display a range of behaviors that indicate intelligence, emotionality, and complex sociality. Both African and Asian elephants are threatened with extinction: African elephants because of the trade in their ivory tusks, and Asian elephants because of habitat loss, human-elephant conflict, and the illegal trade in live elephants. The Asian elephant is revered as sacred in Hinduism and Buddhism. Elephants are used for tourism and religious ceremonies in Asia and are held in zoos in North America and Europe, but it is debatable whether elephants' welfare needs can be met in captivity.

Elephants evolved from Proboscidae, trunk-snouted mammals that emerged in northern Africa 40 million years ago. Two million years ago, three species gained prominence: *Elephas* (which became the Asian elephant), *Mammuthus* (the now-extinct mammoth), and *Loxodonta* (precursor of the African elephant). African elephants weigh 12,000 pounds and are larger than Asian elephants at 11,000 pounds. Wild elephants feed for approximately 12 hours daily and travel far in search of food. An elephant's trunk has several hypersensitive nerve bundles (called Ayer's