The Elephant Tourism Business

Edited by **Eric Laws**, **Noel Scott**, **Xavier Font** and **John Koldowski**



CABI

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Photo by Alokparna Sengupta (Chapter 12). Alokparna is the Interim Managing Director for Humane Society International, India.

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CABI

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CABI
Nosworthy Way
Wallingford
Oxfordshire OX10 8DE
UK

Tel: +44 (0)1491 832111
Fax: +44 (0)1491 833508
Email: info@cabi.org
Website: www.cabi.org

CABI
WeWork
One Lincoln St
24th Floor
Boston, MA 02111
USA

T: +1 (617)682-9015
Email: cabi-nao@cabi.org

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Foreword

Travelling to see elephants may evoke the awesome feeling of being stared at wisely by these ancient animals, or the folkloric wisdom of their complex social behaviour: in fact, only whales and primates can be compared in that respect. However, this study looks into the evolution of the means of production and consumption behind this African and Asian 'rite of travel passage'. It demonstrates the transition from a colonial to an immersive and community-based form of tourism, integrated in many countries' development plans, and from an eccentricity to a vital sector in several regions' economies. It positions this well-known experience in the reality of a threatened opportunity in a time of need: every elephant population lost to poachers today impacts the local tourism industry, and, by aggregate, Africa's and Asia's economies.

The plight of the elephant is one of too many as we struggle to reverse the unacceptable loss of biodiversity, our core development and wellbeing asset, and prepare for the United Nations to determine the next 10-year global biodiversity framework, the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on life on Earth in 2021. In their flagship role, elephants stand in for their millions of unknown or uncelebrated relatives in this sixth extinction event.

The publication is very timely also as the COVID-19 pandemic, a long-announced risk, has accelerated a financial, economic, political and social shock whose causes are clearly associated with the root causes of unsustainable development and inequality, and whose implications we are all just beginning to realize. The same mechanisms that define this crisis formed, and will continue to affect, the elephant tourism sector. Travelling for leisure is, as it has been in historical tradition, one of the first victims of any economic shortfall, and arguably one of the first segments to re-engineer itself, in what will turn out *not* to be the post-COVID, but the with-COVID world.

The countries that still hold viable populations of this keystone species will continue to need them in the 'new reality' of the next decade, both for

their economic and for all their other roles, so well depicted throughout the articles. Their governments and decision makers therefore urgently need to put a stop to illegal hunting and destruction of their economically valuable species and habitats – and they can learn how by reading this publication. The kind of tourism the authors point to can help achieve that, and may in fact be the most effective method to do so sustainably. Yet it will be a very different kind of tourism from the one we know today. Change will come, and for many aspects this may be good. Safe and accessible natural beauty and healthy ecosystems will continue to be major draws for travellers; arguably, longer stays are focused on wellbeing and therefore deeper interactions and experiences at a destination level may become trends.

With their diversity, the authors achieve what good research can do at the science–policy interface: to help key actors self-reflect on their approaches, processes and technologies, and to take corrective action in the face of a changing environment based on the best available knowledge and facts as interpreted by a wide range of specialists. The approach used by the authors reflects that of the global assessments of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), as they examine the phenomenon of elephant tourism in the complementary economic, socio-cultural, ethical, moral and even spiritual perspectives. The knowledge they share about the pressures and drivers, direct and indirect, affecting tourism, and the uneasy 'homeostasis' between supply and demand in this special interest segment, do not only apply to managing elephant tourism, but to all charismatic species in tourism.

It cannot make sense, in any economic development strategy to come, to allow for a charismatic species that brings so many development stories as we read in this publication to be killed for ivory, a dying market, or for meat. Only a few destinations in the world can still offer the magnificent experience of watching the communal behaviour of an animal already reduced to only 10% of its original population. It is my hope that this publication, produced by a network of the best researchers on this theme, with concrete experience in both conservation and international policy, can help revert the unacceptable loss of all species on Earth – and particularly this unique, possibly insightful animal who will always live in our dreams since the first time we saw it in a circus or zoo, or, if we are lucky, in its habitat.

Oliver Hillel
Programme Officer, Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, UN Environment
Montreal, Canada

Preface

Elephant tourism is a contentious topic. On one hand, travellers want to have an engaging interaction with these magnificent animals, and on the other there are ethical concerns for elephant welfare. Concerns relating to how they are trained initially, and then how working elephants are treated,[1] have led to the establishment of good-practice guidance (e.g. the five domains of nutrition, environment, physical health, behaviour and the mental domain[2] and the Captive Asian Elephant Welfare Standards[3]). However, without independent verification it is impossible to tell which are good operations and which are not,[4] and this has led to elephant experiences being removed from some online booking platforms.[5] Now in 2020, with the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen how the dramatic drop in visitation has led to further elephant welfare challenges, with the lack of tourism revenue to pay for their food and care.[6]

So what is the best course of action for elephant experiences that is in line with sustainable tourism practices? How should we proceed in a way that supports these charismatic and intelligent animals? How can the livelihoods and cultures of people who rely on elephant business be adapted or sustained? Can tourism contribute to the overall conservation through sustainable use, when these animals are also threatened by illegal exploitation for their ivory?

In response to these and many other questions, the editors have drawn together an excellent collection of papers by researchers. The contributions help us better understand the sector, and share guidance on how elephant tourism can be practised well. This has been done in response to the demand for academics to become more engaged in animal tourism research, and to consolidate knowledge and find the gaps in understanding. The book has been thoughtfully structured in six sections that describe personal experiences, the expectations and experiences of elephant interactions, ethical

and moral issues, practical management of elephant tourism, and exploring the way forward. The editors reflect on tensions between the perceptions of international tourists and the cultural, religious and economic importance of elephants in tourism destinations.

The book helps us to understand the diverse range of perspectives and factors at play, and the need for better research, more awareness-raising and guidance to support sound policy decisions. The book enriches and strengthens our awareness of the complexity of issues surrounding the elephant tourism business and is a key resource for researchers and practitioners engaged in elephant tourism and welfare.

Dr Anna Spenceley
Chair, IUCN World Commission on Protected Area (WCPA)
Tourism and Protected Areas Specialist Group
Board member, Global Sustainable Tourism Council
Independent Advisory Panel member, Travalyst
Honorary fellow, School of Sport and Service Management,
University of Brighton
Senior research fellow, School of Tourism and Hospitality,
University of Johannesburg
Advisory fellow, African Wildlife Economy Institute
Editorial board member, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*
Associate editor, *Journal of Ecotourism*

Notes

[1] https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jul/06/thousands-elephants-exploited-tourism-held-cruel-conditions

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[3] https://www.elephantstandards.com

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[5] https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2018/aug/11/how-ethical-is-the-elephant-sanctuary-youre-visiting; https://www.geekwire.com/2017/expedia-cracks-wildlife-tourism-removing-activities-promoting-animal-welfare/

[6] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-52110551

Contributors

Taweepoke Angkawanish is a renowned elephant veterinarian with a PhD in infectious disease management in Asian elephants from the University of Utrecht, the Netherlands. He is the deputy director of the Thai National Elephant Institute in Lampang, where he runs the elephant hospital and the mobile elephant clinics, thereby securing the highest level of elephant care and welfare in Thailand. Taweepoke has worked on various elephant health and welfare projects with the Danish Animal Welfare Society and Copenhagen Zoo over the years. Email: taweepoke@gmail.com.

Ann Suwaree Ashton graduated with a PhD and Master's degree from the University of Queensland, Australia. She has been working at the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) in Bangkok, Thailand since 2012, teaching mostly in the area of local wisdom for creative tourism, research methodology in tourism and hospitality, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the tourism and hospitality business. Prior to coming to NIDA, she had experience working in the hotel industry and spent the 2008–2010 school years teaching at the University of Queensland in Australia and universities in New Zealand. She presently supervises PhD students within the area of wellness tourism, destination image development, international retirement migration and hotel management at NIDA, and several highly respected universities in Thailand. Email: suwareeashton@hotmail.com.

Liv Baker is a conservation behaviourist and an expert in wild animal welfare. She researches the wellbeing of individual animals and their roles in the health of their social groups and populations. She teaches at Hunter College, USA in the Animal Behavior and Conservation programme, is research director with Mahouts Elephant Foundation, UK,

and director of the Institute for Compassionate Conservation, NA. Liv is behaviour advisor for Elephant Aid International's integrative health team, and advisor for the Whale Sanctuary Project. She is past fellow with the Centre for Animal Welfare and Anthrozoology, University of Cambridge and the Centre for Compassionate Conservation. Email: lv824@hunter.cuny.edu.

Sumanth Bindumadhav has worked on issues concerning wildlife conservation and welfare for nearly 20 years. Starting his career with rescue and rehabilitation of urban wildlife, he swiftly moved to set up his own organization focused on creating a network of first respondents for wildlife emergencies. He progressed to work on critical elements of human–wildlife conflict in species such as snakes, leopards and elephants. In his current role as campaign manager, Wildlife for Humane Society International India, he builds capacity of government agencies on wildlife protection policies and laws while leading the organization's breakthrough efforts in conflict management and prevention of illegal wildlife trade. Email: sbindumadhav@hsi.org.

Sarah Blaine is co-founder and CEO of Mahouts Elephant Foundation. The foundation's projects are in vast areas of forest and enable elephants to live naturally while tourists come in small groups to observe from a safe and respectful distance. Sarah spends time internationally raising awareness and educating stakeholders on the important issue of elephant welfare and a considerable amount of time on the ground directing project development and growth. Sarah's impeccable reputation for being able to work in ethical partnership with small rural communities has helped the foundation become a sought-after partner by many Karen communities in the region. Email: sarah@mahouts.org.

Nina Brask is a zoologist and conservationist specializing in elephant biology and welfare practices, practical wild animal rescue and rehabilitation and wildlife ethics. Nina has lived in Thailand and Laos working as a project manager with WWF Thailand on human–elephant conflict mitigation and as a best elephant welfare practice consultant with the National Elephant Institute, Thailand. Most recently she has had a conservation manager and elephant welfare specialist role with Lao Elephant Initiative and Mandalao Elephant Conservation in Laos focusing on the assessment of captive elephant activities and the implementation of humane, evidence-based elephant training initiatives, education of mahouts and engagements with local elephant communities. Email: nbrask51@gmail.com.

Eric Brymer specializes in researching the relationship between people and the rest of nature. His expertise includes qualitative and mixed methods research design and the development of the ecological approach to understanding behaviour and performance. Eric collaborates with research teams across the globe and holds research positions in Australia, the UK, Europe and the US. Email: eric.brymer@acap.edu.au.

Naphawan Chantradoan is assistant president and an instructor in the hospitality and tourism field of study at Stamford International University, Thailand. She has a solid background in tourism and event management and has been involved in tourism research for more than 15 years. Her research interests are tourism policies, tourism product design and event experience management. Her previous works focused on destination image making and the economic contribution of tourism services. Naphawan is a member of Thailand CEM-IAEE. Email: naphawan.chantradoan@stamford.edu.

Saranphat Chotmanakul is currently teaching at the Department of Tourism, Faculty of Humanities, Chiangmai University, Thailand. She has worked as a lecturer in tourism for eight years. Her areas of expertise include cultural tourism, cultural heritage management, tourism impact management and planning. She has conducted research as well as consulting projects related to cultural tourism, cultural heritage and community tourism. Her recent projects have expanded to the area of rural tourism and innovation in the tourism industry. Email: saranphat.c@cmu.ac.th.

Qingming Cui is a researcher in the School of Tourism Management at South China Normal University (SCNU), China. He also works at the South China Ecological Civilization Research Center at SCNU. He obtained his PhD degree from Sun Yat-sen University, China, and visited the University of Manchester for one year. His research interests include wildlife tourism, ecotourism, sustainable tourism and tourism social theories. His research pursues the understanding of human–animal/nature relationships in the tourism context from a social-cultural approach. Currently, he is working on a project on tourism eco-compensation in elephant tourism and non-human primate tourism in the Asian context. Email: cuiqingming@126.com.

Susanna Curtin is a senior tourism academic at Bournemouth University, UK. She has researched wildlife tourism for 20 years, which has culminated in a number of published articles and conference papers. Her research interests are primarily focused on animals and tourism: how animals are represented in the tourism industry, the tourist experience and the environmental and management implications of wildlife-based travel. Her most recent work has involved the unethical use of animals in the tourism industry. She is an advocate for conservation and animal welfare and is currently interested in the theoretical approaches to behavioural change. Email: curtin.susanna@gmail.com.

Charlotte Day is a tourism management graduate of Bournemouth University, UK. In her final year of study, she completed a dissertation on the changing perceptions of elephant tourists in Asia. Inspiration for her dissertation topic began when she saw elephant tourism first-hand on a personal trip in Sri Lanka while visiting various elephant tourism establishments. Prior to this, she completed a placement during her third

year where she spent six months in Costa Rica enhancing her knowledge and understanding of the wildlife tourism sector. She is currently working as a sales manager at a watersports centre. Email: c.day1996@hotmail.co.uk.

Nilakshi W.K. Galahitiyawe is a senior lecturer in the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka. Her main areas of teaching and research include service management, supply chain management and research methods for social science. She has published a number of research papers in many international and local conferences, peer-reviewed and indexed journals. Dr Galahitiyawe also serves as a member of the editorial board of the *Sri Lankan Journal of Management* and as editor of the *Sri Lankan Journal of Service Management*. Dr Galahitiyawe is a well-known trainer in academia for structural equation modelling – AMOS for data analysis in social science research. She also works with international bodies such as the Asian Institute of Productivity and Quality, Tokyo, as the 'national coordinator' for managing innovations for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Sri Lanka. Email: nilakshi@sjp,ac.lk.

Vivek Gurusamy completed his PhD in the School of Veterinary Science at the University of Queensland in 2013. He was granted an Endeavour Asia Award and a University of Queensland Research Fellowship to study appropriate welfare indicators for elephants that will improve their management in captive facilities. His research efforts are connected to the scientific disciplines of behaviour, physiology and stress management, primarily studying behavioural management of captive Asian elephants. Vivek specializes in *in situ* management strategies for Asian elephants and conducted fieldwork mostly in India. He has also studied social attitudes of people towards animals in captivity. Email: drgvivek@gmail.com.

Xavier Font is professor of sustainability marketing at the University of Surrey, UK, and professor II at the University of the Arctic in Norway. He researches and develops methods of sustainable tourism production and consumption. He has published widely about sustainable tourism certification, and has consulted on sustainable product development, marketing and communication for several United Nations agencies, the International Finance Corporation, the European Commission, VisitEngland, Fáilte Ireland, VisitWales, VisitScotland and WWF among others. He co-edits the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*. He has conducted over 140 courses for more than 2500 businesses on how to market and communicate sustainability. Email: x.font@surrey.ac.uk.

Nicole Häusler holds an honorary professorship at the University of Sustainable Development in Eberswalde (Hochschule für nachhaltige Entwicklung – HNEE, Germany). She has worked as a responsible tourism consultant for over 25 years, mainly in South-east Asia, in the implementation of corporate social responsibility and tourism and poverty reduction. She holds a Master's degree in social anthropology and a PhD in responsible tourism. Additionally, she is a licensed change

management consultant focusing especially on cultural due diligence. Nicole understands herself as a 'pracademic', 'hopping' professionally between consultancy work and academia. She is based in Berlin/Germany and Yangon/Myanmar. Email: nhaeusler.consult@gmail.com.

Jeffrey Dale Hobbs, PhD, is professor of communication studies at the Phuket College of International Tourism in Thailand. Jeffrey's research interests include both feminist and narrative criticism and he has published articles in academic journals such as *Management Communication Quarterly*, *SOJOURN*: *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* and *Contemporary Argumentation and Debate*. Email: jdhphd57@yahoo.com.

Clare Jenkinson is senior destinations and sustainability manager at the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) – The Travel Association and leads the Association's sustainable tourism work. Clare supports travel companies and destinations on issues spanning the environment, human rights, community impact, animal welfare and accessibility. On animal welfare, Clare has driven widespread, international industry adoption of the ABTA Animal Welfare Guidelines and oversaw their recent revision. Clare has worked in sustainability with the public, private and not-for-profit sectors globally, including in Kenya, Ghana, Nepal, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. She gained an MA in physics from Oxford University and a distinction from Imperial College Business School's Foundations of Leadership. Email: cjenkinson@abta.co.uk.

John Koldowski is professor and foreign expert within the School of Tourism at Leshan Normal University, Sichuan Province, China. Prior to that appointment, John was with the College of Innovation at Thailand's Thammasat University, and part of the Secretariat for the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Thailand Chapter for several years, while living and working in Thailand. Before entering academia, he was deputy CEO of PATA where over a 15-year span he came to be regarded as one of the travel and tourism sector's leading analysts. He still maintains his relationship with that Association through his appointment as a special advisor to the CEO. Email: jktourism@hotmail.com.

Naut Kusters has been a leader in promoting sustainability in tourism since 1993, when he founded the European Centre for Eco and Agro Tourism (ECEAT), a European not-for-profit organization for the development and promotion of sustainability within the travel sector. ECEAT follows a business-led approach by development and implementation of training, tools, standards, assessment systems, and by providing market access support. In 2004, Naut co-founded VISIT (Voluntary Initiatives for Sustainability in Tourism), a European umbrella association for certification schemes in the accommodation sector. In 2007 Naut established in close cooperation with the European tour operator associations, the Travelife training, management and certification programme for tour operators and travel agencies. ECEAT is also one of the founding members of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council

(GSTC). Naut holds a Master's degree in environmental science and social forestry from the Wageningen Agricultural University. Email: n.kusters@eceat-projects.org.

Eric Laws has an MPhil from the University of Surrey and a PhD from Griffith University. He has retired from full-time academic life, and is visiting professor at Leshan Normal University, Sichuan Province, China. His research interests include tourism service quality, destination management, crisis management and elephant tourism. Eric's publications include nearly 100 journal articles, book chapters and conference papers. *The Elephant Tourism Business* is Eric's 20th authored or edited book. Eric is the founder of ETRIG (the Elephant Tourism Research Group). Email: e.laws@runbox.com.

Chi Lo is a sustainable tourism expert with 13 years' experience across four continents. She specializes in sustainability strategic planning and reporting, cross-sectorial and cross-cultural relationship building, with particular interests in community-based tourism, wildlife, (food) waste and certification. As a consultant, she coaches sector entities aiming to become more sustainable. She currently serves as an advisory board member for the World Tourism Association for Culture and Heritage, as a tourism advisor for the Wildlife Friendly Enterprise Network, and sits on the GSTC Communications and Membership Working Group. Email: chi@chisustainability.com.

Shilpa Mahbubani has spent several years working for animal welfare and rescue with Compassion Unlimited Plus Action (CUPA), Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre (WRRC) and the Humane Society International (HSI) India. She was originally drawn to the field by her desire to conduct community animal welfare programmes, particularly anti-rabies vaccinations and birth control. With WRRC she assisted with documenting the lives of captive elephants held by religious institutions in south India and was involved in a handful of transfer operations that moved working elephants to fully equipped rehabilitation centres. Shilpa founded the Kin Animal Care Foundation in 2018 and is passionate about philanthropy and sustainability. Email: shilpa.mahbubani@gmail.com.

Andrew McLean, PhD (equine cognition and learning), BSc (zoology) has been a top international equestrian competitor and an accredited horse-riding coach for over 30 years and has written numerous books (including an international bestseller) and authored 35 peer-reviewed journal articles. In 2011 he won the Eureka Prize for Science, the highest Australian science award. He is co-director of Equitation Science International and founder of the Australian Equine Behaviour Centre. Andrew conducts lecture demonstrations around the world including coaching of riders and national federations on the optimal use of learning theory for improved welfare and performance. In 2010 Andrew co-formed the Human Elephant Learning Programs Foundation (H-ELP). Today Andrew's systematic approach to elephant training is recognized

as a viable and safe alternative to traditional submission-based methods. Email: andrewmclean@h-elp.org.

Mucha Mkono is ARC DECRA fellow at the University of Queensland, Australia. Mucha has published widely on a range of issues pertaining to sustainability theory and practice. Her work on trophy hunting in Africa has attracted the interest of lawmakers and practitioners in wildlife tourism. She serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of Tourism Futures*. Email: m.mkono@business.uq.edu.au.

Somyot Ongkhluap is a lecturer in the Department of Tourism, Faculty of Humanities at Chiangmai University, Thailand. Somyot has worked as a lecturer in tourism for 20 years and has taught in ecotourism and tourist behaviour. He has led research projects in ecotourism, tourist behaviour, tourism marketing and tourism development. His recent focus is on elephant tourism, tourism impact and destination management. Email somyot.o@cmu.ac.th.

Anja Pabel is a lecturer in sustainable tourism management at Central Queensland University, Cairns campus, Australia. Her research interests are tourist behaviour, sustainability, marine tourism and humour research. She has authored and co-authored several peer-reviewed publications including two books. Email: a.pabel@cqu.edu.au.

Piengpen Na Pattalung, PhD, is a teacher of English at Phuket Rajabhat University in Thailand. She has worked as a language researcher for 27 years focusing on sexism in language and English education. She has also conducted research in tourism narratives and has had academic articles published in journals such as *SOJOURN: Journal of Issues in Southeast Asia* and the *Journal of the International Public Debate Association*. Email: piengpenn@yahoo.com.

Clive Phillips is the Foundation Professor of Animal Welfare at The University of Queensland, where he directs the Centre for Animal Welfare and Ethics in the Veterinary School. He previously taught and researched animal welfare at the Universities of Cambridge and Wales in the UK. He has written widely on the welfare of captive animals, mainly farm animals but also zoo and companion animals. His books include *The Animal Trade* and *The Welfare of Animals – the Silent Majority*. He has also authored over 300 journal articles. In 2012 Clive was awarded the Australian Museum prize for scientific research for the protection of animals. Email c.phillips@uq.edu.au.

Kannapa Pongponrat is assistant professor in social development. She is a director of the Service Innovation Program (International Program) and a lecturer at the College of Innovation, Thammasat University. She also serves as a consultant for sustainable development projects both at the national and international level. She was a visiting fellow at the Center for Japanese Studies, UC Berkeley, a visiting faculty member at the Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia, the University of Tokyo, a research fellow

at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, and a visiting scholar at the College of Merchandising, Hospitality and Tourism, University of North Texas. Her research interests focus on community development, coastal tourism resilience, participatory planning and development, responsible business, social vulnerability, social impact assessment and sustainable tourism. Email: kannapap@hotmail.com.

Suphaporn Rattanaphinanchai, MBA, is a faculty member of the International Program in Hotel and Tourism Management at Siam University, Bangkok, Thailand. Her research interests are in the area of film tourism. She is also a convention secretary of the World Conference on Hospitality, Tourism, and Event Research 2015. Email: supaporn.pha@gmail.com.

Bongkosh Rittichainuwat is associate professor, dean of the International College and director of hotel and tourism management at Siam University, Thailand. She is the director of research, Asia Pacific CHRIE, and a board member of the Asia Pacific Travel Association. Dr Rittichainuwat serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, *Tourism Management Perspectives*, the *Asia Pacific Journal of Travel Research* and the *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*. She received her Bachelor of Arts from Chulalongkorn University, Master of hospitality management from Conrad N. Hilton College, University of Houston, and PhD in hospitality administration from Oklahoma State University. Email: ngamson@gmail.com.

John Roberts is group director of sustainability and conservation for Minor Hotels. Previously known as director of elephants, he has been involved in the day-to-day management of elephants since 1999, working in both Nepal and Thailand. He is director of the Golden Triangle Asian Elephant Foundation, which, since 2006, has worked to improve the welfare of captive elephants and their mahouts while protecting wild elephants across South-east Asia. John is a member of the IUCN SSG Asian Elephant Specialist Group, the WTTC Illegal Wildlife Trade Working Group and co-chairs the Asian Captive Elephant Working Group. He lives in a solar-powered house next to a rice paddy in Chiang Rai, Thailand. Email: jroberts@anantara.com.

Andrea Saayman is professor of economics at the North-West University (NWU), Potchefstroom Campus, South Africa. She is a visiting professor in tourism macroeconomics at the University of Bologna, Italy, and an extraordinary professor at the Kore University of Enna, Italy. She is an applied econometrician and her research interests are in the fields of tourism economics and financial economics. Andrea has published more than 80 peer-reviewed articles in international research journals. She is currently the president of the International Association for Tourism Economics (2019–2021). She has received research grants from the National Research Foundation, the European Union and the British Academy. Email: andrea.saayman@nwu.ac.za.

Melville Saayman was professor of tourism and the director of the research unit TREES (Tourism Research in Economic Environs and Society) at the North-West University, South Africa. He was a member of the executive committee of the Association of International Experts in Tourism (AIEST) and also served on the World Tourism Organization's panel of experts. He has done significant research in the field of event economies, nature-based tourism, marine tourism and how these types of tourism alleviate poverty. From his pen, leisure and tourism books (20), scientific articles (200), technical reports (420) and in-service training manuals (8) have been published. In 2017 he was acknowledged by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) for his contribution to sustainable tourism. Melville passed away in March 2019.

Jan Schmidt-Burbach is an experienced wildlife veterinarian, working as head of wildlife and animal welfare research for World Animal Protection. He conducted his PhD on captive Asian elephants and later specialized in animal welfare and wildlife trade concerns. Having been based for 10 years in Asia, he has been leading on one of the largest studies on the welfare conditions of elephants used in entertainment in Asia. Further involvement included curbing the use of wildlife products for traditional medicine in Vietnam, China and South Korea, researching wildlife markets and public health risks, and rehabilitating victims of the illegal trade. Email: JanSchmidt-Burbach@worldanimalprotection.org.

Noel Scott is adjunct professor of tourism management at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia. Noel has worked as a tourism researcher for over 25 years and has led research and consulting projects in sustainable tourism training, tourism branding, destination management, tourism experience design and China tourism. His recent focus is on the use of cognitive psychology theory and psychophysiological methods to understand tourist experiences. He has over 300 academic articles published including 16 books. He is a fellow of the Council of Australian University Tourism and Hospitality Educators, and a member of the International Association of China Tourism Scholars. Email: nscott1@usc.edu.au.

Alokparna Sengupta is the interim managing director for HSI, India. She has worked in the animal protection movement for close to a decade and has been part of several government and scientific committees including the Indian Council of Medical Research, CDSCO, Central Insecticides Board and Bureau of Indian Standards. She has also been part of several stakeholder committee meetings to bring in animal-friendly policies. Having obtained an MSc in biotechnology from Osmania University, Hyderabad, India, she is currently studying for an LLM part-time at National Law University, Delhi. Email: asengupta@hsi.org.

Vinathe Sharma-Brymer is an independent researcher. Vinathe integrates her academic studies, training and work/life experience in her research on human agency for the overall improvement of quality of life. Vinathe has

been engaged in psychology and education with teaching and research roles in Australia, the UK and India. A qualified forest schools practitioner, she is also passionate about social work. Some of her professional memberships are with the National Wellness Institute of Australia; National Academy of Psychology, India; Forest School Education, England; and Oceania Comparative and International Education Society (OCIES), Australia. Email: vinathesharma@hotmail.com.

Senal Siriwardene is an experiential architect at Jetwing Hotels, where he develops and promotes guest experiences at the multitude of hotels and villas of the Jetwing family, as well as being actively involved in the conservation and wildlife-related ventures of the hotels. He also assists in content creation, where he writes predominantly about issues pertaining to the environment and sustainability. Senal holds an undergraduate degree from Murdoch University in Perth, with majors in marine science and wildlife and conservation biology. He currently resides in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Email: senal@jetwinghotels.com.

Ramona Strödecke completed a Master's in sustainable tourism management (MA) at the University for Sustainable Development in Eberswalde, Germany. During her Master's programme she spent one year in Sri Lanka, working in local incoming tourism agencies and focusing on sustainable offers in the country as well as researching elephant tourism. The focus of her Master's thesis was on visitors' demand and knowledge at selected elephant tourism attractions in Sri Lanka. Currently, she is working in an international social impact company in Berlin that combats food waste. Email: ramona.str@web.de.

Daminda Sumanapala is a research fellow at the School of Veterinary and Life Sciences of Murdoch University, Western Australia. His research has focused primarily on nature-based tourism and protected areas; behaviourism in nature tourism and protected area landscapes; and motivation, attitudes, knowledge expectation and experiences of nature-based tourism and protected areas. He is particularly interested in understanding the challenges of nature-based tourism practice with human engagement and how it is mitigated and conserved for the future nature-based tourism industry in South and South-east Asia. He obtained his PhD from the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. Email: daminda.sumanapala@murdoch.edu.au.

Daniel Turner is an environmental biologist who has been working for the advancement of applied animal welfare for over 20 years. During that time, he has created and led initiatives that have influenced international policy, national legislation and activities by international travel industry. Serving 17 years at the Born Free Foundation, Daniel established a more pragmatic approach to working with the travel industry, creating capacity-building programmes and guidance. This included ABTA's Animal Welfare Guidelines (2013). In 2018, Daniel co-founded ANIMONDIAL, a specialist consultancy that provides impartial advice

to travel businesses to better manage impact on animals and the natural environment. Email: daniel@animondial.com.

Marjorie van Strien is an inclusive tourism and livelihoods specialist. Over the past 12 years, she has developed extensive experience with South and South-east Asia's diverse social systems and unique opportunities for inclusive economic development. She seeks suburban and rural contexts where the practices of natural resource management and governance meet the realities of local economic conditions and the constraints of layered social and political systems. She has developed expertise in sustainable tourism and related value chains, with a focus on governance, responsible business development and collaborative management approaches. Marjorie currently works as project manager with ECEAT. Email: marjorie.vanstrien@gmail.com.

Rebecca Winkler is a PhD student in the Anthropology Department at the University of Pennsylvania and helps consult for Mahouts Elephant Foundation. Rebecca has collaborated with Mahouts Elephant Foundation for the past three years on projects centred around tourism development and growth, and the development of the Foundation's research programme. Her current research examines human–elephant communities and their relationships with wildlife conservation policies and environmental movements in South-east Asia. Before starting her PhD Rebecca studied biology and feminist gender sexuality studies at Wesleyan University, where her thesis research on elephant tourism was awarded the Carol B. Ohman Award for Best Thesis. Email: becca@mahouts.org.

Isabelle D. Wolf is an urban green space and protected areas specialist including on all aspects of visitor research. As a human mobility expert, she leads research and enhances geospatial methods for people monitoring, sustainable visitor experience development and natural resource management. Trained as an ecologist, her speciality is the human dimensions of ecosystems, with work on people and animal behaviour and flora and fauna communities among others in tourism and recreation systems. Isabelle has a PhD from the University of New South Wales and has published in both social and environmental science journals. Email: i.wolf@online.ms.

Honggang Xu is professor and dean of the School of Tourism Management at Sun Yat-sen University, China. She is a fellow of the International Academy for the Study of Tourism. She is associate editor of *Tourism Geographies* and editorial board member of many journals such as *Tourism Management*, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, *Tourism Management Perspective* and *Mobilities*. Her research interests include ecotourism, sustainable tourism, tourism mobilities and system dynamics. Her research mainly concerns human–nature relationships, tourist mobilities and sustainable tourism. She is currently working on a project on tourism mobilities and rural revitalization in China. Email: xuhongg@mail.sysu.edu.cn.

Elephant Tourism Glossary

Many words and phrases are used to describe the different aspects of elephant management and care. This can result in confusion and a lack of clarity, particularly when elephant affairs are being discussed at international meetings or in publications. The editors of this book recognize the importance of local terminology, but in the interests of consistency and ease of reading *The Elephant Tourism Business* we have adopted consistent terms throughout this text, as noted here.

ABTA

The Association of British Travel Agents. Issued a set of guidelines for elephant tourism companies, revised in 2019.

ASEAN

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Was established in 1967 by the founding fathers of ASEAN, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Among its objectives is to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region through joint endeavours to strengthen the foundation for a prosperous and peaceful community of South-east Asian Nations (https://asean.org/asean/about-asean/overview).

Anguli

The finger, or two fingers, at the end of an elephant's trunk.

Angkus *or* Ankus

See Hook

Breaking

See Phajaan

Bush knife

A long heavy machete used to cut food for the elephant, clear pathways or cut firewood for the mahout. A bush knife is only used to control the elephant when the hook is dropped or in emergencies when human life is in danger.

Captive elephants

It is incorrect to say that elephants are domesticated animals. They have seldom been bred in captivity and therefore do not exhibit attributes selected for human purposes, in contrast to species such as cattle or dogs. The correct term is captive, as they are taken by force from the wild.

Calf

A very young elephant that has not learned to use its trunk. It is protected by the maternal herd; male calves become increasingly independent from five years of age, but in the wild, females usually remain in the maternal herd.

Camp, also sanctuary or reserve

A place run as a business, which tourists visit to see and interact with captive, rescued or injured conditioned elephants that perform various acts for their entertainment. Camps are usually located in forests. Two philosophies of elephant camp management have been distinguished: anthropocentric elephant camps, the purpose of which is to profit from tourist interest, but which do little to benefit elephant welfare; and ecocentric camps, centred on concerns for the elephants' wellbeing.

Chair

A heavy steel structure mounted on an elephant's back over a thick pad and upholstered for two tourists to ride, led by a mahout. Chairs are usually

locally made. They can cause lesions, and by wearing them for an entire day an elephant's spine may be damaged. Some camps now use lighter plastic chairs.

CITES

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. An international agreement to regulate trade in ivory, skins and other products from wild animals by killing them and endangering the survival of species (https://www.**cites**.org).

Conditioned elephant

A captive elephant that has been trained to be safe with tourists, and to perform various unnatural acts to amuse them, such as playing football, playing musical instruments and painting. Conditioned elephants command a premium price in the inter-camp market. (*The phrase conditioned elephant was introduced by Turner and Kusters in the final chapter of this book*).

Crush

A strong, tight enclosure used to restrain an elephant either during phajaan or as a safety measure when performing veterinary procedures such as trimming their toenails.

Drag chain

A long, strong chain secured around the elephant's ankle and used by the mahout to tether it at night to a stout tree.

Ear halter

A small piece of iron shaped like a fishhook and fastened over the base of the ear with light rope. It is used to lead elephants and also, for very short periods of time, to tether them.

Hobbles

Rope or steel hobbles are fitted to an elephant's front feet to make it stay still, to slow it down, or to ensure that it cannot cross over broad objects or obstacles. Sometimes hobbles are used to prevent elephants from mating. Can be used on their own or attached to tethering chains.

Hook, also angkus and ankus

A short stick with a sharp, finger-length metal hook at the tip, used to control and direct captive elephants. Experienced mahouts use light pressure to guide the elephant, but inexperienced mahouts tend to hit the elephant with the point if it does not respond quickly enough, but this can cause injuries. Mahouts always carry a hook, as elephants are unpredictable.

Howdah

A seat or covered pavilion traditionally placed over a thick pad to ride on the back of an elephant while hunting animals such as tigers; or used in ceremonial events.

Keystone species

An animal or plant that is central to the ecology of an area. If it were to die out many other species would be endangered locally.

Khedda

A Khedda is a traditional way of capturing wild elephants, consisting of a strong stockade into which mahouts mounted on captive and trained elephants drive a wild herd in order to train them to accept human commands.

Kraal

See Khedda

Mahout

The trainer, keeper or driver of an elephant who usually walks beside it or sits on its neck. Traditionally, mahouts came from ethnic groups with generations of elephant-keeping experience, and one mahout kept his elephant throughout its working life.

Musth (various spellings)

Adult bull elephants (males) annually cycle between a state of heightened aggressiveness, called musth, and one of non-musth. During the musth cycle

the bull elephant is primed to mate, and will fight other male elephants, attack other animals and sometimes destroy inanimate objects in its way. Visitors are usually kept well away from bull elephants in musth for safety reasons.

PATA

Founded in 1951, the Pacific Asia Travel Association is a not-for profit association that is internationally acclaimed for acting as a catalyst for the responsible development of travel and tourism to, from and within the Asia Pacific region. Its member organizations comprise government, state and city tourism bodies, international airlines and airports, hospitality organizations, educational institutions, and hundreds of travel industry companies in Asia Pacific and beyond. Thousands of travel professionals also belong to one (or more) of the 36 local PATA chapters worldwide.

Phajaan, also crush

Phajaan is both a ceremony and a process. The 'ceremony' of Phajaan is said to originate in the belief that a tribe's shaman can separate the spirit of an elephant from its body, in effect driving the wilful and wild spirit out of an elephant and leaving it under the control of its mahouts.

As a process, it involves people gaining control over elephants by their 'breaking-in' and traditionally involved harsh methods such as beatings administered to a young elephant roped in a crush to strong posts and deprived of sleep until it accepts a man riding on its back. Modern training methods are more cooperative and reward-based but this potentially leaves the mahout without the ability to control an elephant in an emergency, therefore most camps allowing visitors to be close to elephants also require the handler to carry a hook for reasons of safety (https://phajaan.webs.com).

Range countries

Countries with wild elephant populations. The Asian Elephant Range States Meeting (AsERSM) 2017 attracted delegates from all 13 Asian range countries. In sub-Saharan Africa, there are 10 range countries.

Remote owner

In many elephant tourism camps some of the captive elephants are owned by people or companies who are not directly involved in the operation of the camp. Other elephants may be owned by the mahout who manages them on

a daily basis and is paid by the camp owner for his work and for the upkeep of the elephant.

Reserve

A large area of prime or secondary forest such as a National Park in which wild elephants and other animals are constrained, managed and protected from poachers in near-natural ecological conditions. Tourists can visit to observe them but usually no interaction is permitted.

Sanctuary

A camp or reserve that specializes in treating injured elephants whether wild or captured. Visitors are welcome at some, as they help to defray their costs.

Tethering

Unless they are corralled in a stockade, elephants are tethered at night to strong trees on chains about 30 m long, allowing them to graze much as they would in the wild, but separating them from other elephants. When a camp has sufficient space, elephants are tethered in a different place every night, allowing the first area to recover.

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An Elephant Portrait Gallery



1. Pumpui, a rescue elephant living at the Anantara Golden Triangle Elephant Camp, with her veterinarian Dr Nissa Mututanont and her Mahout, Mr Kham Singkaew.

Pumpui's photo is on the cover of this book, her story is discussed in Chapter 1. (Photo by the Anantara Golden Triangle Elephant Camp & Resort.)



2. The new Jungle Bubbles for private night viewing of elephants. (Photo by the Anantara Golden Triangle Elephant Camp & Resort.)



3. Tony Nevin, a specialist osteopath, cannot cure Pumpui's injured leg, but he can alleviate her discomfort and pain. He trains camp staff in the method. (Photo taken on Tony's camera; see Chapter 1.)



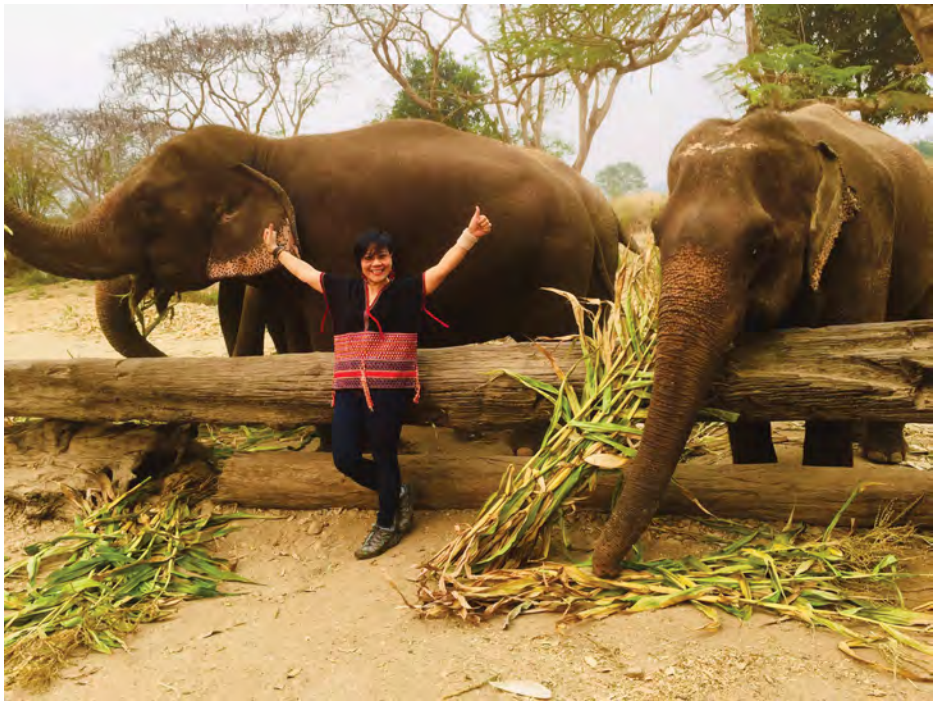
4. Natta Kota the wild elephant strolling into a Jetwing hotel property, where he is welcomed by the paying guests; see Chapter 2. (Photo by Anuradha Chandrasekara of Jetwing.)



5. Visitors watching orphaned baby elephants being fed milk, their only food during this period. Visitors can see this three times per day, limited to one hour. When old enough the elephants are released back to the wild, at the Udawalawe National Park (UWNP). (Photo by Daminda Sumanapala; see Chapter 11.)



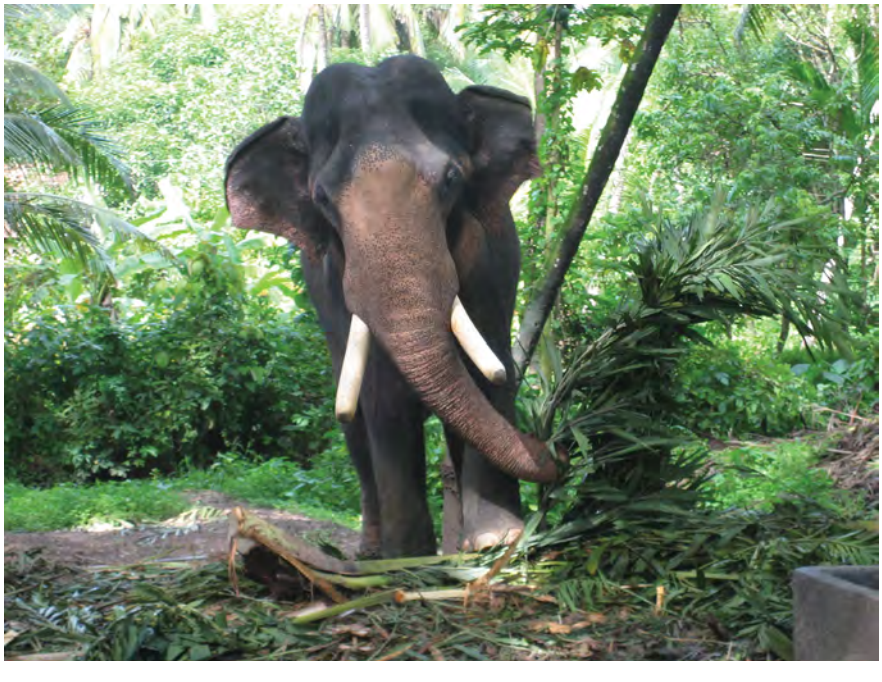
6. Sarah Blaine and colleague observing an elephant from a safe distance (see Chapter 10).



7. Ann Suwaree Ashton conducting field research for Chapter 13. (Photo taken by colleague on Ann's camera.)



8. A contributor's mother with two elephants. (Photo by Anja Pabel; see Chapter 8.)



9. Elephants thrive when browse material is part of their diet, providing valuable nutrients as well as enrichment of their daily feeding. (Photo by Clive Phillips; see Chapter 19.)



10. Elephants love water, but during bathing they must be allowed to leave if they wish and must not be forced to participate just for the enjoyment of spectators. (Photo taken on Clive Phillips' camera; see Chapter 19.)



11. Visitors to an elephant camp enjoy bathing the elephants, but few elephants can tolerate the proximity of unfamiliar humans. (Photo by Daniel Turner; see Chapter 21.)



12. Privately-owned elephants with their mahouts enjoying better living conditions than most elephant attractions in Sauraha, Nepal. (Photo by Marjorie van Strien; see Chapter 20.)



13. A small herd of elephants with a calf. (Photo by Andrea Saayman; see Chapter 16.)



14. ‘Lost in artistic impression.’

Images of the ‘happy’ elephant artist peacefully painting for the crowd hide the pain and brutality involved in their ‘training’. (Photo by Eric Brymer; see Chapter 3.)



15. Daniel Turner conducting an audit at an elephant camp. (Photo taken on Daniel’s camera; see Chapter 21.)

Elephant riding has been the most profitable activity in elephant tourism to date but has been subjected to serious criticism.

'Elephants have long vertical protrusions from their spinal column to assist with bearing the weight of the head. Europeans often ride up to four in a crate carried above the vertebral column. This is likely to increase the risk of arthritis and ruptured discs, not to mention body lesions at the point of contact. In an extremely large terrestrial animal such as the elephant, extreme care must be taken not to overload them, since proportionately they cannot carry as much weight as small animals.' Clive Phillips (Chapter 19).



16. In this camp, elephants waiting to give visitors a ride are chained to concrete slabs while wearing heavy chains strapped to their backs. The ride is along a concrete road into a valley. (Photo by Jeffrey Hobbs; see Chapter15.)



17. Caparisoned elephants awaiting their next passengers for a tour of Ayattuha. (Photo by Bongkosh Rittichainuwat; see Chapter 4.)



18. A lone elephant encountered on a remote track. (Photo by Andrea Saayman; see Chapter 16.)

Introduction to The Elephant Tourism Business

John Koldowski,[1] Eric Laws,[1] Noel Scott[2] and Xavier Font[3]

[1]*Leshan Normal University, Leshan, China*
[2]*University of the Sunshine Coast, Sippy Downs, Australia*
[3]*University of Surrey, Guildford, United Kingdom*

Lundgren *et al*. (2018) note that the world was once home to an astounding diversity of large herbivorous mammals (>100 kg), or megafauna. The majority of these species went extinct at the end of the Pleistocene as modern humans spread from Africa. Most research points to overhunting by humans as the most likely culprit for these extinctions. It seems that we are still overhunting elephants (and other species); this time not to eat them for survival but for money.

The woolly mammoth (*Mammuthus primigenius*) survived in small isolated polar island populations, particularly on Wrangel Island, until about 4000 years ago (Arppe *et al*., 2019).

Elephants and humans have interacted over recorded history, and elephants remain important for the cultures of many countries in which they live. They are involved in religions (Hinduism) and religious practices such as Perahera processions in Sri Lanka, are deeply involved in the history of countries such as Thailand and India, and are associated with high social status and royalty in many Asian countries (Zimmerman, 2018; Vijayakrishnan and Sinha, 2019). Elephants also fascinate people from countries outside their natural range, perhaps due to their size and social nature, expressed in complex sounds and mutual touching behaviours with their trunks (Yasui and Idani, 2017).

Elephants were also part of the childhood of many Western children, encountered for example in the *Jungle Book* stories of Rudyard Kipling; the 1941 Disney Studios film, *Dumbo*; and Colonel Hathi, leader of the Dawn Patrol in the 1967 Disney musical cartoon *The Jungle Book* (Srivastava, 2017).

Although now extinct, the woolly mammoth – or at least some derivative of it – is being considered for de-extinction, with researchers attempting to splice genetic material obtained from frozen specimens of the mammoth

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to the DNA of Asian elephants. Whether or not that will be successful has yet to be seen but, even so, it raises many ethical as well as practical questions (Pruitt, 2018).

Such ethical questions also spill over into the general treatment of elephants, both in the wild and as captive creatures. Indeed, it is largely the ethical treatment of elephants that forms the basis of this volume. Elephants are being exploited to the extent that in the wild, they are now on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Endangered Species and, while there is a wide range of research on these creatures, much of it is disparate and lacking in cohesion.

'Thailand's forests teemed with a vast wild population estimated at the beginning of the 20th century to be in excess of 300,000 with a further 100,000 domesticated elephants' (www.eleaid.com). By the early 21st century, Thai wild elephant numbers had fallen to about 3700 with about the same number in captivity (Sukumar, 2006). The latest available figures (for 2018) at the time of editing this book are 3100–3300 wild and 3783 captive elephants in Thailand (IUCN Asian Elephant Specialist Group, 2019).

Elephants are important as a keystone species, able to alter the ecology around them. Seloana *et al*. (2017) call them ecosystem engineers. Their size, strength and large appetites (they consume about 120 kg per day) enable elephants to change their local environment by pulling the lower branches off large trees or pushing down trees, thereby opening the ground to light and enabling the growth of many types of smaller plants, which further benefit from elephants trampling the ground. Dense forest thus becomes attractive to many small animals, birds and insects. Lainé (2018) regards elephants as megagardens – their poor digestion lets them carry seeds to new areas, creating a seed-shadow (Harich *et al*., 2016; Silva, 2019). The significance is that elephants must be considered in the context of the other animals and plants around them. According to Ishida *et al*. (2018), keystone species have outsized ecological impacts relative to their biomass, driving biological dynamics at the ecosystem level of analysis and illustrating the complexity of ecosystem interactions and the interdependency of the entire web of life.

No other animal has the power to alter conditions for surrounding species as much or as fast as humans, a hyperkeystone species driving complex biological chains in unplanned ways and with unintended consequences (Worm and Paine, 2016). Albuquerque *et al*. (2018) discuss this in terms of chronic anthropogenic disturbances in ecology. Large and abrupt climate change is well documented in geology (Wood and Roelich, 2019), but the naturally occurring cycles of climate change have been exacerbated by the use of fossil fuels since the beginning of the modern industrial era (Ashton and Laura, 1999; Reid *et al*., 2020), and increasingly by chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) (Lickley *et al*., 2020).

Land clearance, usually to provide space or conditions suitable for cash crops such as palm oil or coffee, is another human cause of ecological change (Sintayehu and Kassaw, 2019), the heavy human footprint of monoculture rapidly reducing biodiversity (Meijaard *et al*., 2020). There are an increasing number of projects to restore forests as an effective 'sink' for atmosphere-borne

carbon, but it has recently been found that hard wood such as teak, which is endemic to the forests where most Asian elephants live, is the most effective at removing carbon from the atmosphere and storing it long-term (Aton, 2017).

Biodiversity is another important ecological consideration. According to Fa *et al*. (2020), p. 599), 'It is insufficient to treat all forests as equal regardless of their condition. Instead, forest that is free of significant anthropogenic degradation (which we term "intact forest") should be identified and accorded special consideration in policymaking, planning and implementation.'

Nearly all captive elephants are kept in tourism venues, causing urgent and complex issues for the elephants, the tourism industry, elephant camp owners, mahouts (the trainer, keeper or driver of an elephant who usually walks beside it or sits on its neck) and their families, and residents in adjacent areas (Dashper, 2020). Few Westerners had been able to see living elephants other than in zoos (Whipple, 2019) until the development of mass tourism to long-haul destinations. Contemporary zoos are involved in species survival through breeding programmes as well as individual animal welfare research, but their traditional approaches to exhibiting animals for public amusement are increasingly questioned (Hosey *et al*., 2020).

Katz (2019) reports that Circus Roncalli in Cologne has retired all its performing elephants, replacing them with holograms.

As elephants are no longer used in the logging industry in Asia, elephant tourism there has grown rapidly, providing almost the only viable way that elephants and their owners can generate income. However, while some old logging camps have been converted into elephant sanctuaries, many others have become entertainment centres, with concomitant welfare issues for the elephants and their mahouts. Profits from elephant tourism in Asia have encouraged African operators to follow a similar business model. Viewing elephants in the more natural surroundings of National Parks is growing in popularity, as is the use of elephants as tour buses and viewing platforms to enable safari tourists to observe other species such as tigers in safety.

Local social and business structures within which elephant tourism operates are open to influence by large-scale and international networks (Rianti *et al*., 2019). This is significant because villagers living around elephant reserves are likely to have priorities that differ from those of elephant preservation groups (van de Water and Matteson, 2018).

By bringing together many recent and leading studies of elephant tourism and introducing many new case studies and analyses, the editors of *The Elephant Tourism Business* hope to provide future researchers with a platform for more focused contributions to understanding these extraordinary animals as well as policy decisions about them. However, researchers and managers studying captive elephant welfare encounter several technical problems.

1. There are a multitude of terms for elephant management practices and tools across elephant range countries and in zoos around the world (Madding, 2019). As noted in the Glossary we consider it helpful to establish a common language for international communications,

although we recognize that previous attempts have not achieved a consensus, and in any case the local language or dialect terms are better understood in that locality.

2. Much of the business knowledge and data about elephant tourism is in proprietary research reports, and therefore available only to restricted audiences, and often only selected information is shared (Wertenbroch, 2015; Yodsuwan *et al*., 2018).
3. Published reports often contain data or opinions that contradict other resources and at present there is no reliable source (Guldemond *et al*., 2017).
4. Attempts to establish internationally compatible regulations for elephant welfare have not been successful to date (Stucki, 2017; Bansiddhi *et al*., 2020).

The perceptions surrounding the use of elephants in tourism are wide and varied, and a purpose of this volume is to try and inject some scientific reality into those perceptions. Another purpose behind this volume is the need to bring together in one place some of the most recent research and findings concerning the physical, moral and ethical considerations of using elephants in tourism, where they are used, and in what way the emotional wellbeing of these sentient beings is considered.

Henley (2019, n.p.) points out '…elephants have been acknowledged as "sentient" beings in the National Norms and Standards for the Management of Elephants in South Africa' (DEAT, 2007), according to which '…interventions to manage an elephant should seek to minimise any resultant pain or trauma to the elephant'. Henley (2019, n.p.) further points out that science (rather than opinion) has shown us that:

> not only are elephants capable of engaging in effective tool-use, but they have also passed the mirror self-recognition test as have apes and dolphins. Elephants' brains have a relatively large hippocampus compared to primates, which may explain their long social and chemical memories. Consequently, they can keep track spatially of where other individuals are relative to themselves, and it has even been shown that elephants can classify subgroups of humans that pose different degrees of danger.

This further complicates the many issues that face the use of elephants in the tourism sector. Questions of riding/not riding, captive/rewilding and many others need to be recognized and resolved, with the health and wellbeing of the elephant being of prime importance. To accomplish this, the facts need to be presented to potential tourists, to educate them properly and without bias. Only in that way can tourists modify their expectations of any interaction with elephants and their appropriate behaviours. No manner of guidelines and suggestions, however, will make any difference in changing such interactions unless they are policed and enforced.

The language of much of this volume is academic in nature, but that should not deter other readers from learning what experts in the fields of both elephant health and behaviour, and tourism, have to say. While polar

opposite views may appear, it is only by making these transparent that any real action for change can occur. That, in a nutshell, is the hope of this volume.

The Structure of this Book

The book has six sections, covering personal stories of interactions with elephants, through the expectations and experiences of visitors to elephant attractions, and some of the ethical and moral perspectives relating to their treatment. It then continues by offering some thoughts on management frameworks and alternate forms of interacting with them before concluding with some elephant tales as related at various tourist venues and by tourists though social media channels. In that last section in particular, it is as if the proxy voice of the elephant is finally being expressed and, hopefully, heard.

The chapters within each section range from academic discourse to personal narratives and, as such, the editors hope *The Elephant Tourism Business* will appeal to a wide range of readers. There is no doubt that there are extremes of thought about elephants, concerning topics from their capture and 'training', to their performing for tourists and general behaviour management. Can elephants be ridden, and indeed should they be ridden? Should hooks and other devices be used to manage their behaviour? As sentient creatures exhibiting 'self-awareness', why do humans in many, but not all cases, treat them so badly?

As a whole, the volume examines the current situation of elephants, while also offering some management alternatives and highlighting gaps in our knowledge of these animals that could benefit from additional rigorous scientific research. We do not know as much as we think we do about elephants.

Overview of The Elephant Tourism Business

In Section 1 of the volume, the first chapter provides an interview with John Roberts of the Anantara Golden Triangle Group. This chapter shows the increasing interest by Western tourists in a 'Walking with Giants' activity, whereby visitors do just that – walk alongside the elephants as they browse and behave normally. Riding is not part of the experience. It is interesting to note that Anantara offers this close interaction with an elephant to only a few people a day. Anantara also has introduced a 3-day mahout training package to allow guests to have the experience of working with an elephant, in the hands of staff with proper training. Visitors are covered by public liability insurance and the facility is compliant with health and safety regulations as well as, of course, providing a comfortable bed, good food and hot showers.

Anantara provides three distinct activities with each allowing elephants to participate according to their character rather than be forced into a riding, walking or purely passive activity. There are also elephants on site that do not take part in any activity and which guests never meet, because they have

shown a dislike for all activities. Anantara's funding model uses support from other income streams to allow them to do this despite the extra costs.

The position of the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) is then explored through an interview with Chi Lo, previously the Association's sustainability and social responsibility specialist. Her comments indicate that there is a lot of misunderstanding and misconception around elephants. She emphasizes that social media is affecting attitudes to elephant tourism. European inbound operators and their clients, for example, are more discerning and are demanding ethical tourism products. While there are differences in opinion between tourist operators and some animal rights groups, there is general agreement that elephants should never be taken from the wild.

Chi Lo points out that some groups, for example, believe that elephants should be set free; some believe elephant-riding should be banned; and yet others believe that there should be no interaction at all. Chi Lo argues riding is acceptable if it is done in a responsible and humane way and causes no injury or distress to the elephant. This position is echoed by other elephant specialists. The view of the Association is that elephants are part of a cultural and community experience and must be treated humanely.

Senal Siriwardene, an experiential architect at Jetwing Hotels, provides a practical example of elephants and tourists coexisting in a friendly and benign way at the Jetwing Yala and Jetwing Safari Camp in Sri Lanka. The two hotels are frequented by elephants who wander in and out of the hotel grounds, perfectly at home among the scrub forests and hotel buildings. They are not captive elephants, nor are they trained in any way. They are not trapped by fences and are free to move unhindered.

One in particular, a young bull elephant named 'Natta Kota' by the hotel staff, is a frequent visitor to these properties, much to the delight of guests. His appearance is due to 'Jetwing's insistence on not isolating themselves from the environment by means of fences, walls, and gates'. This allows Natta Kota and others the freedom to saunter in and out at their leisure, but with strict safety guidelines and procedures in force for tourists and staff.

That chapter is followed by one from Vinathe Sharma-Brymer and Eric Brymer, in which collaborative autoethnography allows them to narrate their personal accounts of elephants in India, while reflecting on issues that have affected human–elephant interactions. The authors provide both an insider and an outsider view, and observe that any appreciation for an elephant's agency is lost in human translation.

Section 2 begins with a chapter by Bongkosh Rittichainuwat, Noel Scott and Eric Laws detailing the development of elephant tourism in Thailand. Asian elephants have long been an important part of Thailand's history and culture, and feature prominently in Buddhist religious iconography, in folklore and as emblems of the royal family. The authors note that quite apart from playing a key role in dynastic conflicts elephants also made 'important contributions historically to Thailand's economy as draft animals for farmers and later in the logging industry, transporting lumber from the forests across difficult mountainous terrain'. They also note that in earlier times mahouts, coming as they did from shamanistic traditions, understood

elephants in the context of their natural ecology, enabling them to work effectively with them.

Following a logging ban enacted by the government in 1989, in response to devastating floods and loss of life brought about by unsustainable logging practices, both elephants and their mahouts suddenly found themselves unemployed. From positions of high esteem, some 2000 elephants and their mahouts were forced to resort to begging on the streets of Thailand, in order to survive. Seeing this as an opportunity, Thai entrepreneurs began to offer visits to old logging camps that had been turned into attractions for tourists, beginning the involvement of elephants in the tourism sector. The welfare of the elephants at this stage was at best a secondary concern for many of the camp owners and operators.

The authors note however that this is now changing. 'Interestingly, for the elephants in Thailand, the improvements in their welfare resulted from the actions of travel trade associations such as ABTA [the Association of British Travel Agents], travel trade channel members, and specialist animal welfare and ethnic community NGOs'. This further emphasizes the need to educate tourists on the plight of many elephants in camps and attractions, as it is those very tourists who can facilitate proper change.

This section then moves into a series of chapters describing visitors to elephant camps and their behaviours. Saranphat Chotmanakul and Somyot Ongkhluap from Chiangmai University in Thailand discuss elephant tourism in northern Thailand and the image of elephants in Thailand, as well as discussing how elephants became involved in the tourism business. They note that the global trend towards 'green' and 'responsible' business models has significantly affected elephant camps. Concerns for animal rights and sustainability, for example, have led to the introduction of new types of services offered at those camps, suggesting that responsible tourism could emerge and become mainstream. These trends may also affect tourist motivation and behaviour, and thus shape the way tourists engage with elephants.

Susanna Curtin and Charlotte Day continue with an analysis of visitor perceptions, offering more ethical forms of tourism beyond simply the rhetoric offered by many elephant sanctuaries. They illustrate immersive experiences that are less transitory and allow mahouts and their local communities to become involved in tourism development, leading to a kinder and more ethical elephant tourism alternative. Such an approach differs from what can be an unscrupulous and currently unregulated elephant tourism industry, which often fabricates an emotional narrative of care and rehabilitation for tourists who want to believe these stories.

Ramona Strödecke and Nicole Häusler further extend this discussion by examining visitor preferences and experiences at major elephant tourism attractions in Sri Lanka. They find that most visitors to the sites studied cared about the welfare of the elephants and were mainly interested in observing them, not in elephant back-riding. Even so, some visitors at one site decided to ride the elephants when presented with the opportunity, suggesting that either people do not know such an activity can be problematic, or that they are aware of it, but do not act accordingly.

Many survey respondents indicated that they wanted to learn more about the elephants at the attractions, suggesting that these sites need to provide more educational information. Other responses highlighted the limited education regarding the threats elephants are facing.

Overall, the experiences of the respondents who visited the major elephant attractions in Sri Lanka were positive. However, the administrators of the attractions should respond to any negative online reviews and offer rational explanations, as many potential visitors rely on reviews as their main source of information in choosing which venue to visit, or indeed, whether to visit any elephant camp.

The third section of the volume turns to ethical and moral perspectives of elephant tourism, beginning with a chapter by Anja Pabel and Mucha Mkono, who note the growing ethical, animal welfare and conservation concerns around the use of captive elephants for tourism entertainment in some developed countries, and the subsequent rise of 'elephant sanctuaries' that purport to offer more responsible elephant–visitor interactions. They note, however, that there has been very little research on visitor attitudes or experiences in these sanctuaries, particularly from an animal ethics perspective, and propose a framework that encompasses three dimensions of moral tension that relate to animal welfare and the operations of animal sanctuaries, from the viewpoint of the visitor experience. These dimensions are (i) freedom–captivity; (ii) distance–interaction; and (iii) natural–staged.

The second chapter in this section, from Quingming Cui and Honggang Xu, discusses the value of an ethical elephant encounter. They note that many of the elephant camps around Chiangmai have become 'elephant sanctuaries', 'elephant homes' or 'elephant parks'. Indeed, many claim to treat elephants carefully, having abandoned unethical tourism activities, developing a promising model for profiting from captive elephants while treating them well. The authors argue that elephant welfare in these sanctuaries needs to be maintained on the basis of economic sustainability and that the key to economic sustainability lies in rediscovering the 'encounter value' of elephants in the tourism market. The concept of 'ethical encounter value' illustrates that ethics is not only a concern in capitalizing on the encounter value of animals, but it also serves as a marketing tool to sustain both economic development and animal welfare.

They illustrate how ethical encounter value can be delivered in three ways, namely:

i. revealing backstage 'truth' and building a sense of empathy;
ii. frontstage: spectacular encounter and sense of gratitude; and
iii. backstage work and a sense of responsibility.

Through this case study, the authors show that a balance between economics and ethics can be achieved and replace the encounter offered in traditional elephant camps, which generally involves profit at the expense of the elephants' freedom, welfare and rights.

Elephants are not alone in their current plight and the next chapter in this section, by Liv Baker, Sarah Blaine and Rebecca Winkler, considers mahouts

along with elephant protection and conservation. In Thailand, the local knowledge of certain Karen hilltribe mahouts, and the political will of particular communities to preserve a cultural identity as elephant guardians and forest protectors, have the potential to play an important role in reforming the current model of elephant tourism. Here the authors outline how the Mahouts Elephant Foundation (MEF) model of elephant tourism works to overcome constraints and problems facing management of elephants in Thailand. To promote coexistence, the authors argue that highly skilled mahouts with the ability to develop healthy relationships with elephants are critical to successful elephant protection and conservation, as well as sustainable ecotourism in a landscape where both elephant and human cultures are valued.

This section concludes with an Importance–Performance Analysis of elephant conservation-based tourism by Daminda Sumanapala, Nilakshi W.K. Galahitiyawe and Isabelle Wolf. The focus of this chapter is on the Elephant Transit Home at Udawalawe in Sri Lanka, a site that rehabilitates baby elephants into the wild and allows elephant watching in an unobtrusive manner.

Three areas were identified that other elephant sanctuaries would do well to emulate, namely:

i. give strong attention to the critical welfare aspects of the experience;
ii. establish a strategic education plan that is visitor friendly and accounts for the varying socio-demographic backgrounds of visitors; and
iii. continue with staff education towards optimal customer service and improved facilities.

Taken together, these elements would deliver a strong *ex situ* wildlife conservation experience by ensuring the optimal performance of the welfare-related attributes of the experience, as well as a considered approach to visitor education, and accompanying staff and amenity factors.

Section 4 delves into a number of frameworks for elephant tourism management, beginning with a review of the effectiveness of elephant welfare regulations in India by Sumanth Bindumadhav, Alokparna Sengupta and Shilpa Mahbubani.

A number of regulations and guidelines are reviewed, including:

- The Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- Declaration of Wildlife Stock Rules, 2003 (DWSR).
- Guidelines for Care and Management of Captive Elephants (GCMCE).
- Performing Animals Rules (PAR).
- Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 (PCA).

These authors found that, as is the case with many regulations, while the intent is clear, their effectiveness falls short when it comes to their implementation. Furthermore, the GCMCE, while in place and serving as a benchmark, are guidelines only and as such are not enforceable by law. This points to the broader issue raised by Nassim Taleb (2010, p. 47), who states '…awareness of a problem does not mean much – particularly when you have special interests and self-serving institutions in play'.

Ann Suwaree Ashton then discusses in detail the attitudes of Thai elephant stakeholders. She points out that in northern Thailand there are several ethical elephant sanctuaries that have largely dispensed with riding and where there is no prodding, use of hooks or hitting. They have freedom to move around, have plenty of room to do so and, significantly, receive adequate medical treatment.

The activities that these ethical operators offer include:

i. mud baths with the elephants;
ii. trekking;
iii. learning elephant behaviour;
iv. discovering how to make elephant medicine;
v. collecting and replanting elephant food;
vi. feeding elephants; and
vii. engaging in social interaction with the local community.

The managers of these elephant tourism camps work closely with the community around the camp, creating community awareness about elephant welfare. They teach animal treatment, employ locals in many jobs at the camps and buy elephant feed grown by local farmers. Even where elephant-riding is still available, consideration is given to the needs of the animal, with only one or two tourists riding with the mahout. Elephant-riding is limited to a total of 12 visitors per day and has a premium price.

Many elephant camp managers follow animal welfare regulations, while responding to tourist demands by matching the activities offered with the requirements of different groups. They also continually seek new and innovative ways to promote elephant tourism products and services to tourists. While many Western tourists see elephant-riding and performances as cruel and unethical, there is still high demand from Asian tourists for such activities. A number of elephant camp owners acknowledge this issue and sell different packages to each group, while still delivering the activities in a sustainable and ethical way.

This research found that many (but not all) elephant camps in northern Thailand are establishing standards based on elephant health and wellbeing, environmental sustainability and customer satisfaction, while simultaneously appealing to different visitor segments.

Next, Clare Jenkins from ABTA follows, with a chapter on promoting improved elephant welfare. The 2019 edition of ABTA's Animal Welfare Guidelines and its supporting guidance manuals set out basic welfare requirements and unacceptable practices, as defined by expert evidence. In the absence of international regulations, these practical guides provide guidance for the suppliers of animal experiences and attractions. These guidelines build upon the extended Five Domains model developed by Mellor and Beausoleil (2015), which is in turn based on the Farm Animal Welfare Council's Five Freedoms (Farm Animal Welfare Council, 1979) and Welfare Quality criteria. The extended Five Domains model is considered the most accepted framework for measuring animal welfare.

ABTA's role is to provide advice, guidance and tools to its members to support them to implement approaches that respect animal welfare; however, implementation of the guidelines is voluntary. With the growing demand for animal welfare and ethical treatment coming from the travellers, it is in the best interests of ABTA members to take into consideration how appropriate or inappropriate are the activities undertaken by the attractions that they recommend and sell.

Section 5 deals with elephants and their stories, considering the narratives delivered by the attractions themselves, as well as by social media platforms. These social media posts can be considered as the proxy voices of the elephants as delivered by the tourists and visitors themselves. Jeffrey Dale Hobbs and Piengpen Na Pattalung begin this section with a case study on the narratives told about elephants at tourist venues in Phuket, Thailand. Narratives are important, as the dominant stories tend to be those most likely to shape policy towards animals. The authors indicate that narratives about animals can help form communities and ideologies centred on caring for a particular animal.

The authors find that animal narratives can be centred on six themes: anthropomorphism and zoomorphism; commercial uses of animals; conservation and ethical treatment of animals; danger and mystery; interactions with animals; and science. The narratives about elephants are both similar and different to those for animals in general, depending on which of the six themes it falls under. Four recommendations are offered for narratives about elephants, namely:

1. Analyse the story told about elephants and decide if this is the one to communicate.
2. Be prepared to constantly adapt to tourists' changing attitudes towards animals.
3. Train and treat animals humanely – stories must be consistent with what the listener experiences.
4. Any laws passed to protect elephants must take the culture's metanarrative into account in order for the law to be successful.

In the next chapter, Andrea and Melville Saayman use contingent valuation to determine the mean willingness to pay for a successful elephant sighting by tourists visiting protected areas in South Africa. The mean willingness to pay was found to reflect the scarcity of the species and since the elephant is relatively abundant in all the parks and, in many instances, much easier to spot than the leopard or lion, the mean valuation of a sighting is generally much lower than that of a leopard and lion.

The valuation of the rhino, however, which is facing a severe decline in numbers due to poaching, shows that wildlife viewing tourists account for this in their valuation – albeit only when the scarcity becomes such that it influences their opportunity to view the animal in its natural habitat, either now or in the future. It is therefore imperative that the poaching of elephants should attract more media attention to inform current and potential tourists of the threat the species is facing. If not, the non-consumptive value of the

species will remain underestimated, until a crisis, similar to the one the rhino population is now facing, is reached.

Kannapa Pongponrat and Naphawan Chantradoan then ask, 'who hears the voices of the elephants' and examine how media can be used to gain the attention of visitors and, through them, enable elephant-based attraction owners/operators to deliver a more ethical and authentic experience. They found that user generated content (UGC) is commonly regarded as an authentic source of data by other users and has a high impact on people's emotions, often leading to actions and petitions. Their work explored social media campaigns related to Thailand's elephant tourism in order to better understand prevailing public concerns. Three major issues that emerged were:

i. unethical elephant tourism practices;
ii. country image affected by unethical elephant tourism; and
iii. elephant welfare and health and safety conditions.

While the impacts of social media on elephant rights appear to be strong and to drive awareness of and subsequently improvements in elephant welfare, there is still no real understanding of the feeling of the elephants on their captivity and often harsh treatment.

The voices of the elephants are not heard, since there are few mechanisms to track and assess elephant tourism. The authors suggest there is an urgent need for further research in this area.

The final section for the body of this volume asks the pertinent question of 'what next?'. Andrew McLean is the co-founder of the Human Elephant Learning Programs (H-ELP) Foundation, an Australian organization aiming to improve the welfare of working elephants in Asia. The chapter discusses the issue of ethical elephant training. Andrew has a PhD in learning science and animal learning, and his systematic approach to elephant training is recognized as a viable and safe alternative to traditional submission-based methods.

Andrew observes that horse training in the West is very much like elephant training in Asia, inasmuch as it is strongly influenced by traditional thinking, with submission of the animal an essential element. Moving beyond these traditional approaches, Andrew first applied a learning science approach to training using both positive and negative reinforcement with elephants in Nepal in 2007. In addition, Andrew asserts that the mindset widely held in Asia, but also among animal rights organizations, is that in order for an elephant to be in a free contact management system (interacting with humans in one space) it is essential to 'break the will' of the infant elephant. This is not based on learning science.

On the controversial and contentious issue of riding elephants, Andrew makes the point that riding is not a great benchmark of welfare because elephants can be trained to be ridden in an ethical way. In improving conditions for captive elephants, Andrew considers four essentials:

1. The ability of the elephant to move.
2. The ability to forage.

3. Opportunities for socialization.
4. The application of ethical training techniques.

In moving forward, Andrew suggests that two developments need to occur:

1. The tourism industry needs to be audited and held accountable, and also should sponsor those audit programmes, because it makes money out of elephants.
2. Tourists and operators should be better educated. Many reactions at the moment are from people who have an empathy with animals, but who don't know enough of the reality of their perceptions.

The next chapter is from Vivek Gurusamy and Clive Phillips, who provide a captive elephant welfare index that can be applied by zoos and sanctuaries. They begin by noting that the contentious issue of welfare and management conditions of captive elephants should focus on their physical, psychological and social requirements in confinement. They point out, however, that this is a complex evaluation and one that cannot easily be achieved through a single measure of welfare, since it should be focused 'not only on the health of an individual but also on its emotional experiences and perceptions of its environment'. The authors developed and validated a captive elephant welfare index (CEWI).

Marjorie van Strien and Jan Schmidt-Burbach then discuss the need for locally grounded and tailor-made mechanisms to promote animal-friendly tourism. As they highlight, there is a potentially negative effect following reduced demand for elephant-rides, particularly on the care afforded to these animals because of lost revenue. Elimination of elephant-riding may, in fact, lead to a deterioration in their welfare as a consequence of that lost revenue. They argue that developing alternative sources of revenue from elephants is essential, but these should come from more humane activities involving the animals.

Using the village of Sauraha in Nepal, a principal entry point to Chitwan National Park, as an example, the authors show how an understanding of the local level is key to developing a strategy for improving captive elephant welfare. The authors propose a strategy to develop a more cooperative business model to enable a reduction in both risks and costs for local businesses.

The final chapter in this section looks at the paradox of elephant-friendly tourism. Daniel Turner and Naut Kusters note that finding a viable solution to protecting the integrity of the destination and business, the welfare of elephants and the livelihoods of mahouts is a priority, but that, until now, initiatives have failed to make any meaningful difference.

They note the different offerings made to Western and Asian visitors, with fewer travel companies offering their Western clients fewer elephant interactions, compared with Eastern-based companies. For the Asian visitor markets, however, many attractions still offer the traditional riding and circus-style performances. This indicates that views of elephant camp operations are polarized. One side calls for a phasing out of all hands-on activity, observing elephants from afar instead, while the other advocates a reform of training

techniques and camp management. One solution they suggest, is that as proposed by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), to encourage better 'communication, cooperation and compromise' among stakeholders to 'continue the discussion and set in motion a more universal set of standards that benefits everyone – elephants, their mahouts, elephant business owners, inbound travel agencies and tour operators'. The tourism sector becomes part of the solution and less of the problem.

The Captive Asian Elephant Welfare Standards (CAEWS) is also a significant step forward, reflecting as it does, current understanding of elephant welfare. These standards have been established on evidence-based knowledge and consider the practical implications of managing elephants within the typical highly managed, captive environment in Asia.

Across this volume, *The Elephant Tourism Business* shows how elephant treatment, management and use are controversial. The authors emphasize that education of all involved in this sector needs to be factual and based in science. A number of models for the ethical and humane treatment of elephants have been proposed and, using these as a start point, further research and development can hopefully improve their lot as sentient and self-aware creatures. The ethical treatment of these pachyderms is not only the responsibility of the mahouts and the operators/owners and communities using elephants for financial gain, but also the tourists themselves.

All humans have a responsibility to understand the complex situation that elephants face and afford them courtesy and good treatment. We hope that the contents of this volume offer a better understanding of elephants and help readers to adjust their expectations in interacting with these majestic beasts.

Editors' note – The COVID-19 pandemic began as thisbook was being completed. We have addeda Postscript to provide a preliminary analysis of the serious effects it ishaving on the elephant tourism business.

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Section 1 Personal Experiences of Elephant Tourism

1 Managing the Anantara Golden Triangle Elephant Camp: Eric Laws Interviews John Roberts

Eric Laws

Leshan Normal University, Sichuan Province, China

Introduction

This chapter is a record of interviews with John Roberts, director of the Golden Triangle Asian Elephant Foundation, previously the director of elephants at the Anantara Golden Triangle Resort. This series of interviews was conducted during February 2019 in Chiangmai, and in more depth at the Anantara Golden Triangle Resort in October 2019. The interviews had a casual and iterative style of discussion. The notes paraphrasing John's views on the topics were collated and then sent to him for comment. The two major topics explored were, first, how John become interested in elephant welfare issues, and, second, the origins and development of the Anantara Golden Triangle Elephant Camp and related activities.

John's Interest in Elephants

John worked in remote National Parks as a Ranger, enjoying the work, the lifestyle and the environments. In 1998 he joined 'Tiger Tops' in the Chitwan National Park, Nepal, where elephants were used for tourist transport and for safety in wildlife viewing. John became immersed in the mahouts' lifestyle, which involved living with the elephants. Reflecting on his experiences in Nepal, John regarded some of the individual elephants as friends, but 20 years on he thinks it unlikely that the elephants recognized him as an individual character; rather, he was a fact of their life.

Each elephant displayed individual characteristics, and his understanding of this has become important in the way John now selects elephants

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for particular types of interaction with Anantara's guests. He cautions that elephants have rather volatile moods: what one will tolerate on one day is not always a predictor of how it might behave the following day, either when interacting with conspecifics or, particularly, with humans to whom they are only loosely bonded.

John's experiences also led to him consider that mahouts made a number of mistakes. They typically had unrealistically high expectations that an elephant could understand verbal or physical cues (Plotnik *et al*., 2013) and, as a result, mahouts punished the elephant rather than giving it sufficient time to work out in its own mind what it was expected to do in new situations. This was compounded by a tendency to use different cues for a specific behaviour, expecting an elephant to 'just understand what is needed'. Mahouts also overestimated elephants' eyesight, considering them stubborn, rather than understanding that an elephant's thought processes and methods for processing its environments are different from their own (McLean, 2014). John added that most captive elephants can respond to no more than 70 spoken commands, or cues such as pressure on an ear to direct them in a particular direction, but to make use of this ability a mahout must be well bonded with his elephant and there has to be mutual trust.

Anantara's Operations and its Interest in Elephants

Anantara's range of luxury hotels and resorts is 'each designed to enable guests to engage with the people, places and stories that make each destination unique'. The owners of Anantara, particularly Mr William E. Heinecke, founder and chairman of Minor International, parent company to Anantara, have a love for elephants. In 2003, when John joined Anantara, the company owned a hotel in Hua Hin where guests could interact with baby elephants on a private beach (this practice has since been discontinued), and the five-star Baan Boran Hotel in the Golden Triangle north of Chiangrai. Historically, wandering mahouts occasionally brought captive elephants to the extensive forested land around the Baan Boran Hotel.

Elephants provided a unique selling proposition for Baan Boran, enabling the owners to combine their love of elephants with a commercial venture. Anantara began by renting four mature elephants from Lampang's Thai Elephant Conservation Centre (TECC). John was recruited in 2003 as the elephant manager, responsible for the elephants' welfare and for developing the hotel guests' enjoyment and experience of elephant tourism.

Anantara introduced a 3-day mahout training package (the Mahout Experience) to allow guests to have the experience of working with an elephant without having to undergo the strenuous labour or time investment of an alternative 30-day course offered in the TECC, Lampang. Other advantages of deriving their elephant experience from an internationally operating hotel brand were confidence in such things as public liability insurance, staff welfare and human resource training, compliance with health and safety regulations, as well as, of course, a comfortable bed, good

food and hot showers. Tourists enjoyed this and most were able to pass a simple 'driving test' with their elephant and receive a certificate. A shorter (1 1/2 h) version of the mahout training was later introduced.

In 2013, Anantara began the 'Elephant Learning' guest experience and in 2016 a 'Walking with Giants' activity. The latter is now the most popular with guests from Western Europe, the USA and Australia. Walking with Giants is not harmful to the elephants and provides vital exercise that even free roaming does not (Bansiddhi *et al*., 2019), along with a chance to interact with conspecifics in varied natural habitats. John is monitoring the popularity of the mahout experiences. If it becomes truly unpopular he will have to replace it with a similar exercise (Norkaew *et al*., 2018) for those elephants who don't like strangers walking alongside them.

How Does Anantara Differ from Other Elephant Tourism Venues?

The leisurely and elephant-focused Mahout Experience, Walking with Giants and Elephant Learning Experience contrast with visits to a typical large elephant camp, where there could be 3000 visitors per day. Visitors to those camps are shepherded in groups between the various elephant shows, spectacles, rides and other activities such as shopping and dining. These camps do not facilitate any bonding between visitors and elephants. In such camps elephants are busy most of the day, or kept waiting for their next activity, sometimes on hard surfaces or in direct sunlight.

Anantara limits an elephant to two or three short activities spaced out over a day, with a maximum of five hours of walking, and with only a few guests to optimize stress-free interaction. Elephant contact hours, basic health and behaviour are recorded daily and entered into a central database, which is monitored by the veterinary team. The shorter guest contact time has to generate the income to support the elephant for 24 hours and during Thailand's lower guest seasons. John points out that, from a business perspective, elephants and mahouts are fixed costs, requiring the same financial input whether or not they are interacting with guests.

The three distinct activities provided at Anantara allow elephants to participate according to their character rather than being forced into a riding, walking or purely passive activity against that elephant's specific needs. John is keen to point out that they also have elephants on site that do not take part in any activity and that guests never meet because they have shown dislike for all activities – it is their funding model and support from Anantara's other income streams, however, that allows them to do this despite the extra costs.

Anantara offers close interaction with an elephant at a scale of operation of only a few people a day. In their increasingly popular Walking with Giants activity, guests accompanied by a mahout walk beside an elephant along jungle trails slowly, enabling the elephant to forage. The activity, as with the Mahout Experience, has built-in periods for the elephants to interact with each other in their environment but the guests retreat to a suitable

distance for safety and to observe natural elephant behaviour. This delights and fascinates guests. The setup also allows John to keep elephants that do not like guest interaction in areas of forest where guests either will not encounter them, or can watch them from the safety of a very long distance such as during the Elephant Learning Experience, during which guests are accompanied by a member of the veterinary team.

Many guests enjoy elephant-hugging, but some elephants do not want to be hugged by people – they are averse to noise, crowds and being touched other than by an experienced mahout. Hugging an elephant can quickly become dangerous, particularly as few tourists can read an elephant's body language. When necessary, a mahout uses his hook to separate an elephant from humans before any threat escalates.

A hook is effective in controlling the elephant as an extension of the mahout's arm rather than as a weapon, but even this is discouraged to prevent mahouts relying on it. However, John insists mahouts carry a hook in their backpack because its true value is in controlling unforeseen dangerous situations without harming the elephant, and for the safety of all concerned (Bansiddhi *et al*., 2019).

How 'Natural' is Life for an Elephant at Anantara?

Both Thailand's provisional Draft Elephant Act (Part 2, Section 47) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Asian Elephant Specialist Group Guidelines (IUCN Asian Elephant Specialist Group, 2019) require captive elephants to be kept chained at night, or contained in strongly fenced enclosures. At Anantara most elephants are secured on 30-metre long chains attached to stout trees spaced so that they can choose to have contact with each other, or to be alone. John considers this preferable to enclosures as it provides more space each night and elephants can be moved to different areas of the forest when one area is depleted by browsing. John feels chaining in this fashion allows the provision of welfare without increasing elephants' stress levels (Bansiddhi *et al*., 2019). However, in an effort to conform, they are experimenting with enclosures for a group of elephants that are friendly with each other (Veasey, 2019).

The forests around the hotel provide many types of food required by elephants but are degraded, so supplementary feeding is provided. Each elephant has an individual diet plan. Bananas, sugarcane and various types of grass are bought from local farmers and brought in fresh daily by small trucks that the elephants recognize. It costs about US$12,000 per year to feed an elephant, which consumes 250 kg of food per day (that figure increases to $18,000 when John factors in feeding and paying the mahout and his family). Elephants also drink a lot of water; they like to spray it over themselves and to bathe in pools or streams. The hotel is situated above the banks of the Ruak River, about 500 metres from its confluence with the Mekong, so water is plentiful, but some elephants seem to enjoy taking purified water from hosepipes, both to drink and to spray over themselves. Also absent in this

area are salt licks, so mineral blocks are placed in the grazing areas for the elephants.

What is Happening to Elephant Populations in Thailand?

Recent changes in elephant registration (Thailand Director of CITES, 2017) mean that the captive elephant population in Thailand is known fairly accurately. In 2018 there were 3783 with detailed 'pink book' registration documents, which give identifying information to include DNA-based script. These certificates have to be shown by the owner when an inspection is conducted by the authorities or by auditors, and are required when an elephant is moved to a different administrative area within Thailand. However, sometimes elephants are brought in for specialized veterinarian care from neighbouring countries such as Myanmar. These elephants are microchipped and recorded when crossing the frontier, but have no legal Thai standing and could not legally join an elephant camp or move out of the border area.

In addition to captive elephants, Thailand also has a population of between 3126 and 3341 wild elephants (IUCN Asian Elephant Specialist Group, 2019) living in protected areas of the National Parks, with some herds as large as 100 individuals. These can be difficult to manage because of the mountainous forest terrain, and they often stray on to neighbouring farms, damaging crops and causing violent conflict, sometimes resulting in the death of both humans and elephants. In Asia alone an average of 600 humans and 450 wild elephants die each year as a result of conflicts between humans and elephants (IUCN Asian Elephant Specialist Group, 2019). There is no compensation scheme for farmers in Thailand, although other countries such as China have a formal government-funded scheme. Groups of wild elephants also seek contact with each other, causing them to stray across roads and enter villages. John suggests a focus is needed on projects to establish elephant corridors between the wild elephant populations.

Official figures show both the Thai wild and captive elephant populations are increasing. Captive elephants are sought because they generate income for their owners and camp operators. There is a legal market for them among camp owners and so breeding at this point in time is large-scale and successful; a mature elephant is currently valued at around $56,000 (Schmidt-Burbach, 2017), with anecdotal conversations mentioning prices sometimes in excess of $100,000. The Chiangmai Chamber of Commerce has calculated that an elephant can generate almost $50,000 per year for the local economy (including camp revenue, transportation, travel agent fees, etc.), also including the purchase of elephant fodder (few camps have land to grow their own) and other supplies.

There is no agreement on elephant breeding control due to strong demand from camp owners, interest by Western zoos in elephant breeding and the importance of captive elephants in Thai culture. Population increase is often presented as conservation of the species despite their current apparent fecundity in the wild, however unfounded. John feels this argument

is the one most often made when he debates these issues with the elephant community at large.

Has Concern about Captive Elephant Welfare Increased?

Around 2010, awareness of poor conditions for captive animals at many tourist locations led to moves by Western origin country tour operators to introduce guidelines and monitoring for their management, with sanctions against those camps that did not accept or implement them. Soon the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) undertook a similar project for its many member companies with technical advice from the Born Free Foundation. Separate books of standards were published for particular animal species, including one for elephants. These early control systems, and in particular the monitoring of them, were not entirely based on elephant experience and needs, but reflected popular concerns; for example, about potential harm from riding on elephants or the cruelty thought to be entailed in training elephants to perform humanistic acts such as painting, which had attracted adverse media attention.

Sanctions were to exclude non-compliant camps from the major tour operators' lists of approved destination activities (this was partly in response to EU regulations, which had recently made tour operators legally liable for their clients' welfare and have recently been updated (Commissioner for Justice Consumers and Gender Equality, 2018), and sustainability auditing companies such as Travelife for Tour Operators that began to hold operators liable for the sustainability of their own supply chain. The result was the unintended creation of a further set of unemployed elephants and elephant owners as visitor numbers to these camps began to fall off. Some less compliant camp operators responded by turning to the newly developing outbound Chinese tourism market, which made up 58% of Thailand's inbound market in 2019.

By early 2019 the captive elephant tourism industry in Thailand appeared to have split into those camps that claimed a more elephant-centric approach, with elephant welfare as the core value, and another set of camps where the focus was on attracting and entertaining large numbers of paying visitors with elephant performances. However, deeper investigation showed that holistic elephant management was still largely independent of activities advertised (Bansiddhi *et al*., 2018). There was little consensus as to what actually constituted best practice, with some of the practices assumed to be more 'modern' or 'better for elephants' welfare actually being counterproductive (e.g. overfed, under-exercised elephants have been found to be more highly stressed), and some of the presumed 'outlawed' elephant activities actually providing necessary enrichment and exercise when undertaken in the right circumstances (Bansiddhi *et al*., 2019).

Hence the urgent need for a group such as the Asian Captive Elephant Working Group (ACEWG, www.acewg.org) to help define elephants' actual rather than presumed needs, and then to advise willing camps on how best

to meet these needs. The ACEWG, of which John sits as co-chair, concentrates on setting science-based guidelines that can be used by organizations intent on auditing for welfare; facilitating access to specialist vets and providing opportunities for scientific assessment of elephant behaviour and stress levels under various conditions while identifying gaps where new scientific research is needed and supporting scientists in filling those gaps.

How Does Anantara Seek to Improve Conditions for Captive Elephants?

In 2006, Anantara set up the Golden Triangle Asian Elephant Foundation (GTAEF) as its in-house foundation (see www.helpingelephants.org) to encourage better treatment of elephants by the many small camps in the region. GTAEF funds workshops on positive reinforcement training methods, environmental enrichment workshops and, in Surin Province, elephant veterinary care and providing English language and conservation education for mahouts' children. Anantara and the Foundation also support onsite research into elephants' needs, their cognition and thought processes through a long-term partnership with the US-based not-for-profit Think Elephants International. Other ongoing projects include working with the Chiangmai University's Faculty of Occupational Therapy to develop and implement an 'elephant therapy' programme to help both elephants and autistic children.

GTAEF also works to help wild elephants stay wild, currently working in and around two Thai National Parks and, perhaps most notably, since 2013 has funded the protection of an 18,000-ha elephant corridor of standing forest in the Cardamom Mountains, where there was previously no government or other on-the-ground protection and where both poaching of meat and felling of timber were rife.

"We had read Dr Josh Plotnik's work long before we met him, particularly his groundbreaking mirror self-recognition study, so when we got the chance to work with him and his foundation, Think Elephants International, we jumped at the chance (Dale and Plotnik, 2017). With so many opinions out there, some born of experience and expertise but also born of folklore, superstition and emotion, we agreed with Josh that we needed as much scientific study as possible to help us know for sure about elephants' needs in order to best look after them in captivity and protect them in the wild.

We built a dedicated research facility and have since taken part in many studies, including those that proved Asian elephants can be self-aware, in vision and in body, can cooperate to undertake novel tasks, rarely follow visual clues but have an even more acute sense of smell than was ever thought, spread seeds of different trees more efficiently than other vectors – and a few more unpublished revelations that are embargoed! They have also worked with Think Elephants International to develop and roll out a conservation curriculum for Thai schools and are currently helping fund Josh's work investigating wild elephants in central Thailand."

GTAEF Target Training Positive Reinforcement Workshops

Target Training is a method to allow managers and vets to work with a range of animals while not sharing a space with those animals. It requires purely optional cooperation of the animal and seeks to reinforce preferred behaviours (e.g. presentation of the foot for inspection, opening of the mouth for dental inspection) through positive reinforcement.

Dr Gerardo Martinez from Africam Safari (www.africam.com/wildlife/index.php) trained an elephant how to present his feet when needing his nails trimmed. Since then we have held around two workshops a year, covering four countries in South-east Asia. The training technique has been officially adopted by two government departments in charge of their own elephants and has positively affected the training of thousands of elephants.

Target Training allows vets and managers to work even with aggressive or sick and in-pain elephants safely, without having to risk anaesthetic or very restrictive close confinement. It also encourages a mahout to train his elephant to do something new through purely positive methods and to try and understand the elephant's thought processes (Martinez and Roberts, 2019).

One weakness is that Target Training is a technique where there is a barrier between mahout and elephants. This is not normal practice and so we are also working with the Human Elephant Learning Programme (see www.h-elp.org), who have developed an elephant-friendly training technique.

John is convinced that, by giving traditional elephant trainers access to these new tools in a manner that doesn't seek to preach and allows them to develop both techniques also using their own experiences, we can continue to make great strides both in elephant training and mahout handling of elephants throughout the region.

How Do You Obtain Your Elephants?

Anantara's model for obtaining elephants was set by Pleum, their first elephant. John met Pleum on Sukhumvit Road in central Bangkok sometime in 2005 and got talking to the mahout about joining the then-new project in the Golden Triangle. After several months of negotiation they agreed a rental agreement with provision for the mahout's family to join, with all living costs for them and the elephant to be covered as well as a rental fee to allow the mahout to make an income and service debts.

The next elephant, Tawan, who had been hit by a car, was purchased from the owner for a large amount of money. We have since donated Tawan to the Thailand's Reintroduction Foundation and he is living free in forests in Lampang Province.

The owner used this money and some money from the car driver who had hit Tawan to buy two more elephants, which he took begging on the streets. He presented these to us the next year and asked us to rescue these from him too. We refused, realizing that if we bought elephants the owner

would just buy another elephant and carry on the same lifestyle. From then on, our policy was to rent elephants and work only with mahouts and owners who wanted to work with us and who, to a certain extent, shared our mindset – or who we felt could be persuaded to at least!

Please Give an Example of a Rescued Elephant's Life

We provide brief profiles of our rescued elephants on our website.[1] As an example, Pumpui spent her early life on the street. Shortly before her mahout, Lung Suk, bought her in 2005, she had been hit by a car and lost the baby she was carrying. She was very scared of cars and wary of people. Suk and his family worked patiently with Pumpui and helped calm her down over time but continued travelling with her and spent two years in Pattaya living on the streets. Since coming to GTAEF, Pumpui has calmed down further; she is still wary of cars and trucks, but now has her friend and constant companion, Nong Dah, by her side to reassure her. Few elephants form such friendships and building a herd from unrelated elephants is a slow process! Lung Suk has since passed away, but his son-in-law still works with Pumpui and is one of our star mahouts.

The website describes how her friend Nong Dah came to us at four years of age. She came directly from Bangkok, where she had been walking the streets at night selling bananas and posing for photos. At four years old, Dah had never seen the jungle before, only city concrete and tarmac. Our fears that she may have been scared on arrival were quickly dispelled as, being an elephant, she saw our forest as a huge buffet and tried to outeat any nerves she may have had. Having never had a proper childhood, Dah was happy to get involved in the smaller babies' games but is always aware of her advanced strength and never abuses it. Now in her mid-teens, Dah is still good friends with all of our youngsters but spends most of her time with Pumpui.

Pumpui's rear right leg had been broken, and had been set incorrectly before she arrived here; she tips forward to take some weight off her broken leg by leaning on her trunk, but that puts stress on her front left shoulder. We try to help with massage. A specialist osteopath, Tony Nevin, visits twice a year from the UK, and also trains the staff in how to help her avoid pain during his absence. Guests can come to watch and some like to try their hand.

During my visit Tony and the camp vet Dr Nissa Mututanont stood near her talking quietly for half an hour before her mahout brought her forward from the fenced and covered shelter where she stood waiting with her friend Dah. Tony spent more time watching her gait as she walked with her mahout under his instructions, then approached her slowly and began to run his hand over her front shoulders. After some time he began to push with more force, and she leaned into his hand seeming to enjoy the therapeutic manipulations. Tony explained that he could offer no cure but he could alleviate her discomfort and pain. His objective was to get the lymph flowing, but he had to beware switching it off.

After a while a group of four guests came to watch, standing several yards away as instructed by the vet, where Pumpui could see them (elephants have poor forward vision, but are concerned about what is happening around them). The guests each spent a few minutes massaging Pumpui under the supervision of the vet and Tony. Then a pickup arrived, carrying large bunches of fresh-cut bananas. Pumpui lost interest in her treatment, picking up bunches and evidently enjoying eating them. The guests were encouraged to offer her individual bananas and were very enthusiastic about the experience.

I asked Tony what he thought of unnatural activities such as elephant painting, which is not practised at Anantara but which I had seen elsewhere. Tony said that he had recently been to a camp in Cambodia where he was sold a new sweatshirt and told to put it on over a waterproof plastic cagoule. A mahout then brought some paint pots from which his elephant drew up trunkfuls of different colours and squirted them over Tony's new sweatshirt. Tony's opinion was that the elephant enjoyed this natural spraying behaviour, as did he. However, the painting method is rather different and less freeform in most elephant painting exhibitions, where the elephant is required to hold a brush in its trunk, and its painting is usually guided by the mahout, which, like all activities, can be positive enrichment and be trained through positive reinforcement but which relies on skilled practitioners to do so – something that cannot be guaranteed.

Do You Provide Other Training for Elephant Carers?

John's staff training is about the way Anantara wants to present elephants to its guests, or about specialist procedures such as Tony's massage demonstrations. The mahouts also learn standard ways of controlling elephants to minimize any potential danger to guests and to enable any of them to control each elephant.

The elephants are not able to come close to the main hotel, although they can readily be seen from various vantage points. Most guest-facing staff have little experience or knowledge of elephants; they are recruited for specific skills such as languages and their training in reception, restaurant or bar work. All staff take a short introductory programme about Anantara's elephants when they join the hotel.

What New Developments is Anantara Planning?

The nature of competition is that hotels are constantly updating and improving their services to guests. John showed me a new building under construction away from the main hotel, which will provide upmarket overnight accommodation. It is raised above the jungle floor and surrounded by an electrified fence enabling more elephants to enter its compound while remaining separate from other elephant groups. This 'Jungle Bubble' will

give guests an enhanced view of elephants at night in safety, and from the vantage point of their private dining table.

How Will Elephant Tourism Develop over the Next Few Years?

John replied that he hoped tourism will develop in a way that allows us to continue to provide welfare for Thailand's captive elephants; that we lose this current focus on 'this activity is good' and 'this activity is bad' and allow camp managers to manage elephants in such a way as to provide what science tells us best fulfils the elephants' needs, and which is very often unconnected from what guests see or take part in.

I think there is a great danger in the current Western-dominated argument that assumes that a zoo-like setting can provide the best welfare for elephants. Undoubtedly well designed zoo enclosures provide the best welfare for elephants that don't otherwise have access to natural habitat or a large body of qualified handlers, but in range states (the countries where wild elephants live naturally) I feel this approach can lead to a reduction in welfare.

Where the Western model has been implemented with apparent positive welfare outcomes, this has been achieved by providing access to large forested areas and, as Jacob Shell points out in *Giants of the Monsoon Forest* (Shell, 2019), they have also been achieved at the expense of saleability. The rarity of the experience makes tourists willing to commit large amounts of time and money to get to such places. The revenue-generating ability of each individual elephant reduces as the number of elephants increases, and, as the major costs of keeping an elephant – fodder, mahout wages, etc. – are fixed per individual, this is problematic if it drops below the cost of keeping the elephant healthy.

Such venues are applaudable and worth visiting, so the model is certainly worth developing, but they cannot provide an answer for feeding 3782 elephants (not to mention some additional 6000 in Myanmar), especially as we only have our own assumptions that they do actually always represent an improvement in welfare.

Where such facilities have, so far, been replicated in crowded areas, with more elephants in less-than-landscape-sized areas, they have been found to be, at best, not significantly different welfare-wise from neighbouring trekking camps and in some cases their elephants showed increased average stress (Bansiddhi *et al*., 2019). This is not surprising as this method of management often results in overprovision of high-energy foods during the only permissible guest interaction, in turn resulting in a lack of exercise, and sometimes obesity. Furthermore access to a natural habitat is forfeited by enclosure, so two of the factors considered most important to elephant welfare, exercise and opportunity for meaningful browsing and grazing, are lost (Veasey, 2019). Stress levels, if not actual aggression, are more likely to be raised the more elephants are added to the smaller space (de Silva *et al*., 2016).

So, I hope the tourism industry will lose their current fixation on which interaction between people and elephants takes place when guests are

present. Leave that to personal preference and get behind a growing number of science-based welfare standards that camps are voluntarily, or under pressure from Travel Agents, introducing; Travelife for Tour Operators (www.travelife.info), Asian Elephant Camp Standards (www.elephantstandards.com) and Global Spirit (www.globalspirit.biz) are the current market leaders.

Does Anantara Have Similar Conservation Programmes for Other Endangered Species?

We have several; each is locally relevant to a particular property. For example, in southern Thailand we have a project for rare turtles which lay their eggs on beaches near the Anantara Mai Khao. We keep the beaches clean on a daily basis, educate locals and guests alike, as well as help fund a reward scheme for reporting nests to the Phuket Marine Biological Centre and the Royal Thai Navy, who provide a safe home for the eggs to hatch which enable the young turtles to gain strength before finding their true home in the sea (see https://www.anantara.com/en/social-responsibility/the-mai-khao-marine-turtle-foundation).

At Anantara Tangalle in Sri Lanka we work with the local wildlife department and IUCN to protect and monitor 90 km of beach, also for nesting turtles; there we are so successful that the nest can be monitored by our supported rangers and eggs allowed to hatch naturally. In the Maldives we work with Coral Reef CPR on a Holistic Approach to Reef Protection project which is currently focused on restoring reefs damaged in the 2015/16 bleaching events with resistant coral and which recently rediscovered a coral thought to have been extirpated from the country as far back as the 1998 bleaching event there.

Each resort also organizes outreach activities for local orphanages and schools so that the children become aware of endangered species and what is being done to alleviate their problems.

In Conclusion

We believe that in an ideal world all elephants would be wild and there would be no need to discuss elephants' work. Until we reach that point the Golden Triangle Asian Elephant Foundation works with our partner hotels to give and promote ethical work for those elephants that are able, while providing a safe, healthy environment for those that are not.

Thank you John!

Note

[1] Editors' note – Pumpui is featured on the cover of this book, beside her mahout and the camp vet. Also see photo 3 in the Elephant PortraitGallery.

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2 PATA and Jetwing: John Koldowski Interviews Chi Lo and Senal Siriwardene

John Koldowski

Leshan Normal University, Sichuan Province, China

Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA)

The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) is a membership community, founded in 1951. It is a not-for-profit association that acts as a catalyst for the responsible development of travel and tourism to, from and within the Asia Pacific region. The Association provides aligned advocacy, research and events to its member organizations, which comprise government, state and city tourism bodies, international airlines and airports, hospitality organizations, educational institutions, and a myriad of travel industry companies in Asia Pacific and beyond.

In addition, thousands of travel professionals belong to local PATA chapters worldwide. These chapters organize travel industry training and business development events with a grassroots activism that underpins PATA's membership in Uniting Travel, a coalition of the world's major travel and tourism organizations dedicated to ensuring that the sector speaks with one voice and acts in unison on major issues.

The members of PATA have engaged with the broader issue of sustainability for quite some time, first raising it at a conference held in Bali, Indonesia, in 1991, marking the beginning of PATA's role as an 'authoritative' voice for sustainable tourism in the Pacific Asia region. This led to the PATA board of directors approving a 'Code for Environmentally Responsible Tourism' in 1992, which was subsequently and officially adopted by the membership at the PATA Annual Conference held in Hong Kong SAR, later that same year.

Interview

Ms Chi Lo was interviewed by John Koldowski using Skype and WeChat. At the time of this interview in 2019, Ms Chi Lo was PATA's sustainability and

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social responsibility specialist. She has recently left that post to start her own business. Following is a summary of the discussion.

John Koldowski: Can you tell me about PATA's position on elephants and tourism?

Chi Lo: All of us are aware that in Thailand, and across many other Asian cultures, people have been living and working with elephants for centuries. The livelihoods of many communities and individuals come from elephants, and as long as elephant tourism is conducted in a respectable, ethical and responsible manner, it should generally be acceptable.

Indeed, there is a lot of misunderstanding and misconception around elephants, and social media has contributed. European inbound operators and their clients especially, are more discerning and are demanding ethical tourism products. While there may be some fundamental differences in opinion with some animal rights groups, we nonetheless all agree that elephants should never be taken from the wild.

Having said that, there are a number of areas of disagreement. Some groups for example, believe that elephants should be set free; some believe elephant-riding should be banned; and others believe that there should be no interaction at all.

When elephants in Thailand were banned from logging and then from the streets, the tourism industry created work opportunities for the elephants and their mahouts. Working means that there is a source of income for food; elephants have very inefficient digestive systems and so they end up eating for about 16 hours a day. Elephant tourism experiences help to generate income with riding being essentially the highest earner. Banning elephant-riding would therefore be detrimental to their income, without which they wouldn't have shelter (because we've taken over their habitats) or food, and that would surely lead to conflict with the community, which could then lead to some very dangerous situations.

Riding is considered by some as being possible, but it should be done in a responsible way. Elephants should, for example, have access to shade, a varied terrain, food and water, and should be given ample opportunity to rest during the ride. Some argue that riding also gives them a chance to exercise and, since they're roamers by nature, that's a good thing. The riding saddles however must be properly designed and fitted so as to avoid any abrasions to the elephant. Similarly, loads must be within a range so defined as to be possible without undue physical trauma to the elephant.

PATA and Travelife also agree with the animal rights groups that elephants should not be trained to perform unnatural behaviours such as painting or juggling or whatever, however we disagree with the popular opinion that hooks and chains should not be used. To ensure the safety of the visitor and personnel, they can and should be used, but only in the correct manner and by an experienced and knowledgeable mahout.

For the camps, elephant tourism, and indeed any form of animal tourism, can be done, but as with anything, it should be done responsibly, and with empathy for the wellbeing of the animal.

That's why PATA and Travelife have been working over the past four or so years on the elephant camp assessment initiative, which is working to develop standards and guidelines for elephant camps/experiences. This has been a long process: developing the standards, bundling other animal welfare guidelines together, reviewing them, testing them, seeking advice from the camps themselves, as well as from tour operators and scientists.

Travelife is spearheading this initiative, while PATA's role is largely that of a facilitator of the group, working on the standards but also acting as a fierce advocate for what we are doing – facing the naysayers and popular media to dispel the notions that elephant-riding is inherently bad. Together, we've brought together tour operators, and the Asian Captive Elephant Working Group (ACEWG).

PATA has provided some content to Tripadvisor, which itself has advocated for animal rights and stopped selling tickets to attractions where travellers come into physical contact with wild/endangered/captive animals. We have also been interviewed several times on this topic for other publications/platforms, including through Tripadvisor (see Tripadvisor, n.d.a; n.d.b).

In these (and other) interviews, we noted several interesting and often divergent perspectives. Phajaan training, for example, is a technique to 'crush the spirit' of a young elephant to make it submissive. In the past, processes of pain and reward were used but these are now regarded as being inhumane and so are being replaced with positive reinforcement training instead. Technically, however, 'phajaan' refers to the ceremony accompanying the training of a young elephant, through which spirits are called to protect the people and the elephant alike. As a ceremony, it is an important cultural tradition, and is still practised, even when positive training techniques are used.

When it comes to elephant performances, if done ethically and properly scripted using positive training techniques, and depending on the activity, they are regarded by some as actually being beneficial for the animal, as they provide a form of exercise and mental stimulation. It is important to recognize however, that some activities, such as walking on their hind legs, sitting upright or riding a bicycle, are unnatural behaviours, and can negatively affect the elephant's wellbeing and physical health. These should not be allowed under any circumstances. Perhaps more importantly, the tourism sector has an opportunity to utilize certain animals as educational resources and through them, reformat and reposition animal-based tourist attractions.

PATA's view therefore is that the approach towards elephants must be balanced, in that they are part of the cultural and community experience and must be treated humanely. In other words, organizations working with elephants should also promote respect of the local culture, respect of the community working with the elephants and respect of the animals themselves, while constantly promoting safety for the visitors and workers.

John Koldowski: There is a dilemma here in as much as it is an industry association, PATA is mandated to support its members and their activities. While proper guidelines can and are developed and endorsed, it is up to the individual operators to initiate recommended practices. In this regard,

operators are, ideally, in tune with the demands of the tourists, so if demand exists there, it will be satisfied. Educating the visitor, therefore, is of critical importance in changing perceptions about elephants and other animals with which they interact.

Chi Lo: The bottom line is that we at PATA are not elephant experts, but we are experts about our industry, the people who work in it and are affected by it, and who are impacted by elephant tourism. It's not going to go away, so our job is to make sure that it's done right, and to facilitate it. There are merits to it and elephant tourism should not necessarily be demonized outright.

Moving forward, the role for both PATA and Travelife is to work to get more tour operators and destination management companies on the Asia-side, on board, and to bring an awareness to the Western market that what might be seen on social media sites does not always tell the complete and unbiased story, and that there are many other things that happen around elephant tourism. At the same time, this initiative is bringing awareness to non-Western travellers who may be a little less discerning about these things. It is also about helping them become more aware as well. And finally, looking beyond elephants, these types of initiatives could also be expanded to other animal encounters in Asia and elsewhere.

John Koldowski: It is all about harmony – coexisting with other species in a relationship of mutual respect. Increasingly we are seeing examples of where this is happening in the tourism context, in real and practical ways. From places offering breakfast with animals for example, to properties such as Giraffe Manor in Nairobi, Kenya, where an exclusive boutique hotel is also home to a herd of resident Rothschild giraffes. While these animals freely roam the 12 acres of private land around the manor, they also frequently extend long necks through windows looking for a treat from astonished and delighted guests.

Jetwing

Jetwing, a long-time PATA member, is a family-owned Sri Lankan company offering a variety of visitor experiences and accommodation (among other offerings) around the country. Two properties – Jetwing Yala and Jetwing Safari Camp – are significant in the way they offer guests unobtrusive interaction with elephants in general, and one in particular. Senal Siriwardene, an experiential architect at Jetwing Hotels, was interviewed by John Koldowski through emails in 2019 and 2020. The story here is taken up by Senal Siriwardene and follows in his own words.

John Koldowski: Can you tell me about Jetwing's position on elephants and tourism?

Senal Siriwardene: Elephants have, for eons, shaped the wilderness of Sri Lanka and for the last few millennia, walked its splendid forests side by side with mankind. Revered for their immense strength and intelligence, the island's ancient civilizations treated the pachyderms with a sanctity reserved

for few other animals. However, as populations burgeoned, and humanity clawed more and more from the forests, inevitable conflicts arose between the elephants and humans.

Coexistence, which had been the status quo for so long, fell by the wayside as villages resolutely fortified their lands and age-old migratory routes and shrinking patches of forest led to elephants coming into jarring contact with people more frequently, often with dire consequences for both sides.

Just five minutes from Yala National Park, however, in unquestionable elephant country, sit Jetwing Yala and Jetwing Safari Camp. The two properties are frequented by elephants who wander in and out of the hotel grounds, perfectly at home among the scrub forests and buildings. They are not captive elephants, nor are they trained in any way. They are not trapped within and are quite free to decide their movements unhindered. In an age of rapidly increasing conflict between wild elephants and man, the sight of a big bull elephant wandering serenely down a hotel pathway is a refreshing sight indeed.

It all began prior to the hotel's construction, in 2014, when a young bull started appearing at the site. He earned the name *Natta Kota* – which translates to 'short-tail' – since he was missing the lower half of his tail, most likely lost in a tussle with another elephant.

Jetwing's insistence on not isolating themselves from the environment by means of fences, walls and gates meant that Natta Kota was free to saunter in and out at his pleasure[1]. Although a seasonal visitor to the hotel in the early years, he has since found himself a permanent home in the grounds of Jetwing Yala and Jetwing Safari Camp, becoming the hotels' unofficial mascot.

Natta Kota is not without his mischievous moments, stealing fruit from vehicles in the car park and staking his claim to almost 12 kg of manioc (yuca) from the kitchen supplies per day! Rather than resorting to the sadly common elephant crackers which, if used excessively or incorrectly, can permanently blind or deafen an elephant, Jetwing takes his antics in good humour. Signage at the car park warns guests not to leave fruit or vegetables in the car while an imitation electric fence drawn across the kitchen door deters Natta Kota from the hotel's stores.

Despite frequenting the hotel for several years now, Natta Kota rose to fame after wandering into the lobby. Once during the early hours of the morning, he wandered in, attracted by the breakfast packets, much to the disbelief of the reception staff. Emboldened, his second foray into the lobby was at ten in the night where he investigated the area peacefully and, finding the lobby to his taste, wandered back out.

Over time, the hotels have recorded several other elephants in and around the property. Some are transients, wandering through the land on their local migrations and only seen once or twice. Others are seasonal visitors, while a few stop by the hotel every few days.

For the guests, the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see a wild elephant calmly wander by during breakfast or, while lazing in the pool, observe one strip the nearby *Palu* trees of their leaves is exciting and memorable; more

so than seeing one during a safari, one could argue. Of course, taking into account the fact the elephants are still very much wild animals, the hotel ensures that guests keep a safe distance from the pachyderms.

Jetwing Safari Camp consists of ten individually placed tents in the scrub. To ensure safety, the guests are informed when elephants have entered the property and butlers are on hand to escort the guests to the restaurant.

Balancing the requirement of hospitality with those of the environment, all the while ensuring the safety of guests and the animals may seem a daunting task. Indeed, balancing the requirements of almost any industry and the wilderness appears difficult. In Jetwing's staunch determination, settling for anything less is unacceptable. Jetwing believes it has proven that the anthropogenic world and the natural world can coexist in harmony, as they have for thousands of years.

John Koldowski: An interesting observation is that coexistence with elephants and other fauna can be seen to actually work, primarily if it is done on the terms of the animals themselves, not according to our schedules or whims. In addition, the numbers of human visitors at any time appear to be quite limited, so any stress due to crowding and noise is minimal. In addition, a recent video of Natta Kota wandering around the Jetwing Yala hotel has been taken and immediately went viral, making him an instant star (Complex, 2020).

Jetwing and other similar tourist venues offer a valuable template on how to allow limited visitor interaction with animals in the wild, for the benefit of both. The creatures themselves are least likely to change, so it falls on the tourism operator to adopt a new mindset that harmonizes such interactions. This is perhaps best characterized by the staff of Jetwing Yala who continually and subtly remind visitors that indeed they are the guests in Natta Kota's domain, not the other way around.

Note

[1] See photo 4 in the Elephant Portrait Gallery.

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3 The Elephant in the Room: An Autoethnographic Approach

Vinathe Sharma-Brymer[1] and Eric Brymer[2]

[1]*Sharma-Brymer Consultancy Services, Brisbane, Australia*
[2]*Australian College of Applied Psychology, Brisbane, Australia*

Introduction

We aim to fulfil two broad objectives in this chapter. First, we position ourselves as insider and outsider applying collaborative autoethnography to narrate our personal accounts of the elephant phenomenon in India. Second, we reflect on issues that have affected elephants in the interrelational world of human–elephant interactions. These objectives may overlap as we voice our emphasis on seeing elephants as collaborative agents in the 'ecology of relations' (Barua, 2013). We believe all life forms are relationally active agents in balancing ecological systems. We write together as collaborative autoethnographers storying how human–elephant relationship differs between and across cultures and feelings. Yet, our intention is to deepen our understanding of that relationship through our common standpoints for collectively shared actions.

Context

Research on Indian elephants has predominantly focused on understanding the biology and ecology of the species (WWF, n.d., 2011), issues of human–elephant conflict (see Baskaran *et al*., 2011; Midha *et al*., 2018), and securing the elephant's future and welfare (Rangarajan *et al*., 2010). In contemporary times, efforts to protect elephants, conserving their home lands and campaigning for elephants' future echo neoliberal tones from India's colonial past followed by postcolonial development (Locke, 2013; Münster, 2016). On the one hand, elephant protection programmes have grown strong roots in developed countries to strengthen elephants' survival rates. For example, Chester Zoo in England has partnered with the Forest Department in Assam, India. On the other, human appropriation of 'Subject Elephant' reveals disparities in perspectives, be it scientific studies or popular tourism. The

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approaches to elephants seem to scatter across the paradoxical elements of sociocultural, economic and geographic divergences of developing India. An appreciation for the elephant's agency is lost in human translation.

The relationship between people and elephants in India is complex and subtle for an outsider's comprehension, being deeply affected by numerous external interferences (Barua, 2010, 2013). The local communities living on the peripheries of elephant habitats regard elephants as 'friend and foe' (Barua, 2013, 2014). The elephant is a story-board problematizing its non-human self yet bonding with humans. It evokes a compassionate response in its representational space of Western and non-Western geo-economic and sociocultural assemblages, although the elephant's suffering is yet to occupy a key area of academic research (Kopnina, 2016). Both academic and non-academic engagement in addressing issues of elephants' welfare should also recognize the significance of nature's agency (Kiik, 2018). Labelled as vulnerable and endangered (WWF, n.d.), the elephant stands as testimony to the international networks of conservation and a gathering of collective actions generated from transformed individual standpoints. Rather than a viewpoint, this last statement invites a reflexive exploration of perspectives centred on various agents including people, land and the elephant.

In this chapter we examine the human–elephant relationship and the more-than-human agency of an animal that has been embedded within a variety of human lived experiences (e.g. tourism, religion, work, conservation). We apply collaborative autoethnography as two individuals analysing and interpreting self, perspectives and lived experience in order to co-create texts for academic knowledge. We particularly chose autoethnography for its capacity to reveal 'multiple layers of consciousness' (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). Autoethnographers engage in storying their personal experiences for the public gaze (Reed-Danahay, 2017), and interrogate particular sociocultural contexts through lived experience using a critical lens. Custer (2014) asserted that the intent and purpose of autoethnography was related to responsibility, which 'becomes … a living reality, first to ourselves and then outward to others'. Being from two distinct sociocultural, racial, geographical and economic backgrounds we found autoethnography meaningfully useful in interrogating our experiences of elephants to deepen our responsibilities to address elephant's suffering and more-than-human agency. Although we have experienced elephants differently, we searched for a deeper understanding of this being through self-reflective process. Ngunjiri *et al*. (2010) observed that autoethnographer's analysis and interpretation of self-connected life and research together. These two processes of critical analysis and interpretation provide space for researchers to strive for a deeper understanding of lived experience across and between cultures, engaging in an active meaning-making process through texts.

The autobiographical texts presented here narrate our experiences with elephants in India as an Indian (the insider) and as a Western tourist (the outsider). This dialogic and ethnographic process highlights our interrelational perspective of humans and non-humans sharing a common natural world. Our academic collaboration brings together the shared meanings

allowing us to reflect on our standpoints on the elephant's agency. We invite a collective meaning-making process in readers of this chapter encouraging better human–elephant relationships worldwide[1].

Paradox of the Indian Elephant

Vinathe Sharma-Brymer's voice

As of 2017, I witnessed heightened domestic tourism in Bandipur National Park situated in my home state of Karnataka, southern India. I worried that the urbanites flocking to wilderness zones possibly increased undue interactions with wildlife; even more occurrences of human–elephant conflicts adding to their distress from vehicular movement, tree logging activities and poaching. I am aware as an Indian that tourists alone cannot be blamed for such distress; misappropriation of power and money played key roles in allowing human activities inside forests against law, order, ethical and moral concerns.

The elephant is part of Indian mythical and religious stories ascribed with holiness. This image is held in reverence and respect. There is also the image of appreciation and fear. That is how the meaning of elephant was passed on to me as a child born and raised in Indian society. As I grew up, I became conscious of the ways in which humans interfered with elephants, I did not like it. I loathed it when I heard about the erstwhile *Khedda* operation (capturing and taming wild elephants taking help from captive elephants). Notwithstanding, the diminishing elephant corridors, ever-increasing human–elephant conflicts, torturous poaching and the heart-wrenching conditions of elephants serving humans were hopelessly real. This dark reality of holiness, use and abuse stuck hard in me against the stereotypical image of elephants worshipped and feared. The normative feelings held in my everyday life for elephants were just like the paradoxical Indian society where dichotomies, parallels and complex diversities coexist inside and out.

We Indians around the world dramatically worship the elephant-headed god Ganesha with grandiose ceremonies. The Hindu religion depicts three supreme male gods – Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva – as life creator, keeper and destroyer conveying the metaphysical 'circle of life' message. The Karma cycle of sins and good deeds constantly guides us. Unfortunately, Indians have included in such beliefs flora and fauna, ecosystems and the universe whether other-than-human entities like it or not. It posits human supremacy separating nature from us. We talk about saving nature alongside managing the natural world in ways that fit our own agenda.

I grew up in postcolonial India where formal higher education and better employment enabled conservation-fanatics of my generation to pursue non-normative interests such as birdwatching, forest-going, wildlife watching and conservation. As one among them I had multiple contacts with wild and captive elephants in forests, zoos, parks, circuses and temples. They always struck me as intelligent and sensitive beings evoking soft, sad, curious and

awe-filled feelings. As an adult I had more opportunities for seeing wild elephants besides interacting with them in different human spaces, even riding on them as a tourist. The experiences aroused similar feelings as earlier times in addition to an outwardly expressed concern and compassion. This ambivalent position of 'enjoying' the elephant and 'emphasizing' its welfare altered when I formally studied animal behaviour. Although a researcher then, I often thought the more we interfered with nature the more ruptured would be our interrelational bond.

In the 1980s and 1990s, compassion for elephants was neither catchy nor trendy as the animal was not on the human (IUCN) list as endangered. In the 1990s I studied the social and communication behaviour of free-ranging bonnet macaques. As I progressed well in my study, the local farming community on the outskirts of Mysore city captured all 45 macaques that were my study group. I had, in my research notes, documented frequent human–macaque interactions and conflicts. I had felt macaques had the same right to live there as humans. Leading up to organizing the group's capture the farmers had been angry with me for remaining neutral as a researcher watching macaques raiding their agricultural crops. I was torn between my perceptions as a researcher, protector of those macaques from my love for them, and as a fellow human empathizing with farmers. I think the situation of elephants resonates with that experience.

My visits to the forests in those years revealed how local people lived an impoverished life having less access to food, fuel, finances and formal education. The results of postcolonial development, such as industrialization, urbanization and emphasis on formal education, have displaced thousands of illiterate local communities in a manner similar to human interference with forests and their inhabitants. Caste, class, religion and education issues shrouded their lives handing them the beacon of powerlessness. The policy makers and academic researchers, whose work mimicked colonial models, used local communities reinforcing their disadvantageous position. By contrast, the locals had supreme knowledge of the 'local' – the wilderness. Similar to elephants, they were a 'resource' to be exploited. This unequal attitude has only continued.

Although I have been living overseas since 2001, I have noticed with alarm the shrinking forests and wildlife in Karnataka. In the past I would see large herds of 40–60 elephants inside Nagarahole, Bandipur and Mudumalai forests. I have in the last two decades seen occasional herds of up to 15 or 20 elephants in forests, and many a time in human-populated villages and private estates. Electric fences exist everywhere to contain elephants' movements. I have been puzzled, angered and pained. I needed no explanation for the smaller herd size. I also draw parallels between shrunken wildlife and my burgeoning home city, Bengaluru. Globalization turned Bengaluru into a choking megalopolis of madness, concrete structures, congested roads, with the disappearance of green corridors. As a tourist I saw in the forests rampant encroachment, development of private luxury properties and crop plantation in wildlife corridors. On the one hand, I have detested these developments that were accomplished by legal and illegal means and

methods, and playing power politics that we Indians are so accustomed to. On the other, as an insider-visitor from overseas I have indirectly contributed to such developments. I have appropriated elephants and am also concerned for their welfare. I am trying to find answers to balance this seesaw approach.

Elephant's Power! A Tourist's Narrative

It was March at the turn of the century when I first saw an elephant in the wild. I had been intrigued by their size and the way they moved through sterile encounters in zoos and wildlife parks but I had never seen one situated in its own home. It wasn't the elephant that I had come to see, it was the tiger! In truth the elephant had never really been a special animal for me. I had grown up on a farm with pets and working animals as part of my everyday life. I had also had a deep interest and passion for animals for as long as I can remember, but elephants didn't rouse any special interest in me. This is possibly why my reaction on seeing my first wild elephant up close came as a surprise to me. Even now, 20 years later, I can recall and feel the sense of fascination and fear that accompanied my very first interaction with a wild bull elephant. Later, I found out that the elephant was in 'musth', which explained much of his behaviour (musth is a state of sexual arousal lasting several weeks during which mature, male elephants are potentially very dangerous and so they are usually kept apart, and chained to stout trees). We had bumped into the elephant while travelling through Corbett National Park looking for leopards and tigers, attuning to information in the forest that suggested these majestic carnivores were at large. Bumping into an elephant was not on our list of experiences. Partially, this stemmed from my own personal desire to meet the tiger, but to a large part this was also reinforced by the guides who seem to assume and emphasize the tiger for Western tourists. My status as a Western tourist had suggested a particular focus; it took three trips to Corbett National Park before the guides could see beyond these presuppositions.

The elephant below us was swaying side to side, its large head shaking. I had seen what I assumed to be similar behaviour on the farm and immediately associated this with irritation and aggression. However, the cause was not apparent to me. The elephant's ears were flapping vigorously as we watched. The guide was curious about my fascination and seemed to want to move on to something more interesting, however I persuaded him to stay. There were perhaps 20 metres between us and the bull. Naively, this did not concern me as there was also a small woody bank, which meant the elephant was also five or six metres below us. I was feeling excited, both by this unexpected encounter and by the fact that I was now in the elephant's home. I was still an observer looking in but there were no elephant fences or concrete walls to separate us. The elephant turned to focus its attention on us. I was blissfully unaware, almost calm; the guide was clearly nervous. The elephant ran towards us. In my mind the small bank protected us; however, the guide's nervous body language and gestures made me question my

complacency. My heart started to beat faster and I began to appreciate the elephant's incredible size as it came closer. The speed and nimbleness of the elephant shocked me. I recall thinking 'how could it move like this?' and feeling almost lied to. The experience of observing an elephant in the zoo had reinforced the two-dimensional perspective of the elephant as slow, cumbersome, sedate and even sterilized. The elephant to this point was akin to a nicely framed picture of the Mona Lisa, aesthetically pleasing. Now, this enormous, powerful, irritated animal was moving at a rapid pace towards us. It was halfway up the bank before we had managed to get back into the Jeep and leave. The elephant followed at speed flapping its ears, raising its trunk and clearly intending to make contact. Slowly, the distance between the Jeep and the elephant grew…

I was hooked; intellectually, I wanted to know more. We were only allowed to stay in the forestry department accommodation for three days and I had already spent two days. As soon as I could, I booked another three days. On the second trip I decided to make use of the elephant-guided tourist trips. However, as the elephant could not travel as far as a Jeep, wildlife needed to be closer to the accommodation.

I did not have any thoughts about riding an elephant, except for its size. I had ridden horses often on the farm and I had assumed that this would be very similar. It was not. Now I was really close to an experienced female elephant familiar with providing transport for tourist experiences. Mixed feelings rushed through my body and mind. There were comfortable memories of being led while sitting on a horse at the age of one or two. This time, a sense of righteous indignation when mahouts used their sharp, pointed hook to communicate direction and motion. I was relaxed, nervous, excited, uncertain and horrified, all at the same time. My Western indignation at how 'badly' elephants were being treated by the locals was mixed with an appreciation of the power of the elephant as an embodied agent. I knew for certain that if she chose to go her own way nothing could stop 'my' elephant from doing what she wanted to do. Yet, at the same time I felt safe and protected on the back of this gentle giant. I began to realise that the leopard and tiger were not the most dangerous, powerful, fearful force in the Indian jungle. This status belonged to the elephant.

The experience of riding, swaying on the back of the elephant, of being so close, touching her skin and being tickled by the hair on her body, of looking her in the eye, of feeling her power beneath me changed my perception of the elephant. I was shocked and indignant at the way I, as an outsider, perceived she was being treated but then she had stepped out of her role as an aesthetically pleasing work of art to three-dimensional living, breathing, embodied agent. I felt almost ashamed at being part of her abuse while excited, privileged and thankful that I had had such an experience. That night I did not sleep well and instead sat on the porch of the bunkhouse listening to the wild elephants in the undergrowth within the enclosure. I was very aware of a different experience of the elephant where the two-dimensional, gentle, herbivore had morphed into one where I appreciated the elephant as embedded in its environment and dangerous.

Fortunately, a guest on the third trip was a well-known travel agent from Delhi who spoke excellent English. He knew many of the guides and mahouts and was able to open doors that were not available to domestic or international tourists. His knowledge of Corbett National Park and the elephants filled in many gaps in my understanding. I found out that the elephant that I had initially encountered was a well-known rogue elephant in musth. I travelled, often by foot, to parts of the National Park that were generally out-of-bounds for tourists, helped (in a very superficial way) when park rangers were attempting to rescue an elephant calf and started to learn the language of the forest. I also started to feel for the elephant. As a large animal so much a part of the local natural world, how was it to survive? Parks were slowly shrinking and elephants needed to move. I was grateful for my time with the elephant, both wild and domestic.

Intersectionality of Privilege, Rhetoric and Embodied Agency

Our individual narratives of the elephant phenomenon enabled an interpretation of the intersectionality of culture, privilege and reality around elephant agency. Collaborative autoethnography as a research method encourages engagement with critical autobiographical reflections of our individual experiences in a cooperative manner (Moore *et al*., 2013). The method facilitated our reflective texts of embedded meanings illuminating the status of elephants, human supremacy, possible understandings of animal agency and the space available for locating the human–nature relationship. As Hernandez *et al*. (2015, p. 536) did, we took advantage of our physical proximity as colleagues to discuss, collect and develop our individual autobiographical data concurrently. This sharing allowed us to identify our experiences that were uniquely bound together in a collaborative manner in relation to elephant agency. Our personal memories, self-reflections and the contextual body of academic literature sharpened our focus (Hernandez *et al*., 2015). By living this collaborative autoethnographic process we feel we have engaged ourselves as part of a collective response (Sparkes, 2018). It also exposed our informed and privileged educated position, prompting a sharper gaze at our actions.

We narrated that the gentle giant elephant was 'in abundance' in forests, involved in tourism and used for human activities. In our experiences few Westerners and domestic tourists visited Indian forests desiring to see elephants. Human–animal interactions were frequent but not so much the conflict between humans and animals. The government agencies and scientists appropriated local community knowledge to fulfil their work-related plans and goals. Human knowledge seems to have widened the gaps between humans and nature.

Over the years, animal welfare activism has become vocal, reciprocating nature conservation movements around the world. Embedded in our experiences was the less significant management of human–animal conflicts that had failed to pay attention to the 'analytical repertoire for engaging with the ecologies of human–animal cohabitation' (Barua, 2013, p. 1473).

Although addressing human–elephant conflict and habitat destruction has gained prominence (Baskaran *et al*., 2011), action directed towards alleviating elephant suffering is still peripheral (Kopnina, 2016). Their reduced numbers show that seeing elephants as agents within their own natural environments has gone amiss.

The number of wild elephants roaming around 65,814 km^2 of forests in 14 states of India is close to 28,000 (MoEF and CC, 2017); about 55% of the world's elephant population (Easa, 2017). Scientifically documented evidence reveals that the main causes of declining numbers are the appropriation and fragmentation of wildlife habitats for human actions (Baskaran *et al*., 2011; Gross, 2016; Midha *et al*., 2018). In recent times, researchers other than biologists have elicited multiple perspectives on elephant life, not only presenting ethnographic critical analysis of the ecologies that elephants inhabit, but also the sociopolitical nuances of human–elephant interactions (Barua *et al*., 2013; Barua, 2014). The perspectives are embedded in the lived experience of local communities, which the modern developments of postcolonial India have negated. For example, alcohol as a material has played a key role as a hidden actor, 'besides the state, institutions, and people, which influenced human–elephant relationships' (Barua, 2014). Alcohol seemed to not only change the lives of the disadvantaged locals living on forest fringes, but also impacted the existence of elephants in the wild. Further in-depth research may explain how the locals faced and adapted to postcolonial development-related demands akin to the challenges that elephants faced in their natural environments. We need to appreciate both the local humans and elephants as active agents.

Our narratives related multiple layers of conscious meanings to the complexities of human agency, evoking compassion and empathy. Will this be enough and useful to understand elephants as active agents within their environments? Perhaps not. Our professional backgrounds and personal perspectives urge us to advocate for elephants' life quality to be on a par with that of humans. What else could we do in addition to conservation efforts? We need to develop alternative perspectives on human agency. We need more-than-science perspectives and more-than-conservation approaches to accept between and across agencies embedded within our interrelational ecologies.

The current situation of elephant status is that humans view them as usable for work, entertainment and domestication, similar to viewing nature as a commodity with economic value. Experiencing nature for what it is, not made for human consumption, is an alternative perspective that is deeply philosophical, experiential, personal and spiritual. Developing such a perspective may enable the validation of animal agency – the elephant's in this case. Experiencing the natural elephant phenomenon as it is in the natural world has the potential to bring together multiple disciplines addressing conservationists' anxieties, scientists' ethical dilemmas and environmentalists' compassion (Kiik, 2018).

The academic literature on the conditions of captive elephants is both limited and unpopular, almost as if the literature is 'actively opposed to discourses that emphasise elephant suffering' (Kopnina, 2016, p. 222). The conditions of such elephants are mostly descriptive and humanistic,

providing generic accounts of compassion and campaign in popular media, travelogues, and in research articles related to animal management and conservation. The elephant story evokes a package of neoliberal goods. What does 'saving elephants' imply in this context? How can we move beyond this objectified and Subject Elephant framework? The efficacy of human agency in this context lies in how humans relate to elephants as agents living in the same shared natural world. It lies in our actions to be as much part of the ecosystem as other life forms.

Our narrative shared the experiential opportunities with elephants that move beyond traditional stories or the romantic, two-dimensional impressions gained from zoo encounters facilitating a deeper appreciation of the elephant as embodied agent. However, opportunities for such experiences need to be balanced against the importance of letting the animal be – not only conserving elephant habitats for their independent existence but also securing its dignity as a being. A case in point is the mountain gorilla of the Rwandan region in Africa. The gorillas survived as active agents in their natural environment after changes in policy and practices for their conservation were effected efficiently involving the local communities. Actions are necessary in the case of elephants also, with concerted global efforts to identify alternative pathways to redirect human dependency on elephants for livelihood, entertainment and work.

If thoughtfully applied, tourism seems ideally situated to support conservation and a better human–elephant relationship. The current practice of running elephant camps, the romantic idea of 'living with elephants' and newer programmes of working with mahouts need better management plans and execution that are centred on elephants' embodied agency. The environmentalists and animal activists vigorously campaigning for the welfare of wild and captive elephants have a clear message of saving elephants. This message is creating exciting waves among younger generations to engage in acts of empathy, care and compassion for elephants. This enormous potential of the younger generation's empathetic stand would need appropriate direction and facilitation to understand the multiple layers of elephant agency in its natural world, alongside its role as a friend to humans. Changes in attitudes are necessary to improve the conditions of elephants that are serving humans regardless of wilderness habitats and human spaces. Personal standpoints to appreciate elephants as co-actors in balancing the ways of the natural world may result in collective actions towards stopping overall elephant suffering. It is not just the voices of empathetic individuals that should address elephant suffering: the academic community must dedicate resources to study elephant health and wellbeing. Policies and practices must be implemented strictly to control, stop and re-guide human interference with elephants, their rights and their voice. Environmental justice includes respecting the elephant's quality of life.

Conclusion

Achieving a reasonable balance between researchers, environmentalists and everyday empathetic activism is crucial to address the issues elephants face. Understanding the human–elephant relationship has individually different yet reciprocal and interconnected perspectives. Appreciating the co-agency of human–animal relationships may diminish the differences that have distracted humans from understanding the embodied agency of elephants. Recognition of elephants as capable individual agents balancing the ecosystems is a significant feeling, an action and a decision of acceptance. To embrace such an embodied standpoint we need to dismantle our elitist, egoistic, neoliberal values representing human supremacy. The elephant story-board requires collective actions that are shaped by personal standpoints of respecting this interrelational world of diverse actors who are all equal and capable beings.

Note

[1] See photo 14 in the Elephant Portrait Gallery.

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Section 2 Expectations and Experiences of Interactions with Elephants

4 Drivers of Elephant Tourism in Thailand

Bongkosh Rittichainuwat,[1] Noel Scott[2] and Eric Laws[3]

[1]*Siam University, Bangkok, Thailand*
[2]*University of the Sunshine Coast, Sippy Downs, Australia*
[3]*Leshan Normal University, Leshan, China*

Introduction

Thailand is one of the earliest established and most attractive tourism destinations within the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) region (Liu *et al*., 2018). Tourism is one of the primary drivers of economic growth in Thailand. In 2018, international arrivals increased to 38.3 million and contributed 2000 billion THB (US$64.7 billion) in revenue to the country (Thai Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2019). Tourism accounted for 18.4% of the country's GDP in February 2019 (Thai Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2019).

Thailand offers a diverse range of experiences for international tourists, including archaeological sites, Buddhist temples, modern cities, beaches and resort areas, mountain forests, tribal villages, interesting cultural artefacts and wildlife interactions. Together with a good transport and hospitality infrastructure and easy international access, Thailand is a major tourist destination for international and Asian tourists, with an effective and developed tourism supply chain.

Bangkok is the most popular destination, providing easy access to many beach resorts. Tourism in the north of Thailand developed around Chiangmai and included hill trekking, village stays and elephant tourism (Dearden, 1991).

Elephant Tourism in Thailand

Asian elephants are an important part of Thailand's history and culture, and feature prominently in Buddhist religious iconography, in folklore and as emblems of the royal family.

Moreover, elephants have played a key role in dynastic conflicts as well as making important contributions historically to Thailand's economy

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as draft animals for farmers and later in the logging industry transporting lumber from the forests across difficult mountainous terrain. In the mid-20th century, there were an estimated 13,000 captive elephants used in this industry (Laohachaiboon, 2010). In Thailand, the practice of using elephants for logging stopped abruptly in 1989 following devastating flash floods that destroyed multiple villages and killed 251 people (Delang, 2002). The Thai government attributed these floods to unsustainable logging practices and banned logging (Sulaiman and Rahim, 2015), leaving the elephants and the mahouts with no source of income and limited opportunities to be returned to the wild.

During the colonial era from the 18th to the early 20th century, Asian elephants had been captured from the wild in large numbers for use in the teak forests (Saha, 2017); mahouts were paid for the upkeep of the elephant and for themselves and their families. The mahouts usually treated their elephant well, and coming from shamanistic traditions they understood them in the context of their natural ecology, enabling them to work effectively with the animals in difficult and mountainous forests.

In Thailand, the history of captive elephants is inherently linked with mahout tradition. Traditionally each elephant was cared for by an individual mahout, who was often either the owner of the elephant or a relative of the owner. In the logging era, mahouts were considered skilled tradespeople, held in high esteem, with the career of mahout bestowed from one generation to the next, along with the ownership of the family's elephants (Lohanan, 2002).

Becoming a mahout required many years of apprenticeship before a young man was confident enough to tame and care for an elephant. The elephant and the mahout knew each other's moods and capabilities, but as Mumby (2019) notes the traditional relationship between captive elephant and mahout has been weakened by the rise of elephant tourism.

Responses to the logging ban

Begging

The logging ban left an estimated 2000 mahout owners suddenly without sources of income, coupled with the huge expense and responsibility of caring for their elephants. Elephants in captivity can consume up to 250 kg of food per day, an insurmountable expense when mahouts are unemployed, particularly as elephants were no longer able to browse freely in the forests. The government offered some mahouts work as rangers, but the majority soon took their elephants into local or major cities and tourism centres to beg, (Pimmanrojnagool and Wanghongsa, 2001). Elephant begging soon became organized, with village headmen providing loans and charging for transport of elephants and mahouts into cities and resorts.

Many tourists as well as locals took pleasure in buying bunches of bananas from a mahout to feed to his elephant (Lin, 2012). This practice

proved dangerous for mahouts, elephants and city dwellers, and resulted in a very poor quality of life for elephants. In Bangkok, the practice was also a danger to traffic and pedestrians (Pimmanrojnagool and Wanghongsa, 2001). In 2001, the Food and Agricultural Organization and the Forest Industry Organization expressed concerns regarding begging-elephant welfare: they were working long hours (including at night) and were being frightened by the noise and lights of city traffic. Walking on tarmac and concrete is painful to them and leads to potentially crippling disorders in the elephants' feet (Fowler, 2001). Begging was ultimately banned in 2010.

Elephant camps

Soon after the logging ban, the Thai Elephant Conservation Center (TECC; now known as the National Elephant Institute), the government's elephant training camp adapted its work, attracting paying tourists to demonstrations of elephants' and mahouts' logging skills. This was successful and many local entrepreneurs began to offer visits to old logging camps, which were easily turned into attractions for visiting tourist groups, but often little regard was paid to elephant welfare (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009b).

Elephant camp activities

The camp owners, mahouts and their elephants quickly developed new opportunities in the tourism industry by presenting the traditional forestry skills such as dragging and stacking heavy logs and washing and feeding the elephants at camps. Rides were offered during which two tourists sat in a chair specially made to be strapped on the elephant's back while it was guided by a mahout[1]; however, many chairs were heavy and badly designed, causing lesions exacerbated by leaving elephants saddled throughout the day. Bags of bananas or cut sugarcane could be purchased by tourists after the ride to feed the elephants. Familiar games such as darts and football were easily adapted to elephants' abilities, and some camps introduced elephant painting shows with opportunities to purchase a painting (Schliesinger, 2015).

Camp owners continue to diversify, seeking ways to differentiate the experiences they offer tourists by innovations such as rides on carts drawn by bullocks (long used locally for heavy agricultural work), rides on bamboo rafts along the local rivers, the sale of elephant paintings or elephant-dung paper, and by establishing museums exhibiting local agricultural or craft skills. However, as with any service-based industry, these innovations can quickly be copied by competitors.

Another business strategy for camp owners is to develop strong links with tourist-origin markets. To do this successfully requires business skills including networking to create and channel tourist interest. Their ability to do this puts camp owners at an advantage when market conditions change. For example, one large camp owner explained that when Western travel companies tightened requirements for elephant welfare, he was quickly able to switch his marketing efforts to Asian outbound countries where the concern for elephant welfare was not so developed (confidential interview, 2018).

A large camp can attract several thousand visitors a day, and rank among the largest businesses in the local economy. Camp revenue sources included entrance fees, riding fees, professional photographs of visitors with an elephant, meals and refreshments, and shopping opportunities in formal shops or market style setups selling ethnic products such as clothing, bags and souvenirs.

Most tourists visit these camps in groups organized either by their home-based international tour operator or on local tours purchased from hotels and small travel agencies in cities such as Chiangmai. Thus, interconnected networks of travel companies have been established, usually by the camp operators, and tourists follow a daily sequence of events from hotel pickups through camp visits and entertainment, lunch breaks and commentaries by local (or sometimes international) guides during coach transfers, ending with their return to hotels. All visitors experience broadly similar routines, to the extent that the larger camps stagger the arrival times for coaches, and the various activities are repeated so that all visitors can be accommodated. This can result in days that are long, busy and repetitious for the elephants. It has been suggested that many camps mislead their visitors by saying that elephants get bored easily and prefer to be entertaining or transporting visitors rather than standing idly or socializing with each other and browsing, as this had been their preference in logging camps (Cheeran and Poole, 1996).

This business model, established in Thailand in the early 21st century, is being replicated in Myanmar, Cambodia and other elephant-range countries (Malikhao and Servaes, 2017).

An emerging sector is volunteer elephant tourism, providing the most intense contact for visitors with elephants. Mostafanezhad (2016) considers that the volunteer sector of elephant tourism is an expression of neoliberal values. Henry (2019) makes the further point that this is an almost exclusively 'white' activity in which (usually young) people can undertake the role of assistant to an experienced mahout either for a day or during an extended stay. Visitors assist in feeding, washing and walking the elephant and may qualify for a certificate in mahout skills. Volunteers pay for accommodation and meals and, in many places, they have opportunities to visit local ethnic groups. Kontogeorgopoulos (2017) identifies the further attraction of getting to know oneself and others as a benefit to participants of volunteer elephant tourism.

The market for elephants

The rapid and lucrative development of elephant tourism camps after the 1989 logging ban created a market for elephants in which camp owners traded with each other for elephants with particular skills, such as painting or playing musical instruments. The success of elephant camp tourism also stimulated poaching, particularly of calves, which are very appealing to visitors (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009b).

It is often necessary to kill its mother and adult 'aunts' to acquire a calf. The young elephant seems to retain vivid memories of these events, and of the subsequent breaking of its spirit to gain control, throughout its life, rendering it hostile to humans (Lohanan, 2002).

Cohen (2015) regards the use of young elephants in tourism as a fatal attraction – the maternal herds in which calves live are highly protective of the youngsters, which learn the complex social behaviour and foraging skills necessary for elephant group survival. At the time this book was being completed (2020) a camp owner told us that a mature elephant already trained to entertain visitors had a market value of up to $100,000.

Captive elephant welfare needs

Bansiddhi *et al*. (2020) discuss the Thai Department of Livestock Development, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives standards for elephant camps. These included regulations on elephant shelters, health care, food and water, mahout management, environmental and waste management, tourist service and safety, and a required a system of record keeping to be introduced by 2020, following additional standards including a camp scoring and certification system issued by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports in 2009 (Royal Thai Embassy, Washington, DC, 2018). Unfortunately, these standards are not enforceable, and many camps do not participate because there is no penalty for not complying.

Controlling an elephant

The process of people gaining control over elephants is referred to as 'phajaan', 'crush' or 'breaking-in', and traditionally involved harsh methods such as beatings administered to a young elephant roped to strong posts and deprived of sleep until it accepts a man riding on its back (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2019). Modern training methods are cooperative and reward-based but potentially leave the mahout without the ability to control an elephant in an emergency, therefore most camps allowing visitors to be close to elephants also require the handler to carry a hook to ensure the safety of visitors (Kopnina, 2016).

Elephants are controlled by a mahout using various tools and commands that an elephant has been trained to follow (Bansiddhi *et al*., 2020). The main tool is a hook (or ankus) usually putting pressure on an ear to steer it. Rizzolo and Bradshaw (2018) note that mahouts from various ethnic groups have different ways of thinking about and training elephants and it seems that elephants may not respond to an unfamiliar mahout.

Few tourists are familiar with elephants' body language, but many want to get close to an elephant although elephants seldom welcome human proximity. If an elephant resists a command the mahout can rapidly gain its attention and compliance by using the pointed end of the hook, but for

a skilled mahout this is necessary only in extreme situations. Elephants browse and wander quite long distances so traditionally they were hobbled or chained to strong trees at night. This is now required by Thai legislation to stop the potential danger of captive elephants wandering onto roads, farms or villages at night.

Human contact with elephants takes place mainly in camps, but elephant welfare is often neglected. Elephants are social animals, needing the emotional experiences of interactions with a herd, given to touching each other with their trunks and using a range of vocalizations from a deep rumble to high pitched trumpeting calls.

In camps elephants are often put together with others from an unfamiliar herd, which can cause them high levels of stress (Dawkins, 2008). Nevertheless they sometimes form lasting friendships (Tuomisto, 2019).

Captive elephant welfare is about managing their individual physical health, particularly proving an appropriate and sufficiently varied diet, clean, fresh water to drink and for bathing, and shelter from the sun (Veasey, 2006). Elephants also need veterinary care, with particular attention paid to their feet, especially if they have to spend long periods standing on hard surfaces (Csuti *et al*., 2008).

Elephant Camp Welfare Concerns

Elephant tourism practices in resorts and camps quickly attracted critical attention from wildlife care advocates, mainly NGOs, who raised public awareness of the (often) cruel methods used to capture and train elephants and criticized the poor living conditions to which most of the elephants were subjected. Captive elephants are inhibited (by law) in their movements. Many are also unable to express of natural behaviours as they spend many hours physically restrained on unsuitable substrate, receive a limited, poor diet and have no regular access to natural foraging, bathing, social interaction or individual choice (Schmidt-Burbach *et al*., 2015).

Many mahouts working in the Thai elephant tourism industry today are not experienced with elephant behaviour and needs, often having had no apprenticeship prior to employment, and are certainly not trained in the traditional skillset. The pattern of elephant ownership has also changed, from mahout owners to 'remote owners' who own and profit from an elephant without working directly with the elephants (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009a). Elephants with remote owners have access to the least amount of natural forage, a key component to elephant welfare (Godfrey and Kongmuang, 2009). Their food has to be bought in and is regarded as a cost to be minimized, so they are often fed poor-quality, limited variety of fodder. Overall, as indicated in Table 4.1, elephants face a range of potential problems and dangers when kept in camps.

It should be noted that it is incorrect to consider elephants as domesticated animals. They have seldom been bred in captivity and therefore do not

Table 4.1. Problems for elephants kept in tourists camps.

- Injuries such as cuts from tree branches
- Cuts from the mahout's hook
- Stress from being grouped with unknown elephants
- Insufficient food
- Limited variety of food
- Food contaminated with pesticides
- Contaminated water
- Harsh training methods
- Harsh discipline
- Long working hours
- Forced to wait in direct sun
- Forced to stand on hard, particularly concrete surfaces
- Kept under low roofs
- Shackled or chained at night
- Kept in noisy surroundings

Main source: Kontogeorgopoulos (2009a, b) with additional factors added by the editors drawing on the literature cited in this chapter.

exhibit attributes through the generations selected for human purposes, in contrast to species such as chickens, cattle or dogs. The correct term is captive, as they are taken by force from the wild. For this reason Malikhao and Servaes (2017) recommend that captive elephants should be governed under the (Thai) Wild Animal Reservation and Protection Act 1992 rather than as farm animals.

Moving to Elephant-Friendly Tourism in Thailand

Around the world, there is increasing concern for animal welfare and demands for improved conditions of captive species. For example, direct action involving a picket of the attraction led to the cessation of dolphin performances at Brighton Aquarium. Following this case, there are no captive dolphin attractions in the UK, although dolphin shows continue in Australia (Sea World, 2018). Some captive dolphins from UK aquaria were transferred to the Caribbean Sea and released into the wild. This case demonstrates that customer demand had a direct effect on the conditions of animals in captivity and led to their release (Hughes, 2001).

Six particular problem areas have been identified in elephant tourism businesses, including the inadequate regulatory context, injuries, nutrition, social environment, training, and a decline in the expertise and experience of mahouts.

The following ethical issues have been identified:

- Where does the tourism industry obtain its elephants?
- What are the patterns of elephant ownership?

- How are the elephants used as a workforce in the tourism industry?
- What are the welfare implications of using elephants as a workforce?

In the case of elephants in Thailand, the main factor leading to an improvement in their welfare occurred through the actions of travel trade associations such as the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA), travel trade channel members, and specialist animal welfare and ethnic community NGOs. In 2010, TUI Nederland became the first tour operator to stop all sales and promotion of venues offering elephant-rides and shows. It was followed soon after by several other operators, including Intrepid Travel, which, in 2013, was the first to stop such sales and promotions globally. More than 160 travel companies have since made similar commitments and now offer elephant-friendly tourism activities.

Tripadvisor announced in 2016 that it would end the sale of tickets for wildlife experiences where tourists come into direct contact with captive wild animals, including elephant-riding. This decision was in response to 550,000 people taking action to demand that the company stop profiting from the world's cruellest wildlife attractions. The result of these campaigns has been to improve the welfare of elephants in those camps that have been able to adapt and continue trading. However, some camps that were unable to comply with the new elephant care standards have had to close, rendering their elephants and mahouts jobless again.

NGOs

In elephant tourism, NGOs provide specialist expertise on ecological policy, and on elephant welfare. Often, they operate by putting pressure on camp managers to implement welfare measures through the tourism industry, and by campaigns to dissuade visits to camps that they consider to have poor elephant welfare standards. If camp managers are unable or unwilling to change their methods, the reality is that there are few alternative sources of income to support the elephants and mahouts (Bansiddhi *et al*., 2020).

NGOs are often regarded as outsiders offering unwelcome solutions to problems that are not recognized or not prioritized by the main stakeholders in the countries where they operate. This distrust is exacerbated by the perception that they are continuing colonial policies under the guise of neoliberalism. Overall, NGOs are now the implementers of their donor's policies rather than independent actors; this accounts for the convergence of their policies and strategies.

Discussion

Today, the elephant tourism industry is well established and highly profitable. Currently, the population of Thailand's legally designated captive elephants is estimated to be about 2000. At present, most captive elephants are used primarily for tourism-related activities, such as elephant-rides,

performances and various other interactive experiences (Nijman, 2014). Most of the captive elephants in Thailand's tourism industry live in varying degrees of intensively managed facilities, notably tourism camps, which have triggered many welfare concerns.

Two types of camp can be distinguished: anthropocentric elephant camps, the purpose of which is to profit from tourist interest, but which do little to benefit elephant welfare; and ecocentric camps, which are centred on concerns for elephant wellbeing. In anthropocentric elephant camps, the tourists'interests and wishes are prioritized. Elephants in anthropocentric camps work harder and are at greater risk of injury from activities that satisfy tourists' interests. On the other hand, elephants in ecocentric camps have more free time to interact with other elephants and more space to roam. Kontogeorgopoulos (2009b) and Cohen (2009) have discussed a number of camps in Thailand that vary significantly in terms of elephant conditions and visitor activities.

Tourism has provided a step towards the preservation of elephants in a difficult environment (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009a), but is only part of the story. Elephant camps have provided a means for elephants to be fed and housed, but clearly not in a manner that meets current welfare standards. Recent industry action has resulted in some improvement in conditions, but these changes are only partial improvements. The rehabilitation and reintroduction of elephants into protected areas would be a great outcome but is unlikely to occur, in part because of the lack of available land. Furthermore, any solution is complicated by the linkages among tourism, community livelihoods and conservation (The World Bank Group, 2018). Elephant camps provide income for mahouts and their families, as well as income for the wider regional community.

The resilience of the elephant tourism business is demonstrated by the ability of camp owners, mahouts and participants in the tourist supply chains to adapt to the rapid changes that have occurred since the 1989 logging ban, and during a turbulent period in the Thai tourism industry.

The series of disasters that struck Thailand and the South-east Asian region include the Boxing Day tsunami (Calgaro *et al*., 2014), flooding (Ghaderi *et al*., 2015), bird flu, monetary crises (Prideaux, 1999) and riots (Kanlayanasukho, 2014), all of which attracted international media attention (Avraham and Ketter, 2017). In different ways, each of these events and many others undermined tourist confidence and disrupted tourist flows. As this book was being finalized, COVID-19, a new pandemic is threatening international and local travel, particularly in South-east Asia (https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus; Animondial, 2020); however, Biggs *et al*. (2012) note the resilience of Thai tourism enterprises when faced with such problems.[2]

Conclusion: A Thai Perspective on Elephant Tourism

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The sustainability of elephant tourism depends on the economic, social and technological support of tourism stakeholders. Most Thai people are

sympathetic to the welfare of elephants and boycott the exploitation of cruel training methods such as electric shock and forcing elephants to perform in unusual postures such as jumping on two legs to greet guests. However, there is still a need for elephant tourism to provide mahouts with income to raise the elephants. Educating the public to improve the quality of life of the elephant and asking for increased elephant welfare can be achieved through social and traditional media. Educated tourists of any nationality are willing to pay a higher admission fee to elephant camps to ensure elephant welfare. Social media has an impact in changing the welfare of the animals. Similar to service personnel, cruel mahouts must be fired or prosecuted according to Thai animal cruelty laws. Under the 2014 Cruelty Prevention and Welfare of Animals Act, animals are afforded protection by Thai law, and violation can be punished with a 2-year term in prison and a fine of up to 40,000 THB ($1663). In conclusion, most Thai people do not approve of cruel treatment of elephants, but few are aware of how the elephants are trained. Thus, educating not only the tourists but also mahouts is necessary to inform them about the penalties under animal protection law and also to warn them against bad consequences arising from the Buddhist law of Karma.

As tourists, we have a choice where we will go. We may put more effort into visiting a well-maintained elephant centre that manages elephant tourism in a humane way. Our entrance fees and donations can help to cure injured elephants from around Thailand through the TECC Elephant Hospital at the Elephant Center, which also schedules elephant shows to generate income to sustain the centre.

Elephant tourism is still needed but strict laws, residents and tourists must help identify and prosecute the persons who have mistreated elephants. Similar to developed countries, animals should be treated with care and consideration. Asian tour operators should incorporate social responsibility into the tours they arrange to elephant camps that offer entertainment and adopt cruel practices. Tourists should refuse to visit places where animals are not well treated if there is information available to them.

Compared with the logging industry, elephant tourism is perceived as providing better welfare to elephants. While the treatment of the elephants in the logging industry had been invisible, the visible treatment of elephants in modern tourism at least influences the camp owners to implement some measures to ensure the welfare of the animals. Thus, elephant tourism is not taboo but must be managed with care. A vigilant public can help ensure better conditions and the continuation of elephant tourism, which is the only source of financial support for these captive and wonderful animals.

Many of the issues facing elephants are similar to those of other animals (Markwell, 2018). Although each species has specific needs and problems (and also attracts the attention of different experts and enthusiasts), more research is required to establish a general set of principles of wildlife conservation, captive animal welfare and wildlife tourism. The issues of animal protection and the interaction of tourists with such animals need further research. Some guidelines for tourist–wildlife interactions are

available (WWF, 2015), but further work is needed, drawing on a range of research approaches and recognizing the differing needs of specific species, the problems they face in common and the potential of tourism to contribute to improvements.

Note

[1] See photo 17 in the Elephant Portrait Gallery.
[2] See Postscript: COVID-19 and Elephant Tourism, a Preliminary Analysis, pages 269–278.

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5 Visitor Expectations and Behaviours at Elephant Camps

Saranphat Chotmanakul and Somyot Ongkhluap

Chiangmai University, Chiangmai, Thailand

Introduction

Elephants have long been the 'tourism icons' of Thailand. They have been portrayed as an integral part of Thai culture as they have been used for transportation, war and ceremonies. Elephants have also been represented in the media, art, crafts and cultural objects sold as souvenirs for tourists. This chapter explores how tourists 'gaze' at elephants at camps in Chiangmai, Thailand. Developing John Urry's (1990) concept of the tourist 'gaze', this chapter will explore and explain different behaviours and perceptions of tourists who visit elephant camps in Chiangmai, and how elephant camps and surrounding communities as the hosts respond to such a gaze. The chapter first provides an overview of how 'traditional' elephant camps rapidly developed into alternative 'eco' or 'ethical' camps in the past decade. Then it tackles the issue of how tourists perceive and react to the available resources and services at these two types of elephant camps, based on statistical evidence and participant observations. The chapter also leads readers to an understanding of how the elephants and the hosts respond to the 'gaze' as reflected from authors' experience during fieldwork in 2015–2017.

Contextualizing Elephant Tourism in Northern Thailand

The image of elephants in Thailand and how elephants got involved in the tourism business

For international tourists, elephants have been seen as an integral part of the tourism industry in Thailand as they have been broadly represented in Thai arts, media and literature (Chatkupt *et al*., 1999; Cohen, 2008, 2010). After logging was banned in 1989, most elephants as well as their mahouts became unemployed or became involved in illegal businesses (Lohanan, 2002). Since then, captive elephants have begun to participate in a wide range of tourism

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activities, such as patrolling with forest rangers and working in circuses and entertainment venues in order to sustain their lives (Lohanan, 2002). Originally, elephant sessions were a part of a day programme. Elephant-riding was later sold as a combined package with other adventurous activities such as rafting and trekking. Later, a wide range of activities were developed as options for tourists ranging from a mere gaze at elephants to a more challenging elephant show.

Elephant camps have been an integral part of the tourism industry in Chiangmai for decades. Chiangmai is a renowned tourist destination in the central province of northern Thailand. It hosts a considerable number of tourist attractions and has long been a destination for adventure tourism, cultural tourism, ethnic tourism and trekking. Visitors can find elephant emblems everywhere including on the souvenirs that they purchase. Even the official seal of Chiangmai is an elephant under an arch (Ongkhluap and Wongput, 2016). The role and significance of elephants in northern Thai culture is represented through all forms of art and media. A number of elephant camps have developed in outskirt districts of Chiangmai, such as Mae Rim, Mae Taeng and Mae Wang. Tourists can purchase a day trip or half-day package from either offline or online travel agents or they can even reserve the packages directly with the elephant camps.

Ethical issues

The role of elephants in Thailand's tourism industry has long been criticized by scholars in various fields (Lohanan, 2002; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009a, Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009b; Duffy and Moore, 2011; Bansiddhi *et al*., 2018). The main criticisms revolved around the misuse of elephants for tourism purposes and degraded elephant welfare. Lohanan (2002) suggested in the International Workshop on the Domesticated Asian Elephant, Bangkok, Thailand that a wide spectrum of tourism activities that elephants were involved in might be consider 'unethical' or 'abusive'. Some improper treatments include the use of tight cuffs on four legs, the use of hooks and chains for punishment, separation of baby elephants from their mothers, confinement of elephants on a short chain and working long hours.

The release of a video clip on the 'separation ceremony' ('phajaan' in local dialect), in which an elephant calf is parted from its mother, resulted in opposition and criticism from Western animal rights protectors. The ceremony is performed by Karen hill tribes and it is intended to break the bond between the calf and its mother, thus making it disciplined (Cohen, 2010). This ceremonial act is considered 'cruel' and 'immoral' according to Western standards and leads to further criticism about the way elephants are disciplined in Thailand. Despite the criticisms, tourism is said to be the only viable way to sustain elephants' lives and mahouts' employment and income.

The shift in demand and supply of elephant tourism

The consumption of 'elephant tourism' has shifted significantly in the past decades. Globally there seems to be an increase in interest in wildlife tourism. Kontogeorgopoulos (2009b) observes that the shift might be a result of improved transportation and communication technology. According to an ethnographic interview in research conducted in 2015–2016 (Ongkhluap and Wongput, 2016), since the launch of the video clip about the separation ceremony on social media, international visitors to elephant camps in Chiangmai have started to express their concerns over the way elephants are trained, especially how the calves are treated. The usage of hook or spike, chain and knives by mahouts is seen as 'cruel' action that violates animal rights. In response to such criticisms, smaller and more 'ethical' elephant camps have developed. These new businesses are dedicated to different philosophies. They are offering a set of 'elephant-friendly' activities. Most of the services provided focus on the 'elephant experience' or 'mahout experience' rather than traditional elephant shows. New services include a variety of activities, such as playing with baby elephants, elephant walking, elephant bathing, preparing food for elephants, elephant spa, etc. These activities are often combined with other 'green' or 'cultural' activities, such as planting trees in a community forest, visiting local villages or learning local survival techniques in the wild.

Gazing at the Elephants

The 'tourist gaze' is a concept introduced by John Urry in 1990. The term was meant to explain the situation whereby tourists often place a set of expectations on local residents when they travel, in the search for an 'authentic' experience. In response to tourist expectations, local populations reflect back the 'gaze' of the expectations of tourists in order to gain financial benefits (Urry, 1990). Thus, the tourist gaze often leads to confrontation between the hosts and the guests and, in many cases, leads to overexploitation of local cultural resources to serve tourist demands.

How the tourists 'gaze' at elephants significantly affects the way in which elephant camps are managed in Chiangmai. In this chapter, some aspects of the tourist gaze at elephants will be used to explain the phenomena found in elephant tourism in Chiangmai. The themes include:

- how tourists, who are travelling out of their usual environments, perceive the elephant camps and what they expect from them as the space for encounters;
- how elephant camps, as a gazed-upon place, react to the gaze and develop social actions or a set of practices to cope with the gaze; and
- how surrounding communities react to the shifting trends of elephant camps.

How do tourists gaze at elephants in Chiangmai?

The tourist gaze that occurs at elephant camps reflects the changing trends in consumer behaviour in the tourism industry, particularly in the area of wildlife tourism. The data referred to in this chapter came from the survey conducted at 21 elephant camps in the outskirt districts of Chiangmai from 2015 to 2016. Some major elephant camps that participated in this research include Mae Sa Elephant Camp, Mae Taeng Elephant Camp, Chiang Dao Elephant Camp, Mae Ta Man Elephant Camp, Elephant Nature Park, Patara Farm, Eco Adventure Camp, Baan Chang Thai Camp, Gaen Gued Camp, Chok Chai Camp, Ele Camp, etc. These camps offer various types of activities for tourists to enjoy the elephant and local experience. For example, Mae Sa and Chok Chai Camps offer a traditional form of elephant experience: elephant-riding and elephant shows. Mae Taeng Camp and Mae Ta Man Camp often combine elephant experiences with other activities, such as bamboo rafting and local cart riding. Among the 542 questionnaire respondents, over 70% of visitors were teenagers or early adults (16–35 years old). This discovery may signify that visitors to elephant camps are mostly younger as the activities related to elephants are possibly perceived as quasi-adventurous. About 88% of participants visited the elephant camp for the first time. The statistics also indicate that 12% of visitors are repeat visitors.

During the time of data collection in 2015–2016, Western and Japanese tourists tended to visit smaller and more 'ethical' elephant camps, while Chinese tourists enjoyed visiting more traditional destinations. Most tourists thought that a half-day or 1-day trip was an appropriate length of time for an elephant trip. That length of time is sufficient for 'the gaze' to happen at various destinations that visitors see as a new environment out of their usual day-to-day routines. The half-day programme is normally a trip to 'traditional' camps that offer elephant shows and elephant-riding, while the longer programme may be either a package of elephant camps in combination with other adventurous activities or a more exclusive and in-depth elephant experience.

The survey reveals some tourist motivation and expectations for visiting an elephant camp. First, the most significant factor that draws the attention of tourists is the elephant itself. The main reason for tourists to visit an elephant camp is because they have a passion for elephants and love the way they can get closer to nature while spending time at elephant camps. Tourists do not expect to find tourist facilities onsite as they want to see the 'authentic' lives of elephants and mahouts.

Second, with regards to tourism activities, tourists often have expectations that they will cause no harm to elephants. They also expect that they will be able to learn about elephant's lives or gain local know-how from the camps. However, they found that tour guides were the main source of interpretation as most elephant camps do not have any staff who can communicate with them effectively. In addition, they expect that elephant camps will provide a set of activities that encourage visitors to think about sustainability and conservation.

There are relationships between tourist motivations and behaviours and the concept of Urry's tourist gaze. First, visiting elephant camps is perceived as a leisure activity as part of the social practices of modern societies. Visitors travel out of their usual environment and they expect to enjoy natural beauty and the elephant experience is seen as part of it.

Second, at the elephant camps, visitors, tour guides, mahouts and elephants develop some forms of relationships. Certain messages and a set of values are produced and presented to visitors. At the same time, visitors also reveal their feelings to the 'local hosts'.

Third, new social actions develop at elephant camps to cope with the mass character of tourist demands. When elephant camp owners learn about tourist expectations and concerns, they develop a new set of activities to offer their customers. Some traditional camps even open another section that offers more ethical and elephant-friendly activities. Camp owners also demand that relevant government agencies and educational institutions set up new standards for elephant welfare and treatment for tourism purposes in order to certify that they are not engaged in animal abuse.

How elephant camps gaze back at the visitors

As one of the local hosts, elephant camps rapidly react to the shifting trend in elephant tourism. In response to the set of expectations that tourists place upon elephant camps during their gaze, local businesses adapt to the new tourism demands. Local businesses have become highly responsive to the global trend of tourism that leans towards 'sustainability', 'responsibility', 'green' and 'clean' (Horwath, 2015; WTTC, 2019). The number of smaller and more 'ethical' elephant camps has increased significantly. While there were less than 40 camps at the beginning of the research in 2015, the number of elephant camps rose to almost 80 in 2016.

Most of the elephant camps were aware of opposition to the use of cuff and hook, but they still insist that such tools are necessary for controlling elephants and for tourist safety. Elephants are wild animals and are likely to turn aggressive during the mating season. They call for cooperation between government agencies and educational institutions to develop a set of standards for elephant tourism, in terms of both activities and welfare. They are willing to follow the regulations, if such regulations are developed from the local context. In addition, most of the camps call for government support in terms of providing better understanding for tourists. With regard to the use of cuff and hook, the elephant camp owners are trying to compensate the elephants by improving their welfare. Vets from the Elephant Research and Education Center, Chiangmai University frequently visit these elephant camps for routine health checks. In the case of severe injuries, elephants need to be transported to an elephant hospital in Lampang.

In sum, the tourist gaze leads to two types of reactions from elephant camps. First, they form a new set of social practices and values in elephant tourism. Riding on elephant's backs, which was once a popular activity for

international tourists, becomes an unethical activity. Visiting elephant camps now involves more of a mere 'gaze' at elephants, learning about elephant life as well as learning about local culture. Many business thrive to survive by adapting their business plan to serve the new demands. Second, the gaze leads to a small wave of 'disagreement'. The urging for government agencies to develop local standards illustrates that they do not utterly believe in the application of universal standards for animal rights in their local context.

How local communities got involved in this gaze

Local communities are also key stakeholders in the tourism context in which the 'gaze' took place as tourist attractions cannot be separated from the environments. There are interrelationships between tourists, elephant camps and local communities. Elephant camps, generally situated out of town and in the forest, are also surrounded by local villages. These local residents are directly affected by tourism activities. Their farms and orchards are trespassed upon and the stream they rely on for agricultural use is part of a route for elephant walks. Thus, communities are the real 'host' who live in the area gazed upon.

According to the interviews with local communities around elephant camps in Mae Rim, Mae Taeng and Mae Wang, local communities observe some physical impacts from the advent of tourists. First, they started to see environmental degradation, such as soil erosion and contamination of water resources, as well as pollution from tourist vehicles. Management of waste and litter is also a question raised by locals. Sociocultural impacts that can be observed include miscommunication owing to the language barrier and lack of cross-cultural understandings between locals and tourists. The economic impact that local communities are concerned about is overreliance on the elephant economy. This leads to the problem of seasonality in local employment as the number of tourists decreases significantly during the low season. However, the level of tourism impacts that local communities experience is considered 'manageable' as there are both positive and negative impacts that come with the advent of tourism.

The reason that local communities or the 'hosts' who live near the elephant camps do not resist or feel irritated by tourists who visit elephant camps and roam around their properties could be that each elephant camp is trying to get local communities involved in the benefits from tourism and to minimize the negative impacts caused by overtourism. Larger elephant camps are able to offer opportunities for local communities to participate as they tend to respond to the trend of responsible tourism. Local communities are involved at different levels. For example, male members of communities may get involved in direct employment as mahouts or workers in the camps. Female members of communities may work in the kitchen. Local communities may also benefit from indirect income, such as rafting, restaurants and selling farm products for elephant feeding. They may benefit as well from land rentals or donations from camp owners. Many elephant camps invite local communities to participate in tourism planning and to set up rules and regulations to

control negative impacts of tourism. Some camps hold a community meeting monthly to monitor the impacts of tourism.

To conclude, elephant tourism has led to direct and indirect employment in the region. Local residents can work in such camps. Multiplier effects also lead to indirect employment, such as related services, accommodation, homestay and even grocery stores. Elephants consume a large amount of food. Local farmers benefit from growing elephant food, such as bananas, maize, sugarcane, etc. Elephant dung can also be collected and sold as animal manure, and is in high demand.

Local taxes from elephant camps are returned to support local cultural activities and festivals. Local cultural resources are also promoted and transmitted through tourism. Visiting local villages, learning traditional know-how and cooking local food are normally sold as a package together with 'the elephant experience' programme. In addition, the construction of infrastructure and tourist facilities also allows local residents access to better transportation and improved standards of living. Elephant camps also provide some of their benefits to support local social responsibility programmes, such as road cleaning, tree planting, and other 'green' and 'clean' activities to improve local ecosystems and environments.

Discussion

As wildlife tourism has received much public interest in the past decade, the role of elephants in the tourism industry, particularly in Africa and in Thailand, has led to debates and concerns over elephant welfare and ethics in elephant tourism. There have been debates concerning the application of universal standards for elephant welfare and calls for local standards and codes of practices that may be more suitable for the local contexts. This phenomenon shows that the concept of 'tourist gaze' and 'host gaze' can still be applied in the case of elephant tourism.

In Chingmai, elephants have played a significant role in the tourism industry since the logging ban in 1989. The shift in global megatrends in tourism led to changing perception of elephants as part of the tourism industry. In the old days when elephant-riding was a popular element on the to-do list of visitors to Chiangmai, larger elephant camps received a number of visitors who had a set of expectations or a fantasy about orientalism or exoticism at the tourism destinations. The elephant is perceived as a tourism icon that provides the 'exotic' and 'authentic' experience to visitors.

As the global trends shift towards sustainability and responsible travel, visitor motivations and expectations also shift from consuming exoticism and yearning for authenticity to learning about the local experience, enjoying natural beauty and feeling that they are part of ethical activities. However, traditional elephant camps such as Mae Sa and Mae Taeng still welcome a number of visitors, particularly Chinese tourists. For those who have a limited length of stay in Chiangmai, traditional camps are better options as they can spend half a day immersing themselves in the 'elephant experience'.

While the number of smaller and more 'ethical' elephant camps is increasing, another concern that should be taken into consideration is how sustainably these camps can contribute to the tourism industry. One day these camps may lead to an oversupply of elephant camps in Chiangmai. In addition, the tourism services that most camps offer are similar to each other. Only a few camps can clearly present their identity and value proposition to customers.

Conclusion

Elephant tourism has been an integral part of the tourism industry in Chiangmai ever since the advent of tourism. After the logging ban was imposed upon timber businesses, elephants and their mahouts started their new lives as contributors of 'tourism experience'. At the very beginning of its tourism development, Chiangmai was famous for trekking and ethnic tourism. These elephant camps beautifully fulfilled international tourists' fantasies about oriental exoticism. That was the early 'gazing' period during which visitors developed one set of expectations. As the global trend shifted towards the 'green' and 'social responsibility' business models, elephant camps were tremendously affected by such changes. Concerns for animal rights and sustainability have led to the invention of new types of services offered at elephant camps. In the future, it is likely that responsible tourism will emerge from a series of global issues such as scarcity of resources, the increased pace of climate change, the rapid extinction of many species and the impact of human activities on the planet. These trends may also affect tourist motivations, behaviour and thus shape the way tourists 'gaze' at elephants and related forms of tourism.

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6 Alternative Forms of Elephant Tourism

Susanna Curtin and Charlotte Day

Bournemouth University, Bournemouth, United Kingdom

Introduction

For an increasing number of tourists, a trip to South-east Asia is not complete without a visit to an elephant attraction, many of which market themselves as 'sanctuaries' or rescue and rehabilitation centres that have supposedly rehoused elephants from zoos, circuses, temples and the logging industry.

Despite their caring rhetoric, many of these 'sanctuaries' subject their animals to extreme cruelty and a way of life that is supported by tourist spending. Although many international tour operators are altering their stance on promoting inappropriate elephant attractions – i.e. those that offer elephant-rides, circus-like performances and bathing sessions – the popularity of these activities remains strong. To profit from this tourist demand, more and more elephant attractions are opening their doors. The question is what moral frameworks perpetuate the use of captive, intelligent animals to be treated in such a way for our amusement and entertainment? Knowing what we know about elephants: their decline in the wild, their tight social bonds, their strong matriarchal and empathetic instincts, their ability to learn and their long memories, we wonder why tourists buy into, or even enjoy, such experiences.

The development of effective programmes aimed at challenging tourist behaviour requires an investigation of the target audience and how and why they interact with the elephant tourism industry. To this end, we conducted a survey of tourists who have previously visited elephant attractions in Asia to find out more about their motivations, the activities they undertook, their experiences and their subsequent views on animal welfare.

Before explaining our findings, we begin by highlighting the key welfare issues with regard to elephant attractions, what issues we wanted to explore and how we collected our data.

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Background

Despite the premise of them being 'sanctuaries', a study by World Animal Protection (WAP) (2017) investigated 3000 elephants at tourist attractions in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Nepal, India, Laos and Cambodia, and discovered that 77% of the elephants were living in appalling conditions that were 'severely cruel'. These included being kept chained up when not performing, not having any interaction with other elephants, being fed a poor diet and being subjected to stress-inducing noise levels. WAP also found that there had been a 30% rise in the number of elephants at tourism venues in Thailand since 2010; many of these were baby elephants captured from the wild and separated from their mothers (Cohen, 2015). Incarcerated at the venues, these young elephants have their already traumatized spirits 'crushed' by being chained in cages where they are subjected to severe physical and mental torture (Malikhao, 2017). This induces enough fear in the animal to ensure it is safe around humans and performs accordingly. It is hard to imagine that any tourist would condone this behaviour if they saw it.

Without witnessing such treatment firsthand, Rizzolo and Bradshaw (2018) claim that most tourists seem to accept the myths that surround Asian elephants; particularly that they are a domesticated rather than a wild species, they are willing performers, they like performing complicated human-like tasks and that providing tricks for them to do such as tightrope walking alleviates their boredom. None of the above could be further from the truth given their psychosocial functioning and evolutionary history – with most of their natural time spent in large social groups, foraging for food.

Schmidt-Burbach *et al*. (2015) similarly explicates how suffering is largely invisible to the outsider. His research in Thailand, the country with the largest number of captive elephants and venues, reveals that some attractions receive between 700 and 1000 tourists a day, with many staying a relatively short time. They have a 15–20-min ride, get to feed the elephant a 'treat', usually bananas, which they purchase from the mahout, they can also bathe the elephant, usually for a cost, and then they leave the camp having enjoyed a positive and memorable experience. Their visit does not give insights into the monotony, the inadequate conditions, nor the training procedures that allowed the interaction in the first place. Likewise, Moorhouse *et al*. (2015) demonstrate that many wildlife tourist attractions (WTAs) have substantial negative effects that are unrecognized by most tourists, suggesting an urgent need for tourist education and the consistent, enforced regulation of WTAs worldwide.

In the end, challenging this growing industry will depend on raising awareness among the tourist population, NGOs and tour operators in order to create enough market pressure for increased regulation in elephant welfare and put an end to inappropriate attractions (Moorhouse *et al*., 2019). Understanding tourist practices, experiences and perceptions of elephant tourism is still relatively under-researched. After conducting a review of

literature, we were particularly interested in how tourists looked back on their experience – did they feel any dissonance?

Method

Our questions also explored why respondents chose to partake in elephant tourism, the types of activity they undertook, their knowledge and perceptions of elephants, the animal welfare that they witnessed and future elephant tourism preferences.

The online survey went 'live' on social media during February and March 2019. A total of 343 responses were submitted but, unfortunately, only 218 completed usable questionnaires were generated. Although the survey was advertised on several social media sites, the snowball, self-selected sample mostly reflects the demographic profile of the researchers, and the findings are consequently limited in transferability – a problem that is often inherent in online surveys such as this (see Kosinski *et al*., 2015). The questionnaires were mostly completed by women (78%). In terms of ethnicity, 88.4% of respondents were white, only 8.8% were Asian and 2.8% were from black or other ethnic groups. The 18–24 and 25–34 age groups represented the largest sample, accounting for 33.5% each. Following that, the 35–44 group accounted for 10.7% and the 45+ group accounted for 22.3%, respectively. Just under a third (28%) had experienced elephant tourism within the past year, and 24% within the past two years; the rest had experienced it during the past four years. The majority had visited Thailand (62%), others had visited Sri Lanka (14%) and India (8%), with the remainder spread evenly between Nepal, Laos, Malaysia, Cambodia and Indonesia.

The following findings are therefore provided with a caveat that the sample demographic is limited and may be indicative of some aspects of the elephant experience but is by no means conclusive, indicating that further studies would be beneficial.

Results

Motivations

Intrinsic motivations are driven by inherent satisfaction rather than external rewards (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Our data reveal that the principal, intrinsic motivations to visit elephant tourist attractions are borne from the desire to see elephants up close and have personal 'one-to-one' time with them (73%), but the most important motivation is to 'learn more about them' (77%). Lesser (extrinsic) motivations refer to doing an activity simply for the pleasure of the activity itself, rather than the values behind it (Ryan and Deci, 2000), which in this research included having a picture taken with the elephants (38%).

Social media, and media in general, appeared to have very little persuasive impact on the desire to visit an elephant attraction, with only 12% claiming that media was influential in their decision to visit a camp. Most respondents (56.9%) chose to visit the attraction before leaving home, with 43.1% deciding during their travels. This reveals the potential for campaigns to question and alter consumer behaviour by making tourists aware of what attractions are the most ethical and what activities are to be avoided before they set off.

When our respondents were asked how they decided which attraction to visit, the most popular form of decision making was through word-of-mouth recommendation (46%). Following this, 17.7% of respondents looked at online travel review websites. Travel companies, particularly in their home countries but also at the destination, were involved in only 14.4% of cases. Although it is a welcome response from tour industry representatives not to include elephant attractions in their itineraries due to concerns regarding animal welfare, it seems that their messages may only target a small proportion of visitors. According to The Telegraph (2019), more than 226 operators worldwide have already eliminated elephant activities from their itineraries, but clearly given the small reliance on tour operators, this has insufficient impact to alter total demand for elephant tourism.

Nevertheless, there was evidence of people 'researching online to find the most ethical attraction' in the area. Of the respondents who answered 'other' (21%), many stated that they did extensive research to find reputable and responsible companies that were focused more on rehabilitation, rather than the typical tourism activities offering rides and unethical practices. Many stated they looked for centres that used tourism profits to aid the elephant's rehabilitation, possibly after a life in the tourism industry. Hopefully, this is in response to the negative publicity that increasingly surrounds elephant attractions across Asia.

Elephant activities undertaken

The most common tourist activities concerned the 'caring' aspects of elephant husbandry such as feeding (68%) and bathing them (53.2%) (See Fig. 6.1). Of greater concern, a third had ridden them and a further 19% had been trekking with them. Furthermore, 18% of respondents (n = 39) had watched them perform unnatural behaviours such as painting (24), dancing (19) or standing on one leg (18). An additional 25 respondents reported seeing other types of unnatural performances. Of these respondents, four saw them playing football, followed by three who saw them doing handstands or other acrobatics, two saw them posing for photos and one witnessed the elephants playing an instrument.

Although most campaigns have focused on the cruelty of riding elephants, these other performative activities are equally harmful and abhorrent; not least because of the terror and torture enforced during training, but also due to the strain of balancing and performing unnatural postures. These

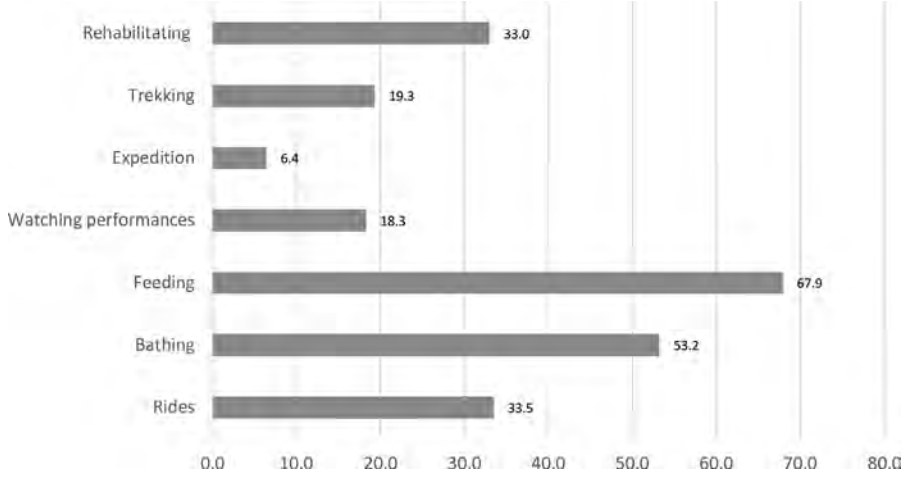

Fig. 6.1. Activities undertaken (%).

enforced acts create eye, foot, leg and spinal problems as well as increased psychological stress induced by fear and long working hours (Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018).

When respondents were asked how 'normal' they thought it was for elephants to perform in this way, most replied 'not at all', but there was still a minority who thought these activities were acceptable for elephants, in the same way that dogs like to do 'tricks' for their owners. Again, such performances feed the discourse that frames elephants as 'domesticated' animals and willing performers.

In terms of post-trip satisfaction evaluation, Fig. 6.2 reveals customer ratings with regards to the various activities they took part in. Readers should recognize that memory and post-experience dissonance may slant these responses over time, and that 'in the moment of experience', they may have responded differently depending on who they were with, and whether

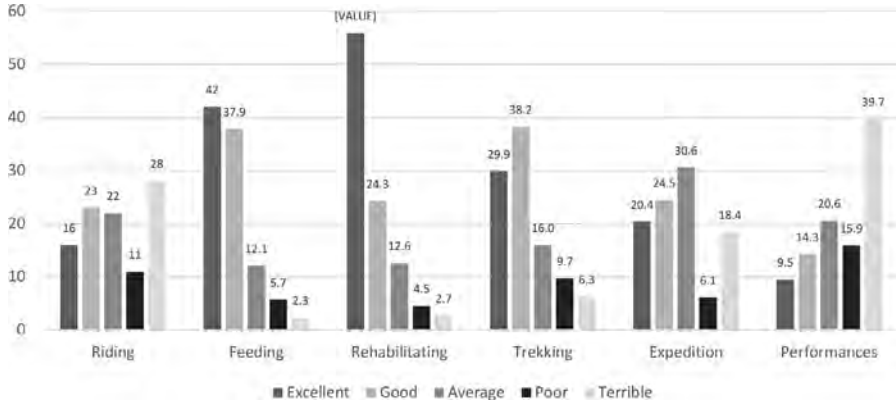

Fig. 6.2. Rating of activities (%).

the experience met their expectations. Social representations of elephant tourism may also have changed since their elephant encounters, and this in itself might alter the perceived emotional synchrony of the experience (Wood, 2019).

Elephant entertainment performances created the least satisfaction, with 40% rating them as 'terrible' and 15% as 'poor'. Yet, surprisingly, 24% of the 39 respondents still rated them as enjoyable.

Conversely, our data suggest that anything to do with the idea of rehabilitation (i.e. slightly less exploitative activities such as walking with elephants, feeding and bathing them) scored highly, with 56% rating it as excellent and a further 24.3% as good. Bathing elephants received generally positive feedback, with 38.2% selecting 'good' and 29.9% selecting 'excellent'. Tourists also enjoyed feeding elephants, with 80% scoring it highly. More exploitative activities seemed to conjure greater negativity. For those who rode an elephant, only 16% rated it as 'excellent' or 'good' (23%), with 39% claiming the experience to be 'poor' or 'terrible'. The reason for this is unclear. It could be the increasing publicity regarding its cruelty, or it could be because the movement on a howdah (a covered seat mounted on an elephant's back – riders usually sit sideways, the howdah sways as the elephant moves) is extremely uncomfortable.

Other exploitative activities such as trekking or expeditions scored slightly better perhaps due to a different, and more prolonged engagement with the animals, although there was also greater ambivalence (i.e. higher average ratings with these activities). Objective ambivalence refers to the 'actual presence of conflicting evaluative reactions within a given person: that is, having both positive and negative thoughts and feelings toward the same object' (Reich and Wheeler, 2016, p. 4). Without further enquiry, it is difficult to understand this ambivalence. In this case, we wonder whether the memories of the adventure are somewhat countered by the changing attitudes towards elephant-riding, creating a more ambivalent response to the question.

It is difficult to analyse whether the countries visited made a difference in these ratings given the limited sample. What we did note, however, was that none of the people who visited elephants in Sri Lanka scored the attraction as 'excellent'. Unlike Thailand, there are a number of national parks where herds of wild elephant can be seen on a typical Jeep safari and this is the preferred tourist experience. As a result, there are only a handful of small elephant camps in Sri Lanka compared with other South-east Asian countries. The most visited 'sanctuary' is Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage, which is a government-run refuge for up to 80 elephants. Although clearly on the tourist trail, neither Responsible Travel nor TripAdvisor advocates a visit given the poor animal welfare, cruel mahouts and tourist overcrowding. Other elephant welfare issues in Sri Lanka concern the overuse of elephants in the cities and at festivals, where elephant-rides are common. Given the paucity of published articles on elephant tourism in Sri Lanka, we surmise that it is these two attractions that our respondents are referring to.

When it came to 'overall satisfaction', 70.2% of respondents 'agreed' or 'somewhat agreed' to having really enjoyed the experience, 10.2% were

ambivalent and only 19.5% did not enjoy it at all. These results are not surprising given that it is hard not to enjoy having the opportunity to be close to elephants, and the fact that it is unlikely that tourists would have seen 'behind the scenes' during the limited time they were on site (23% spent 1–2 hours; 18% a morning or an afternoon and 18% a whole day). It is interesting that when asked if they were likely to visit more elephant attractions in their future travels, under a third (28.6%) thought it likely, 20.7% were not sure and a majority 50.7% thought it was unlikely. Many factors could determine why participants felt it would be unlikely they would visit an elephant attraction again. The results showed that there was a significant correlation between the time spent at the attraction and whether the respondents would visit again in the future with the longer the time spent, the more fulfilling the experience.

When alternative methods of elephant tourism were presented, watching them in the wild appeared extremely popular among these respondents. On the other hand, elephant attractions could simply be just another tourism box to tick while on their travels, hence the desire only to visit or participate once. When these data were analysed depending on the activities experienced, those who had ridden elephants, watched performances and trekked with them all reported no intention of revisiting while those who had taken part in rehabilitation activities would consider further elephant tourism, perhaps demonstrating the power of marketing the 'caring' philosophy of sanctuaries and the fabricated promise of rehabilitation.

Animal welfare

When asked to reflect on whether the animals they saw appeared 'happy or cared for', the majority of tourists reported that they did (58%), leaving 14% unsure and just under a third (28%) reporting 'no'. Seeing elephants confined by chains is often a point of disquiet. A recent study of 2923 Asian elephants in 220 tourist venues in Sri Lanka, Nepal, India, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand found that around three quarters of elephants lived in inadequate conditions (Schmidt-Burbach, 2018). Blaine (2019) would also argue that the mahouts often live in equally unacceptable circumstances, in impoverished conditions and are paid a minimum wage that is not enough to support them or their families. This point is not considered further in this chapter, but it does require more research as these conditions do not bode well for the mahouts or for the elephants in their care.

Respondents were asked to describe the behaviour they witnessed from the mahouts, resulting in mixed views. Some said that the mahouts were 'abusive' or 'aggressive' (16%), 'all about pleasing the tourists' and 'had little experience', while others reported that the mahouts were 'caring' and 'respectful' towards the elephants. These opinions vary within each type of elephant attraction; for example, the respondents who visited sanctuaries reported that 'they behaved appropriately and were very kind to the animal', and they had 'special individual bonds with the elephant'. But those who visited

tourist attractions for activities such as riding or watching performances said the mahouts 'could be harsh or violent', 'not very emotionally attached' and 'only cared about the money'. When asked whether they had witnessed any abuse, 66% said they hadn't seen any, but 16% saw physical abuse, 15% witnessed behaviour that they thought was abusive both mentally and physically, and 3% saw what they described as emotional abuse. Expanding upon their answers, some respondents reported the unnecessary use of bull hooks or goads, and the elephants being whipped or chained up. Some also mentioned that the elephants looked 'unnaturally submissive'. These reports of abuse occurred throughout the various countries reported in the study; however, they were most common in participants who had visited Thailand and Sri Lanka. For a review of the elephant welfare in Thailand, see Bansiddhi *et al*. (2020), Cui and Xu (2019) and Cohen (2015).

Despite this, there was clearly some sympathy or respect for the mahouts. A total of 63% of respondents agreed that the mahouts treated their animals 'well enough', 57.2% agreed that they had a 'special relationship' with their elephants and only 21% thought that they were cruel.

Tourist dissonance and future preferences

Finally, respondents were asked what would dissuade them from participating in elephant tourism. Seeing the elephants being made to perform unnatural tricks or being mistreated were both voted the highest, with 81.8 and 87.3%, respectively. Negative reviews would also make the attraction unattractive, with 65.9% of respondents claiming it 'extremely likely' to make them not want to participate.

Following a number of incidents and social media stories regarding the cruelty of these animal attractions, there is a relatively new movement in elephant tourism. Some elephant attractions no longer offer riding or shows and have reduced direct tourist interaction with elephants (Bansiddhi *et al*., 2020). One example of this is the Mahouts Foundation, which has successfully opened an elephant forest in Thailand. Here they offer a project called 'walking with elephants', where tourists are taken to see the rescued elephants in their natural habitat to observe them behaving naturally: foraging for food, playing in the mud, and cooling down in streams and rivers. The tourists also learn about the local Thai culture and camp on site where they are taught foraging and cooking skills by the mahouts. This allows visitors a unique and memorable experience of elephant tourism in an effort to prioritize both mahout and elephant welfare (Taylor, 2018). This immersive experience is less transitory and allows the mahouts and their local communities to get involved in tourism development, making it a kinder and more ethical elephant tourism alternative.

We attempted to measure the attractiveness of such alternative elephant tourist activities. Observing wild elephants on safari was selected as the most appealing, with 88.8% of respondents answering, either 'extremely' or 'very appealing' (see Fig. 6.3). This was followed by observing rescued

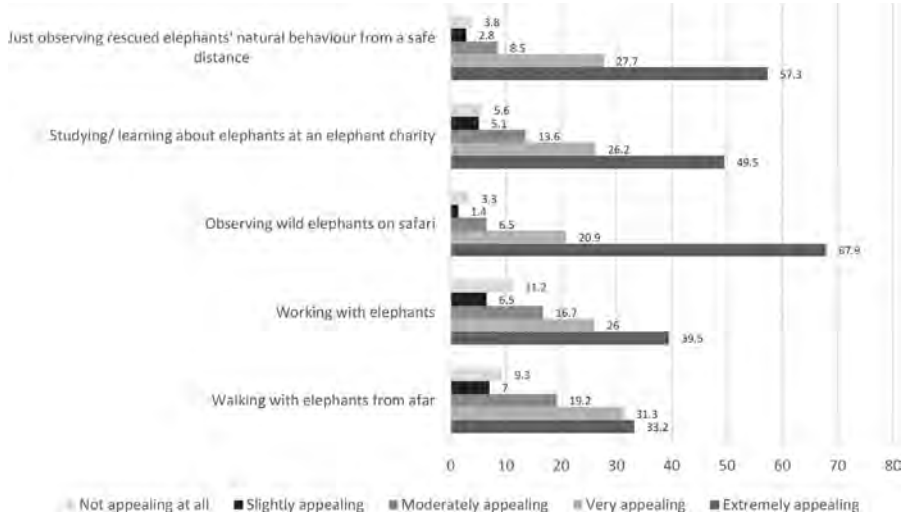

Fig. 6.3. How appealing are the alternatives? (%).

elephants' natural behaviour from a safe distance under the guidance of a local mahout, for which 85% answered similarly. 'Studying and/or learning about elephants at an elephant charity' seemed equally attractive, with 75.7% of respondents selecting 'extremely appealing' or 'very appealing'. Walking with elephants was perceived slightly less favourably, yet still with a collective 64.5% suggesting that this would be relatively attractive. On balance, these findings present a reasonable potential for countries in Asia to deliver a more caring and responsible tourism experience in line with the sensibilities of their Western consumers.

Discussion and Conclusions

It is our belief that elephant tourism conjures a complex mix of emotions. Getting up close and learning about these majestic creatures reflects an inherent human curiosity towards intelligent, sentient, animal others. This desire, however, has encouraged the growth of an unscrupulous and currently unregulated elephant tourism industry that often fabricates an emotional narrative of care and rehabilitation to tourists whose own sentience wants whole-heartedly to believe the stories they encounter. In many cases, their tourist dollars fuel the continuation of appalling practices that at worst involve torture and pain, and at best a cruel intrusion into the natural life of the animals they 'love'.

Just over half of our respondents made the decision to visit an elephant attraction before leaving home. This provides NGOs and travel review sites with further opportunities to drive campaigns home to promote good practice and to encourage tourists to select their experiences with care, as well as to report any incidences of poor animal welfare to non-profit organizations

such as the Born Free Foundation, World Animal Protection, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, Responsible Travel or their tour operator.

One of the most prominent messages should be that elephants are not domesticated by nature and that balancing, kicking footballs and painting is not part of their natural behaviour, and any attraction that includes these is not reputable. The second important message is that riding elephants on a howdah is no longer considered acceptable. The howdah, which is placed on the elephant's back and used to carry tourists, causes abrasions from the shifting of the bench, and across the chest from the chafing of the strap needed to support the howdah (Khawnual and Clarke, 2002). Tourists are carried two or four at a time on each elephant, with the additional weight of the mahout on its neck to control it while trekking. Elephants can carry a maximum of 300 kg, but it is recommended that they don't exceed 200 kg. Although marketing creates powerful romantic imagery for the tourist, carrying heavy weights all day, every day permanently damages an elephant's spine and causes skin abrasions and infections. We were somewhat surprised that riding, trekking and expeditions were still so prevalent in our limited study.

Although some sectors of the travel industry are beginning to take a firm stance on animal welfare, it is noteworthy that only a small proportion of our respondents used, or were influenced by, travel companies. Campaigns against elephant entertainment therefore need to reach a much wider tourist population.

We genuinely trust that most tourists would think twice about buying a ticket if the sad truth behind the 'elephant rehabilitation and domestication' myth were recognized. Our data reveal that tourists much preferred the less exploitative interactions such as bathing and feeding elephants, as opposed to riding them or viewing inappropriate performances. But although tourist belief in the notion of rehabilitation appears to remain strong, it is worth highlighting that elephants can never be rehabilitated and returned to the wild; they always remain captive, and even the seemingly innocuous activities such as bathing and feeding the animals compromise their physical and emotional welfare, contravening their basic right to be able to carry out normal behaviours.

Rizzolo and Bradshaw (2018) set out the numerous ways that engagement in the tourism entertainment industry severely traumatizes elephants. They are chained, they have no control over their social groups or their actions. They cannot forage for food or socialize freely, and they suffer separation anxieties, physical and psychological torture and exhaustion, often being worked long hours without a break. Facts that most tourists do not realize.

Better models of elephant tourism such as the Mahouts Elephant Foundation are examples of good practice and we hope they will pave the way for a more ethical tourist attraction, but the biggest barrier to their success is the existing tourist demand for up-close and hands-on experiences evidenced by the satisfaction ratings of our small study. Shifting this tourism demand in tourist markets, as well as in the emerging ones, is key to transforming this cruel industry into one that provides elephants with improved welfare, mahouts and their families with better working

conditions, and visitors to elephant camps with enjoyment and enhanced understanding of elephants. That and the hope of worldwide regulation.

Finally, to promote an ethical shift in elephant tourism, i.e. away from the usual brief embodied tourist experience with elephants, such as bathing, feeding or riding them to a more hands-off tourist experience based upon viewing them and learning about them from afar, depends upon a greater promotion of the facts before tourists embark on their travels.

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7 Elephant Visitor Preferences and Experiences in Sri Lanka

Ramona Strödecke and Nicole Häusler

University for Sustainable Development Eberswalde, Eberswalde, Germany

Introduction

This chapter discusses the results of our study concerning visitors' preferences and experiences at four major elephant tourism attractions in Sri Lanka. Previous studies in Sri Lanka have been carried out at the Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage (PEO) (e.g. Bandara and Tisdell, 2003; Dayanada and Weerakoon, 2012) and among the visitors to this country's National Parks (NPs) (e.g. Buultjens *et al*., 2005; Eranga, 2013). However, visitors' perceptions of other important elephant attractions in Sri Lanka, such as the Elephant Transit Home (ETH) and the Millennium Elephant Foundation (MEF), have not yet been studied, nor have these different attractions been compared in terms of visitors' specific requests and demands. Hence, research on elephant tourism in Sri Lanka has been limited, especially regarding visitors' responses to these sites.

Our study intends to close this knowledge gap by evaluating visitors' responses to a survey conducted at the four most popular elephant tourism attractions in Sri Lanka. First, we provide a detailed summary of the current discourse on elephant tourism in this South Asian country, followed by a description of the sites under study. Using a mixed-method approach, we were able to gain insights into the visitors' profiles, preferences and experiences by focusing on each site's educational value.

Elephant Tourism in Sri Lanka – An Overview

Elephants in Sri Lanka are a valuable tourism asset, acting as a catalyst to attract visitors to this destination (Schwammer and Schwammer, 2017, p. iii).

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> Beyond Sri Lanka's many attractions and impressive landscape, Asian elephants undoubtedly count among the treasures that make this island stand out as the Pearl of the Indian Ocean.

Consequently, promotional materials feature elephants to help draw both domestic and international tourists (Buultjens *et al*., 2005).

Most Sri Lankan elephants (*Elephas maximus maximus*) live in the wild and are distributed over about 60% of the island (Prithiviraj *et al*., 2011). Based on an unpublished report from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wildlife and Fauna (CITES) estimates that almost 5900 wild elephants inhabit Sri Lanka (CITES, 2017). With this high density of wild elephants (Prithiviraj *et al*., 2011), Sri Lanka offers tourists a unique opportunity to observe Asian elephants in their natural habitat (Eranga, 2013), and the country's NPs allow for safaris to accommodate these visitors. The percentage of captive elephants in Sri Lanka is low compared with other Asian countries. Over the years, the number of officially registered captive elephants has been continuously decreasing and has been reported to be about 250 (Prithiviraj *et al*., 2011; Fischer *et al*., 2018), based on data from CITES (2017). Because of this decline, only a few captive elephant tourism attractions are now accessible to visitors.

We selected four elephant tourism attractions to evaluate visitors' preferences and experiences, based on their popularity, accessibility and the different activities offered (see more in Strödecke, 2019). We included NPs in our study, because most elephants living in the wild in Sri Lanka can best be observed during a safari. From among the numerous NPs in Sri Lanka, feedback was elicited from Udawalawe National Park and Kaudulla National Park – both popular destinations that offer attractive elephant-viewing possibilities (Senevirathna and Perera, 2013; Blank, 2015). During the safaris, information about the elephants is usually imparted by a guide who is booked privately and accompanies the touring vehicle.

Two additional government-run facilities that take care of many elephants are open to the public: PEO and ETH. PEO is the most visited attraction, with 88 captive elephants, mostly born at this facility. Visitors can observe elephants wading in the river, roaming free on the grounds or feeding at the milk station. At certain times, visitors may choose to feed the elephants from baskets of fruit or even to bathe with them. Volunteering is also possible (Prithiviraj *et al*., 2011; Blank, 2015). However, PEO offers little educational content to visitors, nor are the visitors given information about the threats these animals face. ETH looks after 53 abandoned elephants and releases them back into the wild when they are deemed ready. Visitors can watch the daily milk-feeding routine four times a day but only from a distance (Kurt, 2014). In contrast to PEO, the information centre at ETH covers a large variety of topics, including the current threats to elephant welfare.

The privately owned non-profit organization MEF aims to improve the conditions for captive elephants, and visitors can choose from several different options and activities: entrance only, elephant back-riding, bathing

with the elephants, fruit-basket feeding, an elephant walk experience, lunch or volunteering (MEF, n.d.). The facility includes a museum that offers considerable educational content, and information is also generally transmitted by guides. Thus, 'hands-on' experiences with elephants were offered by MEF and PEO, whereas at ETH and the NPs, visitors could view elephants only from a distance. The aim of this study was to gain a better understanding of the visitors' experiences, with a special focus on the educational component provided during these visits.

Methodology

We chose a mixed-methods approach to gather data from several perspectives. The qualitative empirical method selected was observation, which would allow us to determine visitors' firsthand impressions of each attraction and its circumstances, including the condition of the venue both in general and for keeping elephants, as well as the behaviour of staff members and visitors. In addition, in order to obtain quantitative data, we conducted a questionnaire-based survey to compare visitors' perspectives at the four different sites. Observations at each attraction took place over 2–3 days. As a result, we were able to gain a deeper understanding of each of these aspects by learning in detail about the individual attractions.

The visitor survey consisted of an introduction and 22 closed-ended and three open-ended questions. These 25 questions can be subdivided into four thematic areas: (i) visitors' profiles; (ii) visitors' preferences; (iii) visitors' satisfaction; and (iv) visitors' knowledge and learning experience. Although tailored to the specific attractions, these questionnaires were consistent in terms of content. Visitors were handed the questionnaires as they left their attraction, and 44–48 completed questionnaires were returned at each of the sites. The data we collected were then extracted and compared with the corresponding online reviews available at the TripAdvisor website.

Results of the quantitative research

The results of the quantitative part of our study are presented here according to the four thematic areas covered in the questionnaires: the visitors' profiles, preferences, experiences/satisfaction and knowledge/educational experience. We have included our findings for the entire sample as well as for each of the individual elephant tourism attractions. Because not all 185 respondents answered all the questions, the '*n*' values cited below will vary.

Visitors' profiles

Regarding the 185 respondents' socio-demographic data, the female:male ratio was balanced, and the respondents were relatively young (71.9% [n = 171]

were under 34 years of age) and had completed higher education levels. Thirty different nationalities were represented, with a few countries being overrepresented; 14.6% ($n = 178$) of the visitors were Sri Lankan, but the majority were foreign, mainly from the UK, Germany, Australia and India. Although their sources of information before visiting each attraction varied, the visitors' most common responses were 'friends and family', 'online reviews' and 'travel guidebooks'. Nearly all the visitors had seen elephants before, and about half had observed elephants both in the wild and in captivity.

Visitors' preferences

To determine respondents' preferences, we asked specific questions grouped into three subsections. First, when we asked whether visitors preferred observing elephants in the wild or in captivity: the response was clear. Nearly all the participants (96.8% [$n = 185$]) said they preferred to see elephants in the wild.

Regarding the second subsection, which concerned the visitors' reasons for choosing a site, the responses were more complex because there were at least 12 possible answers (see Table 7.1).

The statement 'To watch the behaviour of elephants' was the only statement that was selected at all four sites as one of the main reasons for visiting these attractions (50.3% [$n = 181$]). The two items 'Because I love elephants' and 'To see baby elephants' were frequently selected by those who visited PEO, ETH and the NPs. 'To see a large number of Asian elephants' was selected as one of the main reasons only by visitors to PEO and the NPs. Thus, whereas those who visited the PEO, ETH and NP sites gave similar reasons for their visits, the visitors to MEF chose only one statement in common with the other three sites (i.e. 'To watch the behaviour of elephants'). Rather, MEF respondents selected touching and interacting with elephants, taking close-up photos, and asking questions and learning more about elephants as the most relevant additional reasons for their visit. Although interest in learning about elephants was also high at ETH and the NPs, it was comparatively very low at PEO.

The third subsection regarding preferences focused on the activities visitors chose to engage in at the selected attractions. Because each site's offerings differed, these answers could not be compared. However, the results indicated that most visitors to MEF selected an entrance option that included some type of physical interaction with the elephants, and 34.9% of these 43 visitors chose elephant back-riding. At PEO, 33.3% of these 48 visitors chose feeding the elephants over simply observing them in the free-roaming areas. About half the respondents visited both ETH and an NP in Sri Lanka.

Visitors' satisfaction and experiences

The part of the survey regarding visitors' experiences included four statements. For the closed-ended questions, a Likert scale was chosen, ranging from 1 ('totally agree') to 4 ('totally disagree'). Therefore,

Table 7.1. Reasons for choosing the PEO, MEF, ETH and NPs sites according to percentage of visitors at each site.

Reason for choice of site	Sites of elephant tourism				
	PEO (n = 46)	MEF (n = 43)	ETH (n = 48)	NPs (n = 44)	All (n = 181)
1. To see baby elephants	54.3%	7.0%	72.9%	53.3%	47.5%
2. To see a large number of Asian elephants	45.7%	25.6%	25.0%	65.9%	40.3%
3. To watch the behaviour of elephants	41.3%	44.2%	54.2%	61.4%	50.3%
4. To take close-up photos	28.3%	46.5%	20.8%	22.7%	29.3%
5. To ride an elephant	0%	18.6%	0%	2.3%	5.0%
6. To touch an elephant and interact with it (e.g. feeding or bathing)	30.4%	65.1%	10.4%	2.3%	26.5%
7. To be informed about the threats facing elephants	8.7%	18.6%	25.0%	18.2%	17.7%
8. To learn more about the conservation of elephants	17.4%	27.9%	47.9%	34.1%	32.0%
9. To ask questions and gain more knowledge about elephants	6.5%	41.9%	16.7%	29.5%	23.2%
10. Because the entrance fee will be spent on a good cause	23.9%	14.0%	37.5%	13.6%	22.7%
11. Because this site is known for its good treatment of elephants (ETH, PEO, MEF) or because in the NPs elephants won't be harmed	23.9%	32.6%	41.7%	50.0%	37.1 %
12. Because I love elephants	63.0%	25.6%	50.0%	61.4%	50.3%

Continued

Table 7.1. Continued

	Sites of elephant tourism				
Reason for choice of site	PEO (n = 46)	MEF (n = 43)	ETH (n = 48)	NPs (n = 44)	All (n = 181)
Other	Because this site takes in orphaned elephants	Crabbie's sponsorship of the MEF (since 2017)[a]			

Compiled by the authors.
[a]Crabbie's, a producer of alcoholic ginger beer, is a corporate sponsor of MEF.
PEO, Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage; MEF, Millennium Elephant Foundation; ETH, Elephant Transit Home; NPs, National Parks.

the arithmetic mean was used to compare their answers for the different attractions. Table 7.2 shows the respective arithmetic means (designated $\overline{x}$) for 13 specific statements. These items cover visitors' approval regarding information, infrastructure, staff and other visitors; the elephants' welfare; and value received for the money spent.

In addition to these specific items, we posed two general questions: 'Are you satisfied with your overall visit at this site?' and 'How likely would you recommend this experience to others?' Furthermore, so visitors could describe their experiences in more detail, we provided space on the questionnaire for comments and feedback.

Most ETH respondents were highly satisfied with their visit and rated the site with the highest arithmetic mean of 1.37 (n = 46). Also, most participants would highly recommend visiting this site ($\overline{x}$ = 1.28 [n = 46]); however, the item-rating for ETH was controversial, receiving a total of only $\overline{x}$ = 1.89. Although ETH was perceived to offer the best value for the money and was rated as the site where visitors felt the safest, visitor numbers were considered appropriate, and the elephants seemed to be healthy and treated well, many visitors felt that the staff at ETH did not share enough information and that their questions were not answered sufficiently. Also, ETH's rating regarding the language barrier was relatively low, as was the awareness expressed regarding threats faced by the elephants. A desire for more personal commentaries by staff members was mentioned several times in the feedback section. In the opinion of two respondents, the elephants were not being treated appropriately. Nevertheless, if we look at the overall satisfaction of these respondents, the ETH facility received the most favourable feedback.

Respondents who visited the NPs indicated that they were somewhat satisfied with their overall experiences there ($\overline{x}$ = 1.53 [n = 45]), and most said they would strongly recommend it to others ($\overline{x}$ = 1.24 [n = 42]). Visitors rated as especially positive the professional organization, the cleanliness of the areas and the surrounding nature (see Table 7.2). However, the NPs received the lowest arithmetic mean regarding drivers' respect for the

Table 7.2. Visitors' responses to 13 specific statements about elephant tourism attractions.

Visitor's experience	Arithmetic means ($\bar{x}$)[a]				
	All sites (n = 182)	PEO (n = 47)	MEF (n = 44)	ETH (n = 47)	NPs (n = 44)
1. The experience was professionally organized	1.75	1.91	1.64	1.83	1.60
2. The staff shared knowledge about the elephants and the site	2.20	2.58	1.70	2.82	1.80
3. There was no language barrier	2.02	2.19	1.67	2.16	2.07
4. The visit has made me more aware of the threats elephants are facing	2.05	2.22	1.77	2.18	2.02
5. The visit answered all the questions I had regarding elephants	2.24	2.21	1.88	2.67	2.22
6. I think it was clean	1.75	1.89	1.81	1.74	1.55
7. I felt safe	1.45	1.56	1.48	1.36	1.42
8. The number of visitors was appropriate	1.69	1.80	1.63	1.63	1.71
9. The behaviour of other tourists was respectful	1.75	1.77	1.78	1.70	1.79
10. The elephants seemed to be healthy and treated well (ETH, PEO, MEF)/The Jeep drivers respected the animals and didn't drive too close to them (NPs)	1.79	1.93	1.63	1.63	1.98
11. There was enough shade	1.82	2.11	1.62	1.70	1.90
12. We were surrounded by nature	1.63	1.84	1.64	1.76	1.30
13. I think the value for the money was good	1.66	2.02	1.63	1.43	1.59
Average of all the above statements:	1.83	2.00	1.68	1.89	1.77

Compiled by the authors.
[a]The arithmetic mean ($\bar{x}$) is the sum of observations divided by the number of respondents. Responses were rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 ('totally agree') to 4 ('totally disagree').
PEO, Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage; ETH, Elephant Transit Home; MEF, Millennium Elephant Foundation; NPs, National Parks.

animals and keeping at some distance from them. This issue worried some respondents, who mentioned their concerns several times in the feedback section. A few respondents also noted that they had to leave the NP early because of bad weather conditions. Some of the comments emphasized the enriching experience, and the feedback overall can be considered positive.

Similar to the responses to the NPs, visitors were somewhat satisfied with their visit to MEF ($\bar{x} = 1.59$ [$n = 41$]). Most respondents said they would be likely to recommend such a visit to others ($\bar{x} = 1.60$ [$n = 42$]). In terms of the results for all 13 of the specific statements shown in Table 7.2, the MEF received the most positive results. This site received the most positive feedback from its visitors in seven categories, especially about the educational benefits it offered, and not once was it ranked with the lowest average. However, repeated concerns were shared in the feedback section regarding the welfare of the elephants. Many participants were not sure whether the conditions were ethical, and some said they were not given enough information.

Although PEO received the lowest averages on all three preference questions, the visitors expressed overall satisfaction. Respondents were somewhat satisfied ($\bar{x} = 1.78$ [$n = 45$]), and nearly all the visitors indicated that they would be somewhat likely to recommend the experience to others ($\bar{x} = 1.72$ [$n = 46$]). However, PEO was rated the lowest on nine of the 13 categories (Table 7.2). For no item did it receive the best results. Several people were concerned and left comments about the use of chains on the elephants, and a few respondents also noted the high entrance fee for foreigners at this site. It can be concluded that PEO received the lowest ratings when compared with the other three attractions, yet the feedback was overall still positive.

In summary, the almost entirely positive answers provided by all the respondents indicated their relatively high levels of satisfaction. Altogether, 92.1% indicated that they were satisfied with their visit overall ($\bar{x} = 1.56$ [$n = 177$]). Also, 93.8% ($\bar{x} = 1.46$ [$n = 176$]) offered positive feedback when it came to recommending the experience to others. If we focus on the responses to the specific statements in Table 7.2, it becomes clear that the mean score in nearly all cases indicates approval. Only three times did the arithmetic mean indicate slight disapproval (as can be seen in Table 7.2). Overall, MEF received the highest ratings and PEO the lowest. The widest dispersion of answers is apparent in the items regarding knowledge and education, for which MEF received the best results by far (see Table 7.2). Thus, on the whole, it can be concluded that the visitors at each site were satisfied with their experience. However, repeated comments were made regarding the welfare of the elephants and the lack of information provided by staff members.

Visitors' knowledge and educational experience

In the last section of the questionnaire visitors were asked what they had learned about elephants as a result of their visit as well as about their learning experience. The answers were used to determine the educational value of the individual elephant tourism attractions and whether these attractions created an awareness about the threats elephants are now facing. For that purpose, we asked 12 knowledge questions (eight closed-ended and three open-ended). The closed-ended questions focused on the respondents'

knowledge concerning captive elephants in general as well as the elephants in Sri Lanka in particular, while the more direct, open-ended questions asked the respondents what they had learned, what they would like to know more about and whether their perceptions about elephants had changed as a result of their visits.

The answers to the eight specific closed-ended knowledge questions revealed mostly similar patterns of awareness, with only a few differences. For three closed-ended questions, visitors were mainly united in their responses: First, most respondents were aware that elephants are not domesticated animals. Second, many respondents knew of the importance of elephants in Sri Lanka, with one noteworthy difference: far more NP and ETH visitors than PEO and MEF visitors were aware that elephants are important for biodiversity. Instead, the PEO and MEF respondents perceived cultural processions to be these animals' most essential function. Third, most respondents were aware of the human–elephant conflict that exists in Sri Lanka.

The question respondents seemed most uncertain about was that regarding the number of elephants facing extinction in Sri Lanka. Around 40% claimed not to know about this plight ($n = 148$), and the statement that the density of wild elephants in Sri Lanka is the highest in Asia received the fewest confirmations (8.1% [$n = 148$]). The visitors also seemed uncertain about the number of adults an elephant can carry on its back without being harmed, since 32.2% of them ($n = 146$) responded 'I don't know', while the other responses differed depending on the site: more NP and ETH visitors replied 'zero' and most of the MEF and PEO respondents replied 'two to three'. Regarding taming elephants, more NP and ETH respondents were aware that this practice usually includes 'torture', whereas more PEO and MEF respondents believed that only training was necessary. Most visitors saw elephants as peaceful animals, yet some believed that chained elephants were rather unpredictable. Stereotypies were noted, especially by visitors to MEF but also to PEO, which showed a certain awareness of atypical behaviour. Many suspected the reason for elephants' weaving to and fro was boredom.

In summary, it became evident that the perspectives of visitors to ETH and the NPs differed repeatedly from those of visitors to MEF and PEO. Even though the transfer of knowledge at MEF was rated highest, questions regarding threats revealed that visitors to NPs and ETH seemed to be slightly more aware of the threats elephants are facing in the wild and in the tourism industry.

Turning to the open-ended questions regarding the visitors' learning experience, we can summarize the responses as follows: most visitors stated that they learned something about elephants' general characteristics. Also, several comments demonstrated a desire to learn even more about certain characteristics, including elephants' eating habits, longevity, behaviour in general and in the wild, preferences, physical attributes, the male musth and baby elephants, as well as the species as a whole and their psychology. A few visitors to ETH and PEO wanted to find out more about these two facilities.

The perception-change question was frequently answered with a simple 'Yes' or 'No', with the percentage of 'No' answers exceeding that of the 'Yes' answers for PEO, ETH and the NPs, although these percentages were nearly balanced for MEF. At each site, the comments made by a few respondents confirmed their awareness of the threats facing elephants, although this number was very low. In the aggregate, far more people learned about the characteristics of elephants than they did about such threats.

Discussion

In this section we discuss the results of our research and also attempt to compare these findings with the reviews that appeared on the TripAdvisor website for the four specific elephant tourism attractions we studied.

Visitors' preferences indicate that most visitors to all four sites cared about the welfare of the elephants and were mainly interested in observing them – and not in elephant back-riding. Nearly half of all the respondents were also hoping to see baby elephants, which correlates with the reports by Malikhao (2017) and Cohen (2015). Most respondents (96.8% [n = 185]) preferred elephants in the wild over elephants in captivity, but most people still visited elephants in captivity. Nevertheless, it was interesting to note that more visitors to MEF decided to ride the elephants when presented with the opportunity. This finding suggests either that people do not know such an activity can be problematic or that they are aware of it but do not act accordingly.

Overall, the visitors rated their experiences as positive, and the vast majority said they would recommend the respective attractions to others. These results could be verified by reading the online reviews for each of the attractions that we found on the TripAdvisor website. Although such reviews also mentioned several concerns regarding the welfare of the elephants at each attraction, MEF was the only site that responded to such negative online reviews by trying to clarify their circumstances. The recurring negative reviews concerning PEO might lead to a further decrease in visitor numbers unless such complaints are dealt with (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2018). Furthermore, the fact that many respondents desired to learn more about these elephant tourism attractions would indicate that all the sites need to provide more educational information.

The respondents' answers to the knowledge questions revealed the limited educational value of their visits with regard to the threats elephants are facing. During the observation period, it became clear that the highest educational content could be found at ETH as well as at the MEF information centre. Most visitors to MEF are accompanied by a personal guide who can answer their specific questions. In contrast, hardly any educational content was available at PEO, a fact that had already been pointed out in previous research (Bandara and Tisdell, 2003). As for the NPs, their educational value depended on the accompanying guide. Despite small differences in the visitors' answers, all the attractions yielded similar responses. Our

results showed that elephant tourism attractions need to provide more information about the threats confronting the elephants in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.

Conclusion

This study was the first to directly compare four major elephant tourism attractions in Sri Lanka in terms of visitors' preferences and experiences. Regarding preferences, our results showed that nearly all the visitors' expectations were fulfilled at the individual sites. We found that the respondents were less likely to desire physical interaction with the elephants and clearly preferred observing the elephants in the wild. These findings should be of use for the future planning of elephant tourism in general and in Sri Lanka by informing those responsible for such planning about visitors' preferences and thus to design their offerings accordingly.

Overall, the experiences of the respondents who visited these four major attractions were positive, since for the most part they were satisfied and would recommend these sites to others. However, the administrators of the selected attractions should seriously consider any negative feedback in order to improve their services in the long run. It is recommended that they reply to online reviews by responding to complaints and offering rational explanations, since many potential visitors rely on such reviews as their main source of information. At the same time, those in charge of these sites should pay close attention to recurring requests, such as visitors' desire for more educational content. In addition to the respondents' comments about their desire to learn more about various topics at each attraction, we found that their knowledge of the current threats to elephants was relatively low. Therefore, steps should be taken to increase awareness about the potential threats posed by elephant tourism in Sri Lanka. Such a goal might lead to a change in visitor behaviour as well as a more satisfying experience for those who take advantage of this opportunity to observe and learn more about elephants and their behaviour.

In conclusion, because of the high density of wild Asian elephants in Sri Lanka, this country could become an example of good practice for elephant tourism in other countries. But to accomplish this goal, each attraction must take steps to improve the current situation and respond to visitors' impressions and comments. Stakeholders who are responsible for the marketing and advertising of such attractions should stop promoting elephant back-riding but should instead stress the fact that Sri Lanka boasts the highest density of wild Asian elephants in South Asia. Over the long-term, this more ethical approach will also improve the welfare of the elephants and assure the success of elephant tourism attractions in Sri Lanka.

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Section 3 Ethical and Moral Perspectives

8 Moral Tensions for Elephant Visitors

Anja Pabel[1] and Mucha Mkono[2]

[1]*Central Queensland University, Cairns, Australia*
[2]*University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia*

Introduction

The past few decades have seen an increase in the use of elephants as exotic attractions for tourists (Schmidt-Burbach, 2018). Indeed, in some South-east Asian and African tourist destinations elephants have become mass tourism attractions. Some attractions in these destinations offer popular elephant-based entertainment including elephant-riding and tourist shows where elephants perform circus-like tricks, such as throwing darts, riding tricycles or painting. According to Kellert and Berry (1980) such activities can be considered as dominionistic because they exert control and mastery over the animal.

There are also growing ethical, animal welfare and conservation concerns around the use of captive elephants for tourism entertainment in some developed countries (Duffy and Moore, 2011; Fennell, 2013; Cohen, 2015). This change in social attitudes to animal welfare (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009) has given rise to increasing numbers of animal 'sanctuaries' that purport to offer more responsible visitor experiences. There is, however, very little research on visitor attitudes or experiences in these sanctuaries, particularly from an animal ethics perspective.

This study aims to examine visitor experiences at elephant sanctuaries in an era where animal ethics has taken centre stage. The study unpacks the moral tensions surrounding such attractions through analysis of social media comments by visitors. Based on this study we propose a framework that encompasses three moral tensions that relate to animal welfare and the operations of animal sanctuaries, from the viewpoint of the visitor experience: (i) freedom–captivity; (ii) distance–interaction; and (iii) natural–staged.

The chapter is organized as follows. First, we provide an overview of the literature of animal sanctuaries and responsible visitor experiences. This is followed by a description of the two case studies we draw on, namely

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the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust (DSWT) in Kenya, and the Elephant Nature Park (ENP) in Thailand. The main section presents the method and key findings, before concluding with a summary of the chapter's key contribution: the identification of dimensions of moral tensions experienced by visitors in these two elephant attractions.

Animal Sanctuaries and Responsible Visitor Experiences

Overall awareness of animal welfare issues has increased but many tourists are still unaware of how their demand for certain animal attractions impacts on the animals used for the purpose of entertainment and the residents at the tourist destination (Tourism Concern, 2017). Visitor education can therefore play an important role in ensuring that consumers make informed decisions, which in turn have the capacity to influence industry practices. For example, responsible elephant venues limit or restrict direct engagement between tourists and elephants, and provide education to their visitors on why there is a need for the restrictions. Hence the venues are trying to meet the needs of tourists and wildlife while at the same time creating awareness around conservation issues (Ballantyne *et al*., 2009). This trend has led to the development and proliferation of tourism experiences where tourists can observe elephants in semi-captive settings, i.e. sanctuaries or rescue centres[1].

Sanctuaries represent semi-natural settings that are bounded and managed, and are therefore separated from the ordinary flow of life (Cohen, 2009). Ideally, animals within a sanctuary can live without fear of harm and are relatively unrestrained. The sanctuary provides a simulation of the animals' natural habitats, but within its boundaries. In genuine sanctuaries, which operate a business model based on responsible elephant tourism, visitors are offered observational experiences; for example, the viewing of elephants feeding and bathing in open-range environments (Tourism Concern, 2017). Such genuine sanctuaries emphasize visitor education and limit or completely restrict direct engagement with elephants, which is safer for the visitors, the elephants and their handlers. However, there are some 'so-called sanctuaries' providing irresponsible examples of elephant tourism that offer elephant-riding or other forms of elephant entertainment (Tourism Concern, 2017).

The Case Studies

Our study examines two sanctuaries, one each in Thailand and Kenya. In Thailand, wild elephant populations are threatened mainly due to the destruction or fragmentation of their natural habitats linked to human population growth (Cohen, 2010). Most captive elephants were commonly employed in the teak logging industry (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009). In 1989, following the Thai government's complete ban on logging, many such elephants and their mahouts had to find alternative livelihoods (Duffy and

Moore, 2011), either working in the illegal logging trade or by begging on the streets of cities. Later, a large percentage of these domesticated elephants were employed in the growing tourism industry.

In the African case, there is a tradition of safari hunting of elephants, but tourism today is mostly associated with animal viewing and photography. Illegal hunting continues, and the culling and rampant poaching of elephants for the ivory trade are producing orphaned calves (Duffy and Moore, 2011; Kideghesho, 2016). In many Asian countries, particularly China, there is massive demand for ivory or rhino horn for use in traditional Chinese medicine, or for display as ornaments and jewellery. Commercial as well as illegal trade of ivory has led to a decline in African elephants (Wittemyer *et al*., 2014). In Africa, the expanding human population, as well as habitat loss and fragmentation, also play a role in increasing human–elephant conflict (Amwata and Mganga, 2014). This conflict is exacerbated by elephants roaming outside the protected areas in search of water and forage. However, the land outside protected areas is being increasingly settled by humans and cultivated as farmland or to keep livestock.

David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust (DSWT)

The DSWT was founded in 1977 by Dr Dame Daphne Sheldrick in Kenya, in memory of her late husband, David Sheldrick, pioneer warden of Kenya's Tsavo National Park. The Trust rescues and hand-rears orphaned baby elephants to be eventually released back into the wild. To date, 244 orphans have been raised, with over 100 successfully reintegrated back into the wild elephant herds of Tsavo National Park. DSWT's mission is to be dedicated to the protection, conservation and preservation of wildlife and habitats in Kenya (www.sheldrickwildlifetrust.org). Their activities are far-reaching and based on a triple-bottom-line approach to sustainability. For example, their orphans project rescues orphaned baby elephants, rhinos and other wild species across Kenya, and then reintroduces them to the wild when grown. The anti-poaching unit deploys ground teams to combat ivory and rhino horn poaching and to protect elephants, rhinos and other wild species by removing snares. They also have a mobile veterinary unit that provides veterinary assistance to wildlife in need. Their community outreach programmes successfully collaborate with local communities bordering the national parks by supporting education standards of people and engaging communities living alongside wildlife, creating much-needed employment in the process. Furthermore, they offer eco-lodges, which aim to support Kenya's wildlife through sustainable tourism in the Tsavo Conservation Area.

DSWT operates as a Kenyan non-profit organization and is registered as a charity in the UK. The public can support their projects either through direct donations or through fostering. The foster programme encourages 'elephant foster parents' from all parts of the world to travel to Kenya to visit their foster elephants. The Elephant Nursery in Nairobi National Park is marketed as a safe haven for orphaned baby elephants rescued by the DSWT.

The Nursery provides the first stage in the hand-rearing and development of milk-dependent baby elephants.

Visitation to the orphanage is possible every day (except 25 December) for 1 hour from 11am to noon. Visitors can observe the elephants being fed with giant milk bottles and playfully trundle around the area including mud bathing. Visitors also receive commentary about the individual elephants' stories from the elephant keepers. 'Foster parents' are able to arrange a 'foster parent visit' at 5pm when the orphans return to the stables.

Once the baby elephants graduate from the Nursery, aged 2–3 years, they move to one of the DSWT's Reintegration Centres in Tsavo East National Park, from where they will ultimately return to the wild. This second phase can take up to 10 years. Visits to see the elephants at the reintegration units at Tsavo East National Park are only available for tourists staying at one of their eco-lodges. When staying at the eco-lodges, tourists directly contribute to the conservation of Tsavo (Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, n.d.).

Elephant Nature Park (ENP)

The ENP was co-founded in 1996 by Sangduen 'Lek' Chailert with the aim of providing a sanctuary and rescue/rehabilitation centre for elephants saved from less ethical animal-based tourism attractions. The park is located in Chiangmai Province, northern Thailand, and also looks after other animal species including buffaloes, dogs and cats.

The park is well known and is considered a best-practice case in protecting elephants and conserving their natural environment. Its mission is based on five themes (www.elephantnaturepark.org):

- Provide a sanctuary for the endangered Thai elephant and contribute to their welfare.
- Rainforest restoration through tree planting of areas surrounding the park.
- Preservation of local culture by sourcing products from local villagers and recruiting park managers from the surrounding areas.
- Deliver education to visitors, study and school groups, and other interested parties about the plight of the endangered Thai elephant.
- Act independently of pressure groups and political movements.

'Lek' Chailert actively campaigns against the use of elephants for tourist rides and is committed to allowing the elephants in her care to live as close to the 'wild' as possible (www.elephantnaturepark.org). According to a 2016 CBS News article, Lek has rescued 200 distressed elephants from tourist attractions, circuses, street begging and the illegal logging trade in Thailand as well as neighbouring countries (Garcia, 2016). The park operates a business model based on an ecocentric ethos where visitors and volunteers pay to visit and help to care for the elephants. This venue provides free-range opportunities for their elephants all day, allowing them to socialize in natural herds. No elephant-rides are offered, instead visitor activities include observing

elephants and learning about their natural behaviours. Visitors can also participate in the feeding and washing of elephants. A study by Rattan *et al*. (2012) into the model of volunteer tourism at ENP revealed their operation is effective in creating awareness about conservation issues of the captive elephant populations of Thailand.

Visitation is possible via single-day visits and week-long voluntourism opportunities. The single day visits include observing the elephants while they interact with each other in social groups, roam in the open pasture and bathe in the river bordering the park. Visitors are able to learn about the elephants' past and present lives from the talks by ENP staff members. The week-long voluntourism opportunities allow volunteers to work directly on conservation projects leading to the protection of the endangered Thai elephant. Volunteer activities include learning about the problems facing elephants in Thailand today, cleaning and preparing elephant food, feeding elephants, scooping elephant dung, maintaining mud pits and a variety of other tasks concerned with elephant care.

Method

A qualitative content analysis of Tripadvisor reviews of the DSWT, and the ENP was undertaken. Due to the large volume of reviews (more than 15,000 in total), it was not practical to analyse the whole data set. However, to ensure a balanced representation of traveller experiences in the analysis, an equal number of positive and negative reviews were collated for analysis. One hundred reviews were analysed for each attraction, consisting of 50 'excellent' and 50 'terrible/poor' reviews. Thus, in total, 200 reviews were analysed. After reading through the reviews, it became clear that saturation had already been reached in the data set, and that no new insights relevant to the study focus (moral tensions in visitor–elephant experiences) would emerge from a larger data set.

The analysis process proceeded in three steps. First, the collated 200 reviews were read through to gain an initial 'feel' of the content of the data. Next, the data were coded by identifying phrases and sentences that indicated moral tensions surrounding elephant sanctuaries. The identified codes were then grouped into themes according to their apparent relationships, where each theme captured the underlying tension evident in the codes. Table 8.1 summarizes the number of rankings given in tourist reviews for the two cases, as of 14 June 2019.

User-generated content, such as TripAdvisor reviews, is becoming more pervasive on the web. While this type of data is referred to as 'researcher-uncontaminated' (Volo, 2010), there are also limitations. One pertinent issue is the reliability of the reviews. Some reviewers are motivated to write high-quality reviews, whereas others may write misleading reviews out of mischief, or for other reasons (Hennig-Thurau *et al*., 2004). Therefore, due to the self-reported and personal nature of the reviews, a certain degree of bias cannot be ruled out.

Table 8.1. TripAdvisor reviews of the two sanctuaries.

Sanctuary	Total number of reviews on TripAdvisor (as of 14 June 2019)	Traveller ratings (as of 14 June 2019)	
David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust (DSWT) (Tripadvisor, n.d.a)	5,856	Excellent	4068
		Very good	956
		Average	207
		Poor	31
		Terrible	21
Elephant Nature Park (ENP) (Tripadvisor, n.d.b)	10,483	Excellent	7549
		Very good	558
		Average	165
		Poor	42
		Terrible	33

Findings and Discussion

Overwhelmingly positive visitor experiences

As Table 8.1 shows, the traveller reviews were overwhelmingly positive, with the majority of visitors rating the experience as 'excellent' or 'very good'. Thus, from a visitor satisfaction perspective, the elephant sanctuary experiences met and often exceeded expectations. In the case of ENP, visitors were delighted to experience a sanctuary that was 'all about rescuing these beautiful elephants … and saving them from a life of hard work and heartache, giving them a home and a family where they can be free and live as close to the wild as possible'. At the DSWT, the majority of visitors were similarly enthused about the work of the orphanage: 'Saving orphaned or injured elephants is no easy task, and one visit to Sheldrick's will leave you with admiration and respect for all the members of their dedicated and friendly staff'.

Various positive descriptors were recurrent in the reviews, including 'amazing', 'life changing', 'rewarding', 'moving', 'inspiring', 'healing' and 'heart-warming'. The small minority of visitors who were unhappy with the experience complained mostly about more peripheral issues such as crowding (DSWT), and poor administrative service (ENP).

The focus of our analysis however was on the moral tensions surrounding the elephant sanctuary model. These tensions illuminate the ways in which tourists frame and interpret the experience, as they search for ethical animal experiences. In the next section, we propose a moral tension framework for animal-based experiences, drawn from the three themes that emerged: (i) freedom–captivity; (ii) distance–interaction; and (iii) natural–staged.

To keep our discussion entirely anonymous, we have chosen to leave out the usernames associated with each review. However, the reviews we

analysed may be easily located via the URLs we have provided in Table 8.1, and originate from a diverse pool of tourists, most of whom were from Western countries.

A moral tension framework for animal-based experiences

(i) Freedom–captivity

Both sanctuaries frame their models as prioritizing the freedom of the animals. Thus, visitors to the DSWT were especially gratified to patronize an organization whose goal is to release the baby elephants back to the wild:

> It was really endearing, but also, listening to the carers explaining the mission of the place and that in fact so far they have had 100% success in introducing these babies back into the wild made us feel that those 500KSH we spent for our ticket was a great way to spend money.

However, in some cases, tourists were not entirely convinced that captivity of the baby elephants was necessary in the first place:

> Elephant herds adopt orphan elephants when a baby is orphaned – that is the nature of these incredibly social creatures so for them to be 'orphaned' is hard if they are in a herd… So, I didn't buy the stories told and on the notice board of previous ones that every second elephant had fallen into a well, or washed downstream. I have no doubt they do rescue them when notified of situations but question whether all of them needed rescuing and my guide stated this to me… I hope my guide was incorrect as I personally felt sick that I may have accidently contributed to the detriment of these animals – they are in the business of baby elephants.

Similarly, at ENP, some visitors questioned the claims of the park as having 'freed' elephants. One user asks:

> The nature park says they want to improve the life of the elephants but is it really a good life for the elephants to be owned by someone or to live in a stall. We don't think so. They would never let them free because they earn a lot of money with them.

This tension highlights the contested nature of captivity and freedom as constructs within the animal welfare discourse (Mason, 2010). What might be framed as freedom by one actor might be perceived as captivity by another. Furthermore, what might be viewed as justifiable captivity might be interpreted otherwise by different observers. For visitors, reconciling these tensions may be difficult, especially where there is a lack of transparency on the part of the experience providers.

(ii) Distance–interaction

At both sanctuaries, most visitors appreciated the up-close interaction with the elephants:

> Upon getting to the river you can have a nice cleaning bath with the elephants, and if the carers […] feel that the elephants really embraced you as family they let you touch them, hug them for one of the most mesmerizing moments ever.
>
> It's a nice experience getting to watch young elephants play and frolic with each other – you may even get a chance to touch one!

On the other hand, there was a concurrent need to let elephants live on their own terms: 'I like that they restrict visiting hours to just one hour a day so as not to interrupt with their daily routine.' The sanctuaries must then determine the appropriate balance for these conflicting priorities, so that they meet the expectations of their visitors, while remaining consistent with their image of pro-animal freedom. These tensions have been noted for other captive contexts (see Fernandez *et al*., 2009).

Numerous studies also highlight the stress proximity to and social interactions with humans induce for many species (Davey, 2007; Fernandez *et al*., 2009). It would appear that visitors to the two sanctuaries are either unaware of the potential stress they may be causing through their up-close contact with the animals, or simply ignore the fact. What is interesting is that the providers of the experience deliberately design the experience to allow and even encourage the interaction.

(iii) Natural–staged

Visitors desired a 'natural' experience, rather than a 'staged one', which proved an elusive quest in the semi-captive context of the sanctuaries:

> Through its informational it felt very much like visiting a zoo. I have been to many other elephant orphanages where you see the elephants in more natural settings. This just felt sterile and like a paid elephant show. They demand a compulsory donation upon entry and have plenty of opportunities to ask you for money. I appreciate they need to raise money but honestly just set a ticket price, don't fake a compulsory donation. And don't display elephants like a circus – it feels like you are exploiting orphans to raise money.
>
> The procession of baby elephants into their pens was cute but on reflection felt contrived and sad.

The reviewer perceived the staging as revealing a focus on commercial gain from 'exploiting' the elephants, rather than an altruistic project for the benefit of animals.

When the experience felt 'forced', it was less satisfying for visitors:

> Something about how long the day was, and how things didn't seem as natural as I would expect, made us less excited to spend time with the elephants than we expected. The interactions with the elephants just seemed more forced as the day went on, so it wasn't so fun to take a walk with elephants who seemed like they would have been much more content staying put in the shade from the start.

The views here resonate with the broader debate on authenticity in tourist experiences (for a detailed discussion on authenticity, see Cohen, 1988; Wang,

1999), albeit from a very different angle than is usually encountered. Here the staging is especially problematic because it means that the various activities are contrived for the amusement of the tourist, often at the expense of the animal.

Conclusion

In this chapter we proposed a framework which highlights the moral tensions that are created as a result of visitor experiences at elephant sanctuaries. The study explored TripAdvisor reviews posted by individuals who visited the DSWT in Kenya and the ENP in Thailand. The framework outlines three moral tensions that relate to animal welfare and the operations of animal sanctuaries.

These tensions point to an increased level of consciousness in some tourists, particularly in the way they express and share their experiences with elephant sanctuary-type venues. Human attitudes towards animals are clearly important especially in relation to animal welfare and conservation (Batt, 2009). Drawing on the typology of basic attitudes towards animals developed by Kellert and Berry (1980), one could argue that there is a shift from dominionistic attitudes (which are based on an interest in exerting control and mastery over animals) to more ecologistic, humanistic and/or moralistic attitudes at elephant tourism attractions.

Ecologistic attitudes indicate concern for the environment as a system and for the interrelationships between wildlife and their natural habitat (Kellert and Berry, 1980). In the freedom vs. captivity tension, visitors were mostly satisfied to have visited venues that prioritized the freedom of the animals. However, visitors to both venues questioned whether the captivity, particularly of baby elephants, was necessary in the first place. With increasing habitat loss and fragmentation due to expanding human populations (Cohen, 2010; Amwata and Mganga, 2014), ecologistic concerns about the interrelationships between wildlife and their habitats and discussions around freedom vs. captivity will continue to affect the elephants' existence and their wellbeing. From a visitor management perspective, it will be increasingly important to facilitate visitor access in a manner that is in line with the acceptable limits of a sanctuary's mission, i.e. protecting and conserving animals.

Humanistic attitudes towards animals are characterized by an interest in and strong affection for individual animals (Kellert and Berry, 1980). Most visitors to elephant venues are likely to have an interest in elephants and will therefore appreciate up-close encounters with them. Visitor reviews highlighting the tension between distance vs. interaction indicate that many visitors were in favour of letting the elephants live on their own terms by restricting visitor hours, so that the elephants are not disturbed in their daily routines. Such short hours to view elephants may however not meet the expectations of some visitors. The sanctuaries must determine the appropriate balance for these conflicting priorities; that is, meeting the expectations of their visitors, while at the same time trying to move the animal-centric welfare agenda forward by providing appropriate visitor education about

conservation issues of the elephants. While reconciling this tension is difficult, the service providers play an important role in being transparent as possible about their operations and curtailing unrealistic visitor expectations through appropriate education. This may include promoting activities and interactions with the elephants that have outcomes beyond simply satisfying tourists' desires, such as riding elephants, and focus on reducing the stress caused to elephants through close contact with humans.

Moralistic attitudes are based on concerns about the right and wrong treatment of animals, often associated with strong opposition to exploitation of and cruelty towards animals (Kellert and Berry, 1980). In the theme of natural vs. staged tension, although neither venue offers elephant-riding or elephants performing circus-like tricks, some visitors questioned whether the elephants were 'exploited' by being paraded in front of the tourists. When such experiences felt 'forced' or contrived in some way, that was also perceived as less satisfying. The perception of exploitation was further heightened by the commercialized nature of the operations, where some visitors felt pressured to donate money to the sanctuary.

Travel review websites such as TripAdvisor are useful in raising awareness of animal welfare issues in the context of tourism. Continued public pressure and research into ethical wildlife tourism and animal welfare requirements are needed to help tourism businesses make informed decisions. In particular, ethical elephant tourism will continue to play an important role in protecting elephants better, but for this to happen tourists' attitudes need to 'change towards becoming a contributor rather than a consumer' (Schmidt-Burbach, 2018, p. 118).

Managers at both settings can obtain useful insights from TripAdvisor reviews. The feedback reveals what activities their customers like (or dislike), which can be used to make appropriate changes to their experiential offer. Crucially, the feedback can also be used to improve animal welfare standards at sanctuaries.

Word limitations linked to this chapter meant that our findings could only be presented in brief. We hope that our proposed framework will be explored further in future research.

Note

[1] See photo 8 in the Elephant Portrait Gallery.

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9 The Valuation of Ethical Encounters with Elephants

Qingming Cui[1] and Honggang Xu[2]

[1]*South China Normal University, Guangzhou, China*
[2]*Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, China*

Introduction

The relationships between humans and elephants are increasingly controversial. In modern environmental ethics (mainly originating in the Global North), elephants are regarded as a flagship wildlife species. It is presumed that these animals should be conserved and treated well, both in the ecological and the symbolic sense. In other political, social and cultural contexts (especially those of the Global South) the interests of humans and elephants are commonly seen as conflicting, and animals are often mistreated. In South-east Asia, many cultural and social traditions involve training captive elephants. The tensions between modernity and tradition in the Global North and South are shaping the issues and dilemmas surrounding elephant conservation.

This chapter focuses on the ethical issues of captive elephant tourism in Thailand. At present, there are more than 3000 captive elephants in Thailand (Nijman, 2014), most of which are engaged in the tourism industry (Schliesinger, 2010). In traditional elephant camps tourists can watch, feed, touch and ride elephants. These activities require the captivity and training of elephants. As non-governmental organizations such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA, 2014) and World Animal Protection (WAP, 2010, 2017) have revealed, the training processes used on these elephants are often cruel and involve ongoing animal abuse. Although many camp owners and employees in this industry argue that keeping captive elephants is part of Thai culture and tradition (Laohachaiboon, 2010), tourism elephant camps are commonly criticized for engaging in unethical practices. For instance, WAP has accused TripAdvisor of promoting South-east Asian elephant tourism. Under pressure from the WAP-initiated 'Wildlife. Not Entertainers' campaign, in 2016 Tripadvisor agreed to stop selling tickets for camps allowing elephant-riding (WAP, 2016). Moreover, as of 2019, at least

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245 travel companies around the world have joined the movement to end elephant-rides and shows (WAP, 2019).

Due to pressure from the public, animal welfare organizations and the tourism industry itself, many traditional elephant camps have sought to become more elephant-friendly. A new model has emerged in the elephant camps around Chiangmai, with camps describing themselves as 'elephant sanctuaries', 'elephant homes' or 'elephant parks'. These claim to have abandoned unethical tourism activities such as elephant shows or rides, and they seek to treat elephants carefully, without use of hooks or chains. The elephant sanctuary is becoming a promising model for profiting from captive elephants while treating them well (Moorhouse *et al*., 2017; Bansiddhi *et al*., 2019; Cui and Xu, 2019).

This chapter sheds light on recent successes and challenges in achieving ethical standards of operation in elephant sanctuaries. We argue that elephant welfare in these sanctuaries needs to be maintained on the basis of economic sustainability, and that the key to economic sustainability lies in rediscovering the 'encounter value' of elephants in the tourism market. 'Encounter value' is a concept proposed by Haraway (2008) to characterize the relationships between modern capitalism and animals. In the neoliberal era, animals have increasingly become commodities in a capitalized market, and this trend has induced new moral problems (Haraway, 2008). In this study, we propose the concept of 'ethical encounter value' to illustrate that ethics is not only a concern in capitalizing the encounter value of animals, but it also serves as a marketing tool to sustain both economic development and animal welfare.

Lively Commodities, Encounter Value and Elephant Tourism

The world economy today is framed by the principles of neoliberalism, which upholds private property rights, free markets and open trade. Neoliberals believe that markets can allocate resources in optimal ways (Harvey, 2007). According to neoliberalism, virtually anything can be commodified, including nature, and any problems, including environmental problems, can be handled by market-oriented solutions. In that case, the commodification of nature is viewed as a way to save nature (McAfee, 1999), as seen in the development of a carbon trade market as a means to prevent climate change.

However, many scholars question the neoliberalization of nature due to the effect it has on environmental conservation (Castree, 2003; Harvey, 2007). Markets are seen to ignore the negative externality of the environment, and to exploit nature for profit (Bakker, 2009), which typically leads to a lack of ecological, social and ethical sustainability. Moreover, capital markets are not satisfied with investing and utilizing nature in traditional ways. They increasingly seek to explore new ways to commodify more aspects of nature, to own and sell living creatures, genes or bioinformation (Cooper, 2008). For example, American pet sellers breed millions of dogs, cats and other pets for sale every year (Haraway, 2008). These living beings, when sold as

commodities, are referred to as 'lively commodities' (Collard and Dempsey, 2013). Many of these companion animals eventually become stray dogs and cats. These stray animals are surplus to the pet market. However, abandoning a 'surplus' dog is not the same as throwing away a surplus mobile phone. The liveliness of the animals produces their market value, but it also drags the commodification of animals into moral controversy.

Haraway (2008) points out that Marx was mainly concerned with human labour, and he neglected to consider non-human animals as a labour force. In contemporary society, however, the market value of animals includes not only their use and exchange value, but also their new 'encounter value'. Encounter value is derived from the benefits of trans-species relationships that are embedded in various social, cultural, historical and ecological contexts (Haraway, 2008; Barua, 2016). For example, modern tourists are willing to pay high prices to encounter wild animals in their original habitats, because the forces of modernization have led people to move from wild/natural areas to rural/urban spaces, and therefore encountering wildlife has become novel and attractive (Beardsworth and Bryman, 2001). Wildlife tourism is a significant capitalist space for generating the encounter value of wild animals (Barua, 2017).

In the context of neoliberalism, scholars hold contradictory ideas on wildlife tourism. On the one hand, some researchers argue that ecotourism or wildlife tourism offers a way to expand the scope for neoliberalizing nature, with potentially negative effects on the environment and wildlife (Castree, 2003; Duffy, 2015). For instance, Duffy and Moore (2010) pointed out that elephant-back tourism activities in Thailand and Botswana contributed to deepening the process of neoliberalization. Elephant tourism has become a strategy for capitalist accumulation (Duffy, 2015). Using elephants as lively commodities for riding and entertaining tourists causes a great deal of suffering for the animals (PETA, 2014; WAP, 2017). On the other hand, some scholars still believe in the slogan 'selling nature to save it' (McAfee, 1999). Such scholars argue that the tourism industry, despite the moral compromises it involves, is still a potentially successful means of caring for captive elephants in Thailand (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009).

At the end of the 19th century, large numbers of elephants in Thailand were captured and trained to transport logs for an expanding timber industry (Laohachaiboon, 2010). Then in 1989, Thailand banned logging out of concern for protecting the environment, and this ban caused the unemployment of more than 2000 captive elephants (Laohachaiboon, 2010). For the elephant keepers, these animals became economic burdens rather than sources of income. Many keepers abandoned their elephants because feeding them was too expensive. Developing tourism was an important way to re-employ these captive elephants (Laohachaiboon, 2010). The creation of elephant camps developed a 'work-for-care' cycle, in which elephants worked to help the camps make profits, and the camp owners returned part of their profits to care for the elephants (Cui and Xu, 2019). In the political and economic framework of neoliberalization, these tourism businesses became a means to raise money for feeding elephants, although this still involved holding them in captivity and training them.

The emerging practice of operating elephant sanctuaries seems to be more friendly to elephants than traditional elephant camps. However, few studies have explored the business models and ethical practices of these sanctuaries. The key question is whether this new model of commodifying elephants can achieve both economic success and moral acceptability. This chapter shows that the secret of success for this business model is that it uses ethics itself to generate encounter value, and produce tourism products.

Methods

A case study is used to explore how elephant sanctuaries maintain a balance between economics and morality. Camps that present themselves as 'elephant sanctuaries', 'elephant homes' or 'elephant parks' have stopped providing elephant shows, although some still offer elephant-riding activities. Not every so-called elephant sanctuary follows strict ethical practice towards elephants.

The Elephant Nature Park (ENP) was selected as an example to investigate. The ENP is considered an ethical sanctuary for several reasons. The ENP claims to follow a strictly ethical policy in its treatment of elephants, with no use of hooks or chains, not providing elephant shows, elephant-rides or other entertainment services. It has won many awards for its work in saving and caring for captive elephants (see https://www.elephantnaturepark.org/about/about-us/) and, in 2005, its founder was elected as the Asian Hero of the Year by *Time Magazine*. Many authoritative media outlets such as *National Geographic*, the BBC and CNN have reported on this park, and tourists write positive reviews and recommendations about it. After acquiring evidence on all the park's operations, we propose that the ENP is an exemplary elephant sanctuary.

Our data on the elephant parks were collected from multiple sources. The first author conducted fieldwork in Chiangmai from 2012 to 2014, spending a total of two months in the area. The researchers conducted visits across this 3-year period enabling assessment of changes over time and have continued to track the conditions of the park on the Internet. The primary purpose of the fieldwork was to explore traditional elephant camps. As elephant sanctuaries are an important alternative model for such camps, the first author also visited the ENP to observe this park's operations. One of the managers and three of the tourists were interviewed. This fieldwork helped us to understand the general situation of the elephant tourism market in Thailand, and to see how the ENP seeks to distinguish itself from other camps.

During the fieldwork, the first author took photos of a visitor book containing 73 pages of tourist feedback on the ENP. This visitor book is a main source of information for examining tourist perceptions, attitudes and experiences in this sanctuary, as a supplement to the more detailed onsite interviews. The visitor book is a crucial platform for understanding what tourists think about the practices and attractions being offered (Noy, 2008). However, nearly every comment in the visitor book was positive. Therefore,

we conducted searches on TripAdvisor to check whether tourists had posted negative views regarding this attraction. In total, we extracted 123 negative reviews from TripAdvisor to help us examine the potential risks of the elephant sanctuary model.

The data from the onsite fieldwork, the visitor book and the online reviews were used to examine the ways that elephant sanctuaries can produce ethical encounter value and achieve economic sustainability.

Ethical Encounter Value and Experience in Elephant Sanctuaries

Tourist activities in the ENP

The ENP is supported by a non-governmental organization called the Save the Elephants Foundation. This foundation aims to rescue captive elephants and conserve their habitats in Thailand and other South-east Asian countries. The Foundation also seeks to improve people's understanding about the situation of Asian elephants, and to incorporate local communities into the elephant conservation effort. According to information provided on the ENP website, there are currently more than 100 elephants and numerous cats and dogs living in the park. This nature park offers four tourism programmes: a 1-day short visit, a 1-day longer visit, an overnight visit and a 1-week volunteer visit. The prices for these tours range from 2500 THB to 12,000 THB. These fees are much higher than the entrance fees of traditional elephant camps.

The single-day visit provides many activities. When tourists arrive at the park, they are first organized to help feed the elephants. Unlike in traditional camps, in ENP tourists are protected by fences as they give the elephants food that is specially made by the park staff. Then a guide leads each group of tourists to walk with the elephants in the park area for about 1 hour. During this walk, the guide provides a great deal of information on the background and situation of elephants in Thailand, and answers the tourists' questions. At noon, the tourists can enjoy a vegetarian lunch. They can also watch a documentary about the traditional elephant training process, or they can take a rest. In the afternoon, tourists watch the bathing of elephants along a riverside. The park's mahouts also drive many elephants to walk among the crowds of tourists. The tourists can interact with the elephants if they like. After the bathing and interaction, the guide takes another walk with the tourists to see elephants in another area. This whole-day tour is relaxing, and tourists have enough time and freedom to explore the park space at their leisure.

Tourists who participate in the week-long volunteer project have an enhanced experience. They help prepare foods for the elephants, clean up the elephant waste, walk with the elephants in the jungle and help to do other conservation work in the park. The ENP keeps upgrading its tourist programmes, making them more complicated and interesting. When the park began, it only provided volunteer tourism activities, but recently

the staff have developed a series of new shorter visit programmes. In 2014, tourists could help to bathe the elephants by pouring water on them, but more recently (according to the organization's website), tourists have been restricted to watching the elephants bathe from the riverbank, to avoid the danger of tourists hurting the elephants' skin (see https://www.elephantnaturepark.org/elephants-bathing/).

The park manager explained that the ENP has become a successful business, as it has attracted growing numbers of tourists. With the proceeds, the ENP has been able to buy and rescue more elephants. Due to this success, the Save the Elephants Foundation has launched other projects with the aim of expanding its influence and promoting the transformation of Thai elephant tourism.

Three ways to generate ethical encounter value

The success of the ENP business model is based on providing a high-quality tourist experience and good living conditions for the elephants. For certain types of tourists, the activities offered at the ENP may seem boring and non-hedonic. Many tourists, however, find the experience educational and inspiring. Ethics plays a critical role in shaping tourists' experiences of encounters with the elephants. The ENP produces ethical encounter value, and it does so in three main ways.

1 Revealing backstage 'truth' and building a sense of empathy

The park has a video room where a short documentary is played on a continuous loop. This documentary records how a wild elephant was traditionally trained to obey human orders. In Thailand, this process was called *phajaan*. First, the elephant was confined in a wooden frame for several days. During this confinement period the elephant was given no food, and people beat it continuously. This abuse finally broke the elephant's will, leaving it terrified of humans. The training process was cruel and emotionally damaging. Through viewing this film, tourists can imagine that the elephants performing tricks on command in traditional animal shows have been trained through such a cruel process.

This documentary reveals the 'truth' about the backstage, and tells a story that is not shown in traditional elephant camps. The joy and wonder brought by elephant shows on the frontstage are based on cruel training. The comparison between the frontstage and backstage gives the tourists an experience that many find shocking. As one tourist from Germany said,

> I think elephants are very gentle, great, wonderful animals. They have spirit. Unfortunately, you have to break the spirit before you can ride it. So, every elephant, if they are captured and used for tricks…has to go to a special training called phajaan. The spirit is broken…this is horrible, I think most people don't know what has happened before they ride an elephant.

The documentary-watching experience gives the tourists a greater sense of empathy for elephants, which is an important part of the value in an ethical encounter. After seeing this background of the captive elephant experience, tourists are more appreciative of the things that the ENP is doing.

2 *Frontstage: spectacular encounter and sense of gratitude*

On the frontstage of the ENP, the tourists get to enjoy a spectacular experience of directly encountering elephants. In the feedback comments given in the visitor book, the tourists commonly use words like 'amazing', 'best of our lives', 'beautiful', 'awesome' or 'unbelievable' to describe their experiences. One typical comment reads as follows:

> A day I will never forget. It was so lovely to see happy elephants treated amazingly! I will definitely visit again in the future. Thank you for this life-changing experience and keep up the fantastic work you are doing for all of these animals.

The park has intentionally created a spectacular landscape for tourists. During one tour that was attended by the first author, the tourists gathered on the riverside to watch the elephants bathing, and a mahout drove several elephants to walk among the tourists. It was a harmonious scene that united humans, elephants and the natural landscape together. One girl was moved to say, 'It is so wonderful to see elephants bathing in the river!'

Every group was assigned a tour guide, who educated the tourists regarding the social cultural and biological conditions of the elephants' lives. For instance, when seeing an elephant sprinkling dust on its body, one tourist asked why the elephant did that. The guide answered that this behaviour helps elephants to lower their body temperature and to prevent bites from mosquitoes or flies. The guides told many stories about each elephant, especially stories of how sick elephants were cured. These kinds of stories gave the tourists greater respect for the park's work. One of the visitors wrote,

> Thank you for an amazing experience! We loved observing the elephants and learning more about them. Most importantly, we appreciate the information about how elephants are conserved most places. Keep up the good work – we will spread the word!

The guides' presentations of biological knowledge and stories about the elephants' lives demonstrated that the park's staff understood the elephants and treated them professionally. These spectacular experiences gave the tourists direct insight concerning the importance of the park's work. Such encounters gave the tourists a sense of gratitude to the park, which was another kind of value derived from an ethical encounter.

3 *Backstage work and sense of responsibility*

The park has developed volunteer tourism as a way to involve tourists in the project and in taking care of elephants. The volunteer tourists spend a week helping to prepare food, feed the elephants and maintain the park. This kind

of backstage work can raise tourists' sense of awareness and responsibility, and such experience creates another selling point. From an economic perspective, the park can charge a higher price for this kind of tour without reducing tourists' satisfaction.

In general, tourist activities in the ENP tend to generate many ethics-related experiences that may involve empathy, gratitude and responsibility. In the process, the elephants become the lively commodities for sale. This value-generating process would not be possible without the elephants. However, such value generation goes further than what the concept 'encounter value' usually indicates. The park actually commodifies ethics more than it commodifies the animals themselves. What the ENP's volunteer tourism programme sells is the work to take care of elephants, rather than simple encounters with elephants.

Challenges in the commodification of ethics

The commodification of ethics produces market value and helps the elephant sanctuary gain economic sustainability. Money, then, is the basis of taking good care of captive elephants. It may seem clear that the elephant sanctuary model offers a morally responsible way to rescue all Thai captive elephants. However, our analysis of the online negative review shows that there are two main challenges for this business model.

Small niche market

The ENP targets a particular niche market of tourists with high environmental consciousness and a strong sense of morality. One unresolved question is what percentage of the whole market this niche market occupies. Obviously, some tourists are not interested in the ethical practices of the ENP. For example, one tourist wrote,

> This was very disappointing. We were led to think that we would get to bathe the elephants. NOT THE CASE. There is NO touching of elephants allowed. Make no mistake this place is making money. So, if you want the same experience that you find at a zoo go here… Not sure why they act like it's so terrible to ride or pet an elephant. Then you should be against riding or petting horses as well. The fact that you pay big bucks to go here and can't even touch an elephant seems like a waste of money. Go elsewhere.

Such tourists care about touching, interacting and getting close to elephants, rather than just observing, especially when they spend a lot of money. Therefore, if the total scale of the ethical niche market is small, it could be risky for every camp to imitate the ENP model, and compete to attract that relatively limited group of customers.

The massification of the tourist experience

The ENP is experiencing a massification of its programme. It has added a short 1-day visit option, which shows that it is starting to cater to the mass tourism market. Mass tourists typically do not want to spend much time in one place, so the park now allows tourists to come later and leave earlier. The shorter visiting service has attracted more tourists, but it may provide a shallower experience. In addition, many tourists have complained about the crowdedness of the park. As more tourists have arrived, the managers have come under pressure to push the elephants, to make them appear and eat in front of tourists more times during the day. One tourist gave the following critique:

> I've been to Elephant Nature Park four times together with my family for the last 7 years. It was certainly the last time today… Today, however, there was for the entire minivan group on arrival half a feeding bucket with melons distributed to a single elephant who was apparently already more than full… The afternoon then looked like an elephant was placed in the middle of the river and it was then allowed to be photographed by 50 or 60 tourists on the shore… The reasons are quite clear to me that more tourists mean more money and more money also means that you can possibly save more elephants and take up [sic]… But if you know the earlier years, then you are just disappointed with the current mass processing and would certainly not want to come back.

The massification of the programme may satisfy more mass tourists, but it also may lose the serious ethical tourists. Moreover, to meet more tourists' expectations of feeding and photographing the elephants, the animals may be forced to do things they do not want to do, which contradicts the original ethical policy. The profit-driven nature of the operation pushes the ENP to risk going against its own intentions.

Discussion and Conclusion

Many studies have pointed out that it is unrealistic for Thailand to release more than 3000 captive elephants into the wild directly (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009; Duffy and Moore, 2011; Cui and Xu, 2019). The rewilding project is slow, expensive and space-demanding, and hence it is not a solution conducive to the survival of captive elephants (Cui and Xu, 2019). People are willing to pay for encounters with elephants, which generate encounter value, and the elephant tourism industry is based on providing that value.

The type of encounter offered in traditional elephant camps involves profit at the expense of the elephants' freedom, welfare and rights. Our case study of ENP suggests that a balance between economics and ethics is possible to achieve. The ENP provides an ethical encounter experience for tourists, in which moral value is generated in several ways. Empathy, acknowledgement and responsibility are all important aspects of the ethical encounter value that an elephant sanctuary like ENP provides. Using ethics

itself as a product can enable both care for the animals' welfare and economic returns for the caretakers.

However, the balance between economic success and moral value is not easy to keep. The park may target tourists who have a strong sense of morality, but the market share of highly moral, environmentally concerned tourists is generally small (Cohen, 2002). If more and more tourists become morally conscious about the environment and animal rights, then the ethical elephant sanctuaries will gain more market share, but clearly such a transformation will happen slowly. During that slow process, it could be catastrophic if all of the elephant camps move to the elephant sanctuary model, and try to compete for the same small segment of ethically concerned tourists.

Moreover, the sanctuaries themselves must resist the temptations of profit. As they seek to market ethical encounter value, they may find it more profitable to change their tourism activities in ways designed to attract more mass tourists. This massification can bring more economic benefits momentarily, but eventually the economic sustainability of the parks may suffer. The pressure to satisfy more visitors can have increasingly negative effects on the elephants, due to overcommercialization, overfeeding and coercive display. If the welfare of the animals suffers, the parks may lose patronage from the original target audience of moral tourists.

As Marx (1990) repeatedly explained, capital is always greedy and short-sighted. If this is true, the massification of ethical experience may be an inevitable trend for the elephant sanctuary model. If that is the case, then some kind of effective external supervision will become necessary. The government or an industry association could play a certain role in conserving captive elephants in situations where the market mechanism works to the animals' detriment.

Elephant tourism is a fast-changing industry in Thailand, and this industry has faced severe moral criticism from the outside societies. A transformation of the industry is underway, but it is not yet complete. Much more practice and research is needed to determine whether an ENP-style model can meet the needs of all captive elephants, and how to promote government or other social organizations to supervise the elephant tourism business.

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10 Community Collaboration, Elephant Conservation and Protection

Liv Baker,[1,2] Sarah Blaine[1] and Rebecca Winkler[1,3]

[1]*Mahouts Elephant Foundation, Peopleton, United Kingdom*
[2]*Hunter College, New York, United States*
[3]*University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States*

Introduction

Concerned about the survival of the species, *Elephas maximus* and the lives of all Asian elephants, conservation and animal protection communities must reckon with the negative impacts of the elephant tourism model. The standard practice of the elephant tourism industry in Thailand is well documented to privilege tourist–elephant interaction over observation, and tourist convenience over elephant wellbeing (Baker and Winkler, 2020). This model for tourism is associated with the monetization of elephant lives and bodies, a market demand for captive elephants, poor welfare issues facing many elephants in captivity, the miseducation of tourists, the loss of native elephant habitat, as well as the false dilemma that distinguishes the capacities, management and protections of wild and captive elephant populations (Baker and Winkler, 2020). In order to address this, a new model for elephant protection, conservation, and ecotourism must prevail.

Of Asian elephant range countries, Thailand offers us a useful, if unique, case study for the conservation and protection of *E. maximus* (Baker and Winkler, 2020). In Thailand, the situated knowledge of certain Karen hilltribe mahouts (traditional elephant-keepers) and the political will of particular communities to preserve a cultural identity as elephant guardians and forest protectors (Anan, 2000; Walker, 2001) have the potential to play an important role in reforming the current model of elephant tourism.

Mahouts Elephant Foundation (MEF) is a UK charity and Thai-registered foundation that works on the ground to develop sustainable, welfare-focused tourist experiences to support the needs and livelihoods of traditional mahouts, their families and local communities, together with the needs of Asian elephants. MEF's mission is to shift the existing attitude

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within elephant tourism, away from one of captivity and exploitation, and towards a practice that facilitates the return of captive, working elephants to protected forest habitats. In the following chapter, we outline how the MEF model of elephant tourism works to overcome constraints and problems facing management of elephants in Thailand.

Constraints and Problems Facing Elephants in Thailand

In an ideal world, all elephants would be living free, in a state of wild, unfettered by human activity. Within the context of Thailand there are particular structural limits in place and any discourse about the possibilities for improved elephant lives must consider these constraints. In light of these actualities, and that the drive for elephants within elephant tourism is not going away anytime soon, we nonetheless suggest that there are ways in which we can foster relationships of reciprocity, where both elephant and human cultures are true, tangible and valued (Baker and Winkler, 2020).

Social and Political Constraints

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide an exhaustive history of elephants in Thailand; however, to understand the context of the elephant tourism industry today there are a few historical points to highlight. Elephants are sacred animals in Thailand, featuring prominently in religious and cultural iconography. Elephants have also served in Thailand's political history as means for winning wars and maintaining royal sovereignty (Sukumar, 2012). During most of the 20th century, elephants were used primarily to assist in felling and transporting lumber across difficult mountainous terrain. Skilled Karen and other Hilltribe mahouts were typically sought out for this work due to their knowledge of forests and elephants (Wylie, 2009). Any solution that attempts to sever the relationships between humans and elephants in Thailand faces deep-seated cultural roadblocks.

After the government-decreed ban on commercial timber harvesting in 1989, a period of uncertainty followed, during which many mahouts, feeling there was no alternative, began to bring their elephants to cities in an attempt to capitalize on an emerging tourism industry (e.g. tourists would pay to feed elephants on city streets). In response to concerns raised about the safety of these practices for people and elephants a more systematized elephant tourism industry was formally proposed by Thai entities (e.g. Forest Industry Organization, FIO; Thai Elephant Conservation Center, TECC), which ultimately prioritized the monetization and utilization of elephants, without consideration of the full implications for such an industry (Laohachaiboon, 2010; Pimmanrojnagool and Wanghongsa, 2002).

Since the 1989 logging ban, management of the captive elephant population in Thailand has been framed as a matter of elephant employment (Baker and Kashio, 2002; Baker and Winkler, 2020). We, however, reject this

notion of elephants as agents of employment. The labelling of elephants as employable subjects is a politically performative act, undermining their species-specific needs and distorting issues of wellbeing. More to the point is an issue of mahout employment and livelihood (Baker and Winkler, 2020). Because of the structure of elephant ownership in Thailand, most captive elephants are bound to a mahout who can earn an income through an industry that offers financial compensation for elephant-based labour. As the industry has expanded, polarizing debates have been sparked about the welfare of elephants in captivity and the labour rights of mahouts working within the industry.

Legal Constraints: Legal Designation and Ownership Models of Elephants in Thailand

Towards developing any solutions for elephant conservation and protection, the problematization of Asian elephant tourism must reckon with legal and economic realities of elephant ownership. Although exact numbers of the captive elephant population are disputed, current estimates hover between 4000 and 5000 elephants, with only 1650–3700 individuals in the wild (Sukumar, 2006; Pintavongs *et al.*, 2014). Captive elephants in Thailand are legally designated as property, subjected to the domestic trade of animals and to market influences. Furthermore, there are no 'unowned' captive Asian elephants in Thailand. Ownership structure typically varies with the socioeconomic status of mahout owners, geographical region, as well as associated cultural conventions of elephant-keeping.

Because of the high market value of elephants, some have many owners, especially among low-income communities, and some wealthy individuals own many elephants. While a detailed survey of the elephant ownership and husbandry practices throughout Thailand is needed, an important distinction can be drawn between mahout owners and 'remote' owners (Lair, 1997). Remote owner refers to an owner who has no direct interaction with the captive elephants, but profits from the elephant remotely. Mahout owners, in contrast, typically act as the primary elephant handler, although sometimes the responsibility is shared with or shifted to family members or hired labour from their local network. Broadly speaking, mahout owners tend to have a deeper knowledge about elephants and often come from a longstanding cultural tradition of elephant-keeping, whereas remote owners are more concerned with the opportunistic profitability of elephant ownership. As property, captive elephants are legally deemed 'beasts of burden' under the 1939 Draught Animal Act (Godfrey and Kongmuang, 2009). This contrasts sharply with wild elephants, which are under the 1992 Wild Animal Reservation and Protection Act (WARPA). Due to this legal distinction and the choices of owners, captive elephants are laid open to a wide range of treatment and conscription.

Economic Constraints: Increasing Market Demands for Captive Elephant Tourism Leading to Increased Elephant Valuation

The elephant-related tourism industry in Thailand has grown rapidly over the past three decades since the logging ban, leading to a rapid increase in the market value of elephants. While it is difficult to pin down a precise valuation of captive elephants, the price of a breeding-age female can be estimated at around 2.5 million THB (approx. US$80,000) using the 2019 insurer valuation. As a point of comparison, the minimum wage in Thailand is around $3500/year. Not surprisingly, elephants represent an extremely high-value commodity.

In contrast to the internationally driven commodification of African elephant body parts, the valuation of Asian elephants in Thailand is primarily driven by their life-long servitude in the highly profitable elephant tourism industry. Consequently, the high market value and rise in popularity of elephant tourist attractions perpetuates the capture of wild elephants to traffic into the captive elephant industry, causing a continued conservation concern (Nijman, 2014).

The high valuation of captive elephants also incentivizes exploitation and welfare violations in captivity (Bansiddhi *et al*., 2018). Profits at most elephant tourism camps are generated through an infrastructure of interaction, such as through rides and performances. Whether they are the owners or hired for the task, many mahouts earn the majority of their income from tips garnered from tourists for each interactive experience (e.g. rides, photos, direct solicitation). Many mahouts at interaction-based camps are not experienced with elephant behaviour and needs, often having had no apprenticeship prior to employment, and are certainly not trained in the traditional skill set (Lair, 2002). However, mahout owners working directly with their elephants in the camps is more likely to lead to higher quality of life for those elephants compared with those with remote owners (Godfrey and Kongmuang, 2009). Alternative models for elephant tourism that do not feed into this cycle of valuation and exploitation face the challenge of competing in an entrenched, saturated and well-funded marketplace.

Ecological Constraints: Elephant Habitat Loss in Thailand

Another key set of constraints centres on the availability and accessibility of elephant habitats within the country. Thailand has experienced widespread deforestation in the past century, destroying much of the region's elephant habitat. In 1961, 53% of the country's forest was suitable elephant habitat, but this has diminished to 31.5% according to the most recent statistic from Thailand's forestry department (Permsirivanchai, 2017). Wild elephant populations require large tracts of habitat to thrive. Captive elephants, being no different from their wild counterparts in their ecological and biological needs, also require large areas of habitat. A recent study assessing the

psychological priorities for Asian elephant welfare revealed that captive elephant management woefully undervalues the importance of behaviours and cognitive activities associated with natural foraging (Veasey, 2020). The cause of most deforestation in Thailand is the clearing of forest for low-value cash crops, most commonly millet and corn exported for animal feed. Corn farming is extremely labour-intensive, environmentally destructive and offers very low financial compensation. This is directly linked to remote communities having a lack of sustainable sources of income.

The Problem of Poor Elephant Welfare and Intensive Management Practices in Thailand

Overall, the conditioning and management practices of captive Asian elephants in Thailand are not transparent and there has been little to no formal oversight and research into such practices. Just as mahout traditions vary across subcultures within Thailand, so do management and conditioning methods, yet no comprehensive study has been conducted to examine these differences and what they mean for elephant wellbeing. Secrecy surrounding these practices is harmful to elephants, who would no doubt benefit from the scrutiny.

What we do know is that most camp elephants live in varying degrees of intensively managed facilities, often cared for by inexperienced mahouts who do not come from a traditional mahout background, with elephant-caring experience. Most elephants are inhibited in their movements and expression of natural behaviours, receive a limited, poor diet and have no regular access to natural foraging, social interaction or individual choice.

In the past five years tensions arising from the ethical issues present in the current model of elephant tourism have reached global significance. Most scholars and industry stakeholders agree that there are major welfare concerns for both mahouts and elephants within the industry; however, there is little agreement on the severity of these concerns and what is the best course for resolution. Certain awareness campaigns have advocated for bans on elephant-riding, and the elimination of chains and bull hooks (ankus) as management tools. To maintain their draw for tourists, in light of these campaigns, many camps have stopped offering elephant chair-riding, offering instead 'interactive tourist–elephant' options, such as bathing, feeding and sometimes elephant neck-riding or 'learn to be a mahout' programmes. Elephant camps that advertise only bathing, for example, typically deploy ecotourism and sustainable tourism buzzwords such as 'sanctuary', 'elephant care facility', 'retirement home', 'jungle park' to attract more ethically mindful tourists. However, this shift has led to minimal changes to the daily routine, diet and housing standards of captive elephants, and the life and schedule of elephants may be only minimally different from the more conventional riding camps.

Media attention of this issue has had a hyper-focused lens around increasingly polarizing discussions of cruelty and abuse.[1] While important, this view has effectively blurred out the need for a more holistic approach to elephant wellbeing, which requires far more than a lack of direct cruelty to thrive. Free access to natural forage and foraging behaviours, space and the ability to form social connections with other individuals must also be attainable.

Mahouts Elephant Foundation Model of Elephant Ecotourism

The MEF model of community-based elephant ecotourism tackles many of the legal, political, cultural and ecological constraints that have otherwise prevented the tourism industry from evolving beyond one primarily of exploitation and opportunism. The MEF model fundamentally changes the way in which tourists interact with elephants and mahouts.

MEF projects are community-based and community-driven, situated in remote Karen villages in north-western Thailand, where visitors can trek into the forest with experienced Karen mahouts to observe free-roaming elephants in their natural habitat[2]. The model is flexible to accommodate each community and is designed based on a collective process. It is challenging for small community-based models to compete with the scale of a corporate elephant tourism industry; it thus takes time for an MEF project to become self-sustainable (i.e. supporting the care of all elephants, critical ground staff and infrastructure). MEF's pilot project, 'Walking with Elephants', demonstrated that low-impact community-based tourism can support the care of elephants in their natural habitat, becoming self-sustaining within three years. MEF estimates a similar timeline for additional projects using the same model framework, with some variation based on the amount of seed-funding for the project, in addition to the level of infrastructure and basic hospitality training needed for the community to acquire the legally required Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Homestay Standard.

At MEF projects guests typically stay for 2–6 days and hike out to observe free-roaming elephants as well as partake in cultural immersion activities. This model gives visitors the chance to observe elephants in the forest and learn about how they forage, navigate steep mountain terrain, socialize, communicate and play. The effort that it takes to meet the elephants in their forest home engenders in visitors a deep appreciation for the lives of the elephants and for those of the mahouts. The experience further educates visitors on conservation goals for elephants, which include the rehabilitation and rewilding of captive elephants and the preservation of elephant habitat (Blaine *et al*., 2020). In addition to time in the forest observing the elephants, guests partake in a variety of seasonal, immersive activities designed and run by local villagers. Such activities can include tours with elders to learn about forest medicine, hiking to see

stunning waterfalls and sacred landmarks, lessons in traditional cooking, weaving and agricultural activities.

Mahouts accompany small groups of guests to visit their elephants and observe them free roaming in the forest. To minimize human presence in the forest and maximize the tourist experience with the elephants, MEF projects limit groups of visitors to four or five per month with up to eight guests when observing a single social cohort of elephants. However, as the numbers of elephants and social cohorts increase at MEF project sites, so too can groups of visitors per month, while still ensuring low-impact ecotourism. As a non-profit model, MEF projects become self-sustaining at around 40% capacity. With increased, consistent guest numbers over time, the model affords the support of more elephants and the reinvestment of income into the community to increase infrastructure and aid in collectively decided community projects. Critically, MEF projects run on the ground through a series of community-elected boards ensuring a democratic process and dispersion of benefits across the entire community. The success of MEF model projects has largely been accomplished by collaborating with elephant-owning Karen communities to create alternative models for elephant protection, conservation and tourism. This success is evidenced, in part, by the financial self-sustainability of MEF's pilot project; thus showing proof of concept, enabling seed-funding from grants and donors to begin MEF's second project.

Collaboration: Solutions to the Constraints and Problems

In recognition of different ownership structures (e.g. individually owned, family-owned and community-owned elephants), MEF collaborates with indigenous mahout owners and their communities to support the life-long return of elephants to native habitat. Because each community is different, with varying needs, there is no one-size-fits-all template. However, MEF is able to develop reasonable solutions to ownership that benefit the elephants, their mahouts and the community at large. MEF has multiple models of partnering with communities, but in all cases works with traditional mahout owners who share the foundation's interest in their elephants' health and wellbeing as well as the conservation of natural elephant rangeland. MEF partners with individual and groups of owners to create a sustainable employment model with broad community benefits beyond just owner families. In cases where there are multiple or many owners, from more than one community, MEF also uses a partial ownership model as the community-wide benefits may not reach the villages of all of the owners. In this model MEF shares ownership of the elephants to ensure the long-term future of the elephant to remain on the project and the continued benefit of the community-based tourism model for all members of the mahout community. This model requires a larger financial investment from MEF up-front to become a partial owner and therefore requires more fundraising to take on a new elephant.

The Mahout's Role in the MEF Model: Elephant Guardians and Professional Wildlife Guides

The MEF model accounts for sustainable cultural and economic stability, providing mahouts and their families with an alternative income. Moreover, it allows those mahouts who left home to work in the elephant camps to integrate back into village life with their family and friends. With the elephants in the forest, the mahouts transition into the role of elephant and forest guardians. At MEF model projects, the Karen mahouts patrol the forest and monitor elephant movement, which serves in part, to reduce human–elephant conflict. MEF also provides training, if desired, for mahouts to learn professional wildlife guide skills, increasing their potential earnings and career mobility. Importantly, Karen mahouts maintain leadership roles in the development of ecotourism in their communities, which includes guiding ecotourists into the forest habitat to unobtrusively observe the elephants. The MEF model brings the economic benefits back to the communities, promoting coexistence with elephants.

Management of Elephants

Two key elephant management demands in forest habitats are to keep them within protected areas and to minimize conflict. The drag chain, which is a traditional Karen elephant-tracking device, proves useful in this endeavour. Mahouts use the drag marks to track elephants in the large forest. Additionally, the chains can be temporarily tethered to trees to deter elephants from entering potential conflict areas (usually done at night). The drag chain varies in length and weight depending on the size of the elephant. For an adult elephant, the chain may be 20–30 metres, fastened loosely to a front leg. Preliminary research has shown no effect on gait or on the ability of elephants to navigate the complex forest terrain (pers. obs.). For elephants, the drag chain appears to be similar to a more substantial bracelet worn by people (L. Baker, pers. comm.).

In MEF model projects, elephants are in family groups foraging, dust bathing, washing in the river, scratching on trees at will. Towards dusk, mahouts use the marks left by the chains in the mud and dust, and in the fallen leaves – along with other indicators such as dung and broken trees – to track the elephants. In large tracts of forest where conflict with farmlands is low-risk, drag chains are used simply as a tracking device. But, in forest habitat closer to farmland and with smaller core areas, the drag chains are used to loosely tether the elephants to trees for the night.

The use of the drag chain is a management compromise that provides these elephants greater overall freedom and choice. Long chaining deep in fresh forage is considerably more advantageous to the elephants than alternative methods such as corralling. Corrals are considered best practice at sites with more confined areas or limited forage. However, corrals are

costly and permanent in structure, thus requiring elephants be returned and kept in the same location each night. In MEF projects space is not a limiting factor, making the corral system unsuited for the vast forest habitat elephants have to explore. The drag chain method ensures that elephants are free to explore during the day, never tethered in the same location multiple nights in a row and always have fresh forage with the ability to walk around within the limits of their tether during the night.

Karen People Own Land Used for Elephants

Traditional mahouts with generations of situated elephant knowledge are integral to the MEF model of elephant protection and conservation. Many Karen communities have a long tradition of elephant-keeping and forest protection as well as successfully leveraging for forest rights within Thailand (Kunlawadi, 1997). According to Johnson and Forsyth (2002), 'the Karen are perhaps the most well-recorded example of a hill tribe successfully negotiating access rights to forest areas within community-based negotiation' (p. 1597). MEF works with Karen communities that have rights to tens of thousands of acres of elephant habitat. Because elephants need large areas of unfragmented habitat in order to thrive, MEF works with the communities to develop habitat preservation plans alongside direct elephant support. As communities come to see their livelihoods intertwined with the presence of elephants in forest habitat, this further works to protect against the pressures of anthropogenic deforestation.

Earning an income from community-based tourism can provide an alternative income to forest-destroying agriculture and provide supplemental income from sustainable sources such as coffee, fruit trees and woven goods. Once the commercial cash crop industry and deforestation reach a community, the damage is difficult to reverse. As we have achieved in MEF's Living in the Forest with Elephants (LIFE) project, proactively working with remote communities that have yet to lose the majority of their forests to corn farming, for example, is a more effective way to protect threatened forest habitat.

In Summary

Every captive elephant is owned in Thailand and in all aspects that involve being legally designated as property, elephants are subject to Thai laws and are still entangled with human communities. To promote coexistence, we argue that highly skilled mahouts with the ability to develop healthy relationships with elephants are critical to successful elephant protection and conservation, as well as sustainable ecotourism. Collaborating with elephant owners and traditional mahouts interested in their elephants' wellbeing, and in a model for earning an income in their home community, makes possible a realistic solution for returning elephants to native forest. The MEF model ensures that ecotourism income benefits elephant protection and

conservation alongside community development. It is the very relationships with key Karen communities that may offer captive elephants in Thailand the greatest chance of autonomy, and increased wellbeing in a landscape where both elephant and human cultures are valued.

Notes

[1] See https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/19/travel/thailand-elephant-tourism-humane.html, https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-40501667 and https://www.thailandelephant.org/en/thaielephant.html

[2] See photo 6 in the Elephant Portrait Gallery.

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11 Conservation-Based Elephant Tourism: An Importance–Performance Analysis

Daminda Sumanapala,[1] Nilakshi W.K. Galahitiyawe[2] and Isabelle D. Wolf[3]

[1]*Murdoch University, Murdoch, Australia*
[2]*University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka*
[3]*University of Wollongong, Wollongong, Australia*

Introduction

Wildlife tourism has become a prevalent and fast-growing market in the tourism industry (Gnanapala *et al*., 2017). Watching large mammals is now a highly sought-after activity in wildlife tourism destinations (Lyngdoh *et al*., 2017). As a result, developing countries especially in Asia are promoting flagship mammal species for wildlife tourism such as the Asian elephant, Indian tiger, panda, dolphins and various species of whales. Wildlife tourism needs to be firmly based on the three pillars of sustainability, education and conservation (Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011) to preserve wildlife and sustain their habitat while educating visitors and raising awareness of issues relating to the wildlife experience (Walker and Weiler, 2017).

Although wildlife tourism is primarily staged in natural settings such as National Parks (Lyngdoh *et al*., 2017), more recently zoos and *ex situ* conservation programmes, as is the focus of this research, have also emerged as top-rated destinations for wildlife tourism (Scholtz *et al*., 2013). These 'artificial' sites typically offer education of and interaction with wildlife in semi-natural habitats to mimic 'real' experiences of wildlife (Oh and Hammitt, 2010). They have also generated massive revenue in some countries such as sub-Saharan Africa and created opportunities for the economic development of the local community (Mutanga *et al*., 2017).

Managing the visitor experience and designing experiences that are both satisfying and low impact is a hallmark of sustainable wildlife tourism (Wolf and Croft, 2010, Wolf and Croft, 2012). However, achieving visitor satisfaction is a challenging endeavour as in an experience economy (Dwyer and

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Forsyth, 2008) the highly educated consumer has multiple demands that may be difficult to cater for, or conflict with the conservation aspects of the experience.

Multiple factors contribute to how wildlife experiences are perceived at zoos and other wildlife-watching sites (McGuiness *et al*., 2017). Previous studies have found that visitor satisfaction depends on parking availability and toilet facilities (Jensen, 2007), the viewing experience of animals and their behaviour (Wolf and Croft, 2010; Luebke and Matiasek, 2013), and various other attributes and facilities. These factors are known to influence visitor satisfaction with wildlife tourism experiences (Lee, 2015).

The assessment of visitor satisfaction has become a key tool to determine performance and inform management of visitor experiences and services provided at zoos, parks and similar sites (Coghlan, 2012). The ultimate goal is to improve experiences, manage expectations and negativity (Tomas *et al*., 2002), and increase satisfaction of visitors to ensure repeat visitation and word-of-mouth recommendation (Fletcher and Fletcher, 2003).

Although research on visitor satisfaction around wildlife tourism experiences is common, there is a strong geographic bias towards Western countries (Lee, 2015). How a wildlife experience is perceived however varies with the ethno-cultural context of the participant and the location of where the experience takes place. Thus, it is timely to research visitor satisfaction with wildlife experiences in *ex situ* settings in Asian countries where virtually no research in this field exists. Identifying gaps between attributes and services of the experience will be useful to managers and policy makers of wildlife tourism to maintain viable *ex situ* conservation programmes (Packer *et al*., 2014).

Here we present the results of a visitor research study undertaken in an 'elephant transit home' (ETH) in Sri Lanka. This *ex situ* conservation programme offers a unique experience of viewing rescued elephants that are raised and ultimately released to their natural habitat. The objectives of this study are: (i) to understand the importance and performance of various attributes of the visitor experience with the elephant conservation programme; and (ii) to provide information to policy makers and relevant authorities on elephant-watching conservation tourism in Sri Lanka.

Importance–Performance Analysis

Numerous tools are available to assess visitor experiences and requirements to maximize visitor satisfaction. Among these, two instruments have been commonly used in the past: SERVQUAL and SERVPERF (Jain and Gupta, 2004). However, both of these have been criticized for producing biased and inaccurate results, requiring expert knowledge to interpret so they have value for managers, and generating uncertainty on how to apply the results and implement them in management strategies (Wong *et al*., 2011; Somkeatkun and Wongsurawat, 2017).

Because of these limitations, Martilla and James (1977) developed Importance–Performance Analysis (IPA) (Lai and Hitchcock, 2015). In IPA, the results on how to manage attributes and services of a visitor experience are easily accessible for interpretation and application. When the importance of specific attributes/services is plotted against their performance, as rated by visitors, results can be plotted in one of four quadrants yielding specific recommendations for action: (i) concentrate on this attribute, this service needs high priority and immediate action (i.e. when an attribute has high importance but performs poorly); (ii) keep up the good work (high importance, high performance); (iii) low priority (attribute does not perform well, but it is also not important to customers); and (iv) possible overkill (attribute performs well, but it is not important to customers) (Sever, 2015). Knowing where an attribute/service is positioned among the four quadrants enables managers to prioritize their work to optimize their experience offers.

The Elephant Transit Home, Udawalawe, Sri Lanka

Wildlife conservation projects attract visitors who want to inform themselves, view and interact with different wildlife species (Kaffashi *et al*., 2015). This case study involves the conservation of a Sri Lankan young elephant population in the country to enable a sustained elephant population in the jungle.

Udawalawe ETH is an *ex situ* conservation project in that it raises elephants and releases them to their natural habitat once they are grown-up and self-sufficient. The Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*) is one of the most attractive animals for local and foreign visitors in Sri Lanka, which has the greatest density of this species in Asia. The Asian elephant is also categorized as an endangered species on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List, which makes it even more appealing to view (Choudhury *et al*., 2008).

However, increasing population pressure and the national ambition to improve the economy in the country have led to people encroaching on elephant habitats, which has created an elephant–human conflict. As a result, there are many orphaned elephant babies that need rescue and the Sri Lankan government has established care centres such as the ETH for this purpose. The ETH has become a highly popular tourist attraction that is the vanguard of an innovative form of elephant tourism in Sri Lanka (Fig. 11.1).

Methods

The Sri Lankan Wildlife Conservation Department took an innovative step in conserving the country's elephant population for the wellbeing of the species and to develop wildlife tourism in the country. The Udawalawe ETH, which is located on an island, was established as part of this foresightful planning in 1995, adjacent to the Udawalawe National Park. The objective was 'to take care of orphaned elephant calves until they are independent and able enough

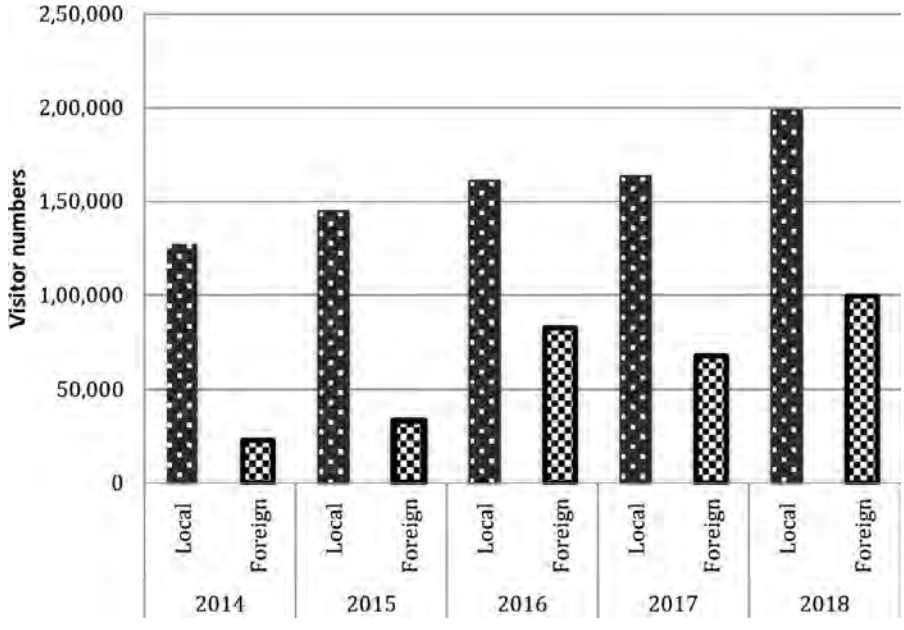

Fig. 11.1. Visitor arrivals to the Elephant Transit Home, Udawalawe, Sri Lanka over five years.

to be released back to the wild, at the Udawalawe National Park (UWNP)' (Miththapala, 2009, p. 24). One of the extraordinary features of the ETH is that the baby elephants bottle-feed each other, thereby minimizing human interaction as a means to improve chances for rehabilitation. Because of its unwavering commitment, the ETH has been recognized as one of the best wildlife rehabilitation centres in the world (Miththapala, 2009).

Survey design

We used a self-administered questionnaire to collect visitor data at the ETH as is common practice for this type of visitor study (Lee, 2015). The survey asked visitors to rate the importance and performance of various attributes of the ETH elephant visitor experience as obtained from past studies (Williams and Soutar, 2009). After pilot-testing 21 attributes were included, which limited participant burden to less than 15 minutes for completion (Sumanapala *et al*., 2017). Ratings were collected on a 5-point Likert scale as consistent with previous studies (Lai and Hitchcock, 2015), ranging from 1 'unimportant' to 5 being 'very important' for importance, and 1 'worst' to 5 'best' for performance. In addition, the questionnaire included socio-demographic information about the visitors, such as age and education, and their visiting party, along with information on how visitors knew about the ETH.

Data collection

Convenience sampling was applied to maximize participant numbers by choosing convenient times to collect data. Most visitors were on a busy schedule during their visit to the island and the ETH limits viewing to selected times when the elephants feed for 1.5 hours each at 9am, 12 noon and 3pm. Visitors > 18 years of age were sampled during these times on both weekdays and weekends.

Data analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS 25 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Descriptive statistics were used to analyse visitor profiles. First, means were calculated for the importance and performance ratings of the visitor experience attributes. Second, the gap between performance and importance was detected and paired sample *t*-tests ($P < 0.05$) were used to test for statistically significant gaps. Finally, the mean score from the IPA was plotted into an IPA grid consisting of the above-described four quadrants. In this grid the mean rating scores for importance were plotted on the vertical axis, while performance was plotted horizontally.

Results

During the study, 200 questionnaires were distributed among ETH visitors: 22 of these were not returned, and a further 45 questionnaires were excluded for being incomplete or having been returned by respondents < 18 years of age. Therefore, the total number of questionnaires was 133, yielding a response rate of 66%. The gender ratio was close to 50% (females: 53.4%), and the majority of respondents were foreigners (60%). About half of the respondents (45.9%) were 45–54 years of age, with only a few respondents being aged between 18 and 34 years. The majority of respondents (57.9%) were well educated, having obtained a college degree. The sample appears representative of the common visitor profile at the ETH as per anecdotal evidence obtained from talking with staff. Also, since we covered all opening times of the ETH it was very likely that our sample represented typical visitors to it.

More than half (56%) of the visitors were watching Asian elephants for the first time. In contrast, 28% of respondents had watched Asian elephants in other countries such as India, Malaysia and Thailand prior to visiting the ETH in Sri Lanka. Among the respondents, 32.3% had chosen to visit the ETH because of recommendations from family and friends, or by word-of-mouth recommendation of others (25.9%), or had consulted with the Internet (23.3%) and guidebooks/maps (11.3%). Only 7.5% (other) of respondents learnt about the ETH from their local tour guide while touring Sri Lanka. Meantime, most of the visitors travelled with friends, some with family and others with a tour group (Table 11.1).

Table 11.1. Profile of respondents' characteristics.

Characteristics	Number of responses	%
Gender		
Male	62	46.6
Female	71	53.4
Age (years)		
18–24	3	2.3
25–34	11	8.3
35–44	34	25.6
45–54	61	45.9
55–64	24	18.0
Educational attainment		
High school graduate	26	19.5
College degree	77	57.9
Graduate school or more	30	22.6
Visitor party		
By myself	1	0.8
With friend	77	57.9
Family with children	24	18.0
Group tour	31	23.3
How heard		
Family/friend	43	32.3
Word-of-mouth	34	25.6
Internet	31	23.3
Books/guide map	15	11.3
Other	10	7.5

IPA results

Table 11.2 contains the attributes included in the visitor questionnaire. According to the data collection plan, the responders were asked to rank their level of importance and performance based on location attributes. Among the attributes, the highest important attribute ($M = 5.00$) is 'Wellbeing of baby elephants' The second highest attributes are 'Good view of the baby elephant' ($M = 4.93$), followed by 'Cleaning of the premises' ($M = 4.93$), and 'Knowledge about the Asian elephant' ($M = 4.92$), while the attribute with the lowest importance was 'Friendly greeting by the cashier' ($M = 3.32$). The attribute performance was highest for 'Good view of baby elephants' ($M = 4.93$), followed by 'Wellbeing of baby elephants' ($M = 4.92$), 'Price area correctly shown in advance' ($M = 4.83$) and 'Price area reasonable for entry' ($M = 4.56$), and the lowest attribute performance was for 'Availability of visitors' safety information ($M = 1.72$) (Table 11.2).

The gap or the difference between attribute performance minus attribute importance was called a *service gap* (Table 11.2). If an attribute's performance

Table 11.2. Importance–Performance Analysis (IPA) of visitor experience attributes for the Elephant Transit Home, Udawalawe, Sri Lanka.

Attribute		Importance		Performance		Gap		
		Mean	SD[a]	Mean	SD	(P–I)[a]	t-stat	P-value
1.	The wellbeing of baby elephants	5.00	0.00	4.92	0.27	–0.08	3.450	0.00**
2.	The baby elephants are doing natural things	3.76	0.98	3.59	0.08	–0.17	1.548	0.12
3.	The baby elephants replicate natives	4.29	0.99	3.40	0.88	–0.89	10.221	0.00**
4.	The baby elephants have a private place away from visitors	4.41	0.99	3.47	1.09	–0.94	9.922	0.00**
5.	Visitors have a good view of baby elephants	4.93	0.89	4.93	0.27	0.00	0.446	0.65
6.	Cleanliness of the premises	4.93	0.25	4.55	0.49	–0.38	7.226	0.00**
7.	Well-maintained facilities	4.86	0.25	4.09	0.92	–0.77	8.696	0.00**
8.	Friendliness of staff	3.86	0.34	2.95	0.61	–0.91	13.191	0.00**
9.	Availability of visitor safety information	3.53	0.60	1.72	0.73	–1.81	22.112	0.00**
10.	Good signposting	4.11	0.86	2.23	0.94	–1.88	31.296	0.00**
11.	Information for children	3.89	0.30	2.25	0.85	–1.64	19.884	0.00**
12.	Information for visitors	4.67	0.65	2.69	0.68	–1.98	44.331	0.00**
13.	To learn more about elephant conservation	4.47	0.47	2.10	0.70	–2.37	34.048	0.00**
14.	Experienced interpreters	3.86	0.62	1.80	0.80	–2.06	28.227	0.00**
15.	Educational activities	3.27	0.63	2.40	0.87	–0.87	10.880	0.00**
16.	Knowledge about Asian elephants	4.92	0.61	2.14	0.73	–2.78	37.489	0.00**
17.	Access facilities for the disabled	3.60	0.26	2.32	0.93	–1.28	12.133	0.00**
18.	Friendly greeting by the cashier	3.32	0.65	2.72	0.56	–0.6	7.279	0.00**
19.	Family tickets for admission	4.01	0.73	2.70	1.39	–1.31	9.261	0.00**
20.	Price range reasonable for entry	4.79	0.48	4.56	0.59	–0.23	6.083	0.00**
21.	Price correctly advertised in advance	4.57	0.49	4.83	0.44	0.26	–4.668	0.00**

[a] I, importance; P, performance; SD, standard deviation; *P*-value, statistical significance of the gap.
[b] Mean importance ratings range from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important).
[c] Mean performance ratings range from 1 (performed the worst) to 5 (performed the best).
[d]*$P < 0.05$, **$P < 0.001$.

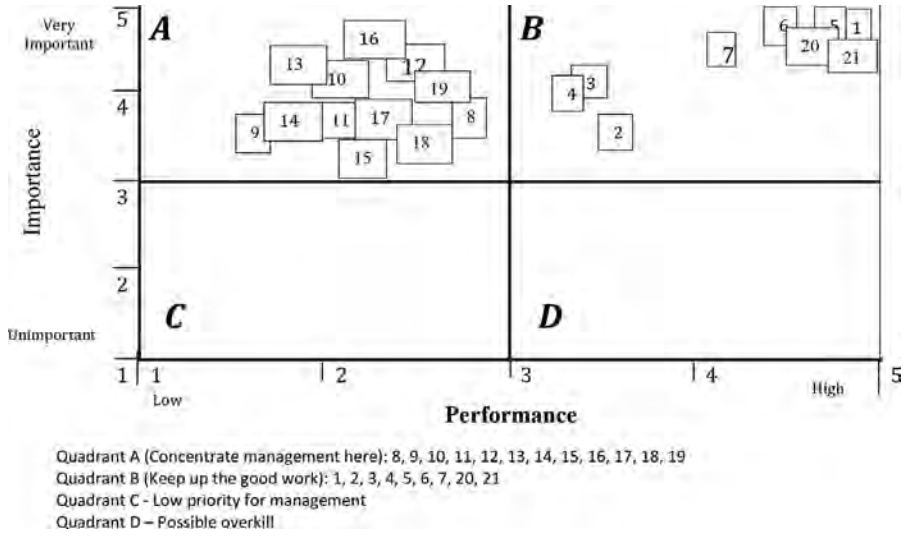

Fig. 11.2. Importance–Performance grid analysis of visitor attributes.

did not meet or exceed the importance, it is a negative gap; if the attribute's performance met or exceeded the importance, then it is a positive gap. Therefore, the study found 19 attributes among 22 to have negative gaps. However, two attributes had performances that exceeded the importance attributed by respondents: 'Visitors have a good view of baby elephants', and 'Price area correctly shown in advance'.

A paired sample *t*-test was performed to compare the mean reaction of importance, and the performance was statistically significant in the analysis. Table 11.2 indicates that visitors were not satisfied with the overall performance of ETH, except for the attributes 'Price area correctly shown in advance' and 'Visitors have a good view of baby elephants'. The gap analysis revealed the widest gaps between the importance and performance of the attributes were for 'Knowledge about Asian elephant', 'To learn more elephant conservation', 'Interpreters', 'Information for visitors' and 'Good signposting'. The IPA result in Table 11.2 shows that these attributes are located on the IPA grid (Fig. 11.2). This grid displays four areas as 'Concentrate management here', 'Keep up the good work', 'Low priority for management' and 'Possible overkill' in the quadrants.

Notably, 12 of the 21 measured attributes of the ETH visitor experience were rated in the 'critical' quadrant as they were perceived as important to the experience with room for improvement. Thus, more than half of the attributes require concentrated management action, which included the 'Friendliness of staff', 'Availability of visitor safety information', 'Good signposting', 'Information for children', 'Information for visitors', 'To learn more about elephant conservation', 'Experienced interpreters', 'Educational activities', 'Knowledge about Asian elephants', 'Access facilities for disabilities', 'Friendly greetings by the cashier' and 'Family tickets for admission'.

Nine attributes were rated in the quadrant that suggested to 'Keep up the good work'. It means these attributes are valuable for visitors, and also they see a good performance level at this site. These included the 'Wellbeing of baby elephants', 'Baby elephants are doing natural things', 'Baby elephants replicate natives', 'The baby elephants have a private place away from visitors', 'Visitors have a good view of baby elephants', 'Cleanliness of the premises', 'Well-maintained facilities', 'Price range is reasonable for entry' and 'Price is correctly advertised in advance'. Nonetheless, these attributes show negative gaps in the gap analysis except for 'Visitors have a good view of baby elephants' and 'Price is correctly advertised in advance', which means that even here there is room for improvement.

Discussion

Encouragingly, this study revealed that visitors were particularly concerned about the wellbeing of the elephants and that the ETH was performing reasonably well along the set of corresponding attributes. Nonetheless, there was room for improvement as the performance of these critical attributes lagged behind their importance. This is an issue that should be addressed immediately as the sustainability of a wildlife experience that is promoted under the banner of rescue and conservation of endangered species needs to place the greatest importance on meeting visitor expectations in this area.

After animal welfare, the visitors were also concerned about the amenities of the place, and the reception and treatment by staff. It is well known that a visitor experience consists of a range of facets that all need to contribute to make an experience enjoyable and memorable (Kruger and Saayman, 2017). If some important expectations are not met, even if they relate to seemingly less central aspects, they will detract from the experience and likely cause participants to comment unfavourably on the experience as a whole. In the case of the ETH some of these issues require immediate attention and could easily be addressed by educating staff towards best-practice customer service and improving some of the facilities. Other factors are somewhat more difficult to address and require funding (such as employing capable interpreters), and would need to be considered for a longer-term planning of resources.

Education planning will need to form an important component of the planning of the ETH. As mentioned above, consumers these days especially of wildlife experiences are well educated, as is the case for the ETH, and thus expect an adequate provision of educational material and programmes. Studies have demonstrated the positive influence of education programmes on tourist behaviour, especially if combined with an interactive experience with wild animals (Orams, 1997). However, Skibins *et al*. (2010) noted that the most effective best-practice education used resource- and place-based messaging where messaging is not generic but directly relevant to the resources and places found on site. Conservation centres that take action to increase their educational facilities and convey conservation messages to local and international visitors are known to change people's future behaviour when

participating in wildlife tourism activities, which underpins the importance of such programmes (Tubb, 2003).

Educational programmes need to cater for different age-groups including children. Although the ETH is likely more advanced than other similar *ex situ* conservation programmes in Sri Lanka it still has a significant amount of work to do in developing its education programme and elevating it above the somewhat haphazard provision of individual pieces of information. It is the education that should connect participants with the core values of the *ex situ* conservation programme and carry the message of conservation across from the experience to the daily lives of people.

Educational programmes and related activities need to be well designed to achieve that and meet visitor expectations. An issue that may have originated from the fact that the establishment of the programme was driven by urgent calls for conservation, as is often the case in conservation initiatives, is that planning at the time was not set out to integrate long-term provisions for amenities or education. However, the ETH and others have evolved over time and embraced the consumer side of their operations and, as part of this, they need to develop a vision for all aspects of the visitor experience. This should involve traditional educational means including sign- and paper-based information along with tour guiding but also modern means of engagement such as phone apps and digital devices (Wolf *et al*., 2013).

If the ETH can meet or exceed visitor expectations, the managers can sustainably run the site while conserving the baby Asian elephants and practising a sustainable form of wildlife tourism in Sri Lanka. For example, this study showed that providing family tickets is very important to meet visitor expectations and satisfaction, and the site performed well in this aspect. Previous studies have noted that if services and facilities have met visitor expectations, there is a high possibility that they will encourage others to visit. It also ensures that they are competitive against other experiences that may involve less eye-catching attractions but score highly on visitor treatment and education.

This study did not identify any low-priority attributes, which were overly catered for, meaning they would have been positioned in the 'overkill' quadrant. Nonetheless the centre has focused on facilities that are relevant to specific (smaller) segments of the visitor population. For example, they facilitate experiences for differently-abled visitors. These smaller segments of visitor populations with their specific needs are often overlooked or 'silenced' in surveys including IPAs. Efforts need to be made to account for minority needs to achieve a fuller integration of a diverse visitor community (Chikuta *et al*., 2019).

Conclusion

The ETH at Udawalawe, which was the focus of this study, is committed to conserving Asian elephant populations in Sri Lanka. Now it has become a local and international tourism destination for elephant-watching in an

unobtrusive manner that allows baby elephants to later be rehabilitated into the wild[1]. Given the greatly increasing demand for such experiences, research that explains how to optimize management of such an operation is timely.

This research has identified three key areas that deserve attention at the ETH to ensure the viability of the experience:

1. Critically, welfare aspects of the experience deserve the most attention. Although the ETH is very advanced in this respect, it is still lagging behind the undeniably great expectations that visitors have with regard to that. We believe that even slight deviations in this area have high impacts on the overall visitor experience and therefore impact repeat visitation and word-of-mouth recommendations, and possibly opportunities to attract external funding.
2. Education always plays a great importance in conservation wildlife tourism experiences. In this regard, the ETH did not just lag behind but underperformed, which is of great concern. It underpins that a strategic education plan needs to be established that is visitor-friendly and accounts for the varying socio-demographic backgrounds of visitors.
3. Staff education towards optimal customer service and improved facilities constitute further aspects that need to be addressed by management. Although not the actual incentive to participate in the experience, they are still part of it and, if well delivered, ensure the long-term competitiveness of the operation.

In conclusion, this study has used the ETH as a case study to exemplify central aspects of an *ex situ* wildlife conservation experience that would greatly benefit from ensuring optimal performance of welfare-related attributes of the experience, along with a considered approach to visitor education, and accompanying staff and amenity factors. The ETH is undoubtedly an example of a well-run wildlife tourism operation and so other *ex situ* programmes are most likely in similar if not greater need to optimize these performance parameters.

Note

[1] See photo 5 in the Elephant Portrait Gallery.

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Section 4 Frameworks for Modern Elephant Tourism Management

12 The Effectiveness of Elephant Welfare Regulations in India

Sumanth Bindumadhav, Alokparna Sengupta and Shilpa Mahbubani

Humane Society International India, Hyderabad, India

Introduction

Most research on elephants focuses on the conflict associated with them. Most conservation efforts sideline the importance of welfare of elephants in captivity and even ignore the welfare aspect of elephants in conflict. A handful of individuals and organizations in India, for instance, have looked at this aspect in the past and have provided enriched reports of lack of adherence to predefined welfare standards in several state-run or privately owned facilities. Research on captive elephants has outlined several instances of failure to meet basic animal needs across the many states in India where elephants are kept in private or government-owned facilities. The deplorable health conditions of elephants, and their mahouts in several instances, have been highlighted in the hope that associated agencies of the government will enforce existing regulations sternly and bring in newer legislation that will improve the living standards of elephants. A fair amount of research and publications have brought to the fore the zoonotic nature of diseases in the captive elephant population and the threats they pose in anticipation of better regulation. While these have served the purpose of pointing out the lacunae in the current system and serve as a bedrock for a strong argument on this front, they have resulted in little change for the elephants themselves over the years (Varma *et al*., 2009a, b; Varma, 2015).

The reality of this industry is in tune with any other in the sense that as long as demand exists, the industry will continue to flourish. The demand, in this case, is largely driven by tourists and the revenue generated by tourism and in minor proportions by religious, cultural and political drivers. The authors of this chapter firmly believe that private 'ownership' of elephants will only truly come to an end if it becomes 'too expensive' to care for an elephant. With this in view, this chapter, as a portion of this book, intends to bring the reality of the elephant tourism industry to the attention of

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potential tourists with the aim of dissuading them from contributing to this vile industry and with the hope that readers will join hands with welfare advocates and scholars to demand more effective regulations from the government concerned. Research publications and reports in the past have been meant purely for government and judicial purposes and have not catered to a more generic audience by design. This has created a rift between the average tourist and the reality of the industry. This chapter intends to be the bridge across this canal and help connect the dots to drive down demand.

To understand existing regulations and their effectiveness, this chapter will consider the case study of elephants in captivity in two prominent locations in India – Kerala and Rajasthan. This chapter will examine the current situation in both locations, then outline existing regulations for the welfare of elephants and then finally discuss their effectiveness or the lack of it before concluding. For the purposes of this chapter alone, effectiveness will be defined as any guideline, legislations or rules in place that will fundamentally improve the quality of life of an elephant in captivity. Quality of life is broadly defined as the provision for captive elephants to display and exhibit their natural behaviour or as close to it as possible.

Captive Elephants in the State of Rajasthan

Rajasthan is a state in north-west India. It is the largest Indian state by area, occupying 10.4% of India's total land mass. Geographically, the majority of the state is covered by the Thar desert and the remaining area is dominated by the Aravalli mountain range. Owing to its topography, seasonal temperatures in Rajasthan vary from upwards of 40°C down to 10°C.

While elephants are not native to the state of Rajasthan, records indicate that the royal stables of the then ruling kingdom owned and bred elephants as a sign of prosperity and for use in warfare. However, upon the independence of India and the abolition of the privy purse practice in the early 1970s, elephants that were at that point owned by the namesake royal family were handed over to their carers and mahouts, who now became 'owners' of these animals and sought to make a living out of them (Varma *et al*., 2009b). Since then, elephants in Rajasthan have served as a mere tourist attraction and one that completes a quintessential 'India visit'.

Rajasthan, through its capital city Jaipur, is a hub for tourists who come to experience the richness of culture and history on display across the state through its various exhibits such as museums and monuments. One such monument is the Amer Fort (Rajasthan State Tourism Department, 2018). Amer Fort (also known as Amber Fort) is a fort located in the town of Amer. The fort itself is situated on top of a hill and is a popular tourist attraction in the state. At the fort, captive elephants are used to ferry tourists up and down a cobblestone path. These elephants are adorned with various garments and ornaments in an effort to beautify them and make them more presentable. Furthermore, the elephants are most often painted across various parts of their body such as toenails, head and around their eyes. The nature of the

paint used and its effects on the elephant have been questioned several times with no definitive response. These elephants carry on their backs a howdah, a seating arrangement that weighs over 100 kg and which was traditionally used by royalty. The howdahs consist of a bench on which tourists can seat themselves while the mahout is sitting over the elephant's neck with his legs behind the elephant's ears and an ankus (bull hook) in hand (Varma *et al*., 2009b; Dornbusch, 2016).

Amer Fort, at last count, had a total of 120 elephants that are forced into this service. Most of these elephants are housed at *hathi gaon*, literally translated to elephant village, which is a few miles away from the fort itself. This serves as night housing as well for these elephants. A few other elephants are kept in private housing for the night within Amer city. Reports indicate that elephants spend about 12–16 hours per day in these stables. Each elephant in the elephant village gets a room that is roughly 50 m^2 according to a report, with most rooms having a concrete, bevelled floor with one point of entry and exit for the mahout. Reports further suggest that within these stables no provision for water exists. Furthermore, once inside the stables, elephants are chained in various ways, none of which allows the elephant to even turn around once chained. The only enrichment elephants in this elephant village have access to is a lake where they are all led to be bathed and scrubbed by their mahouts with a pumice stone. Elephants in private housing outside the elephant village have been documented to be in similar if not worse conditions, as in most of those houses no facility was built specifically to house these animals and space was made to accommodate them within the existing infrastructure. These elephants were observed not to have access to a lake or large body of water (Dornbusch, 2016). A 2009 report recorded that 68% of the elephants in either location did not have access to drinking water (Varma *et al*., 2009b).

Elephants, from either the elephant village or private housing, are made to walk all the way to Amer Fort on a daily basis through the chaotic vehicular traffic of the city of Jaipur on tarred surfaces. Once at Amer Fort, all 120 elephants wait in the courtyard until it is their turn to ferry tourists up the hill on a surface that is unnatural to them. Reports indicate that in the courtyard and on the path up the hill there is no provision for shade or water for the elephants (Dornbusch, 2016).

Studies have further recorded that several of these elephants are also loaned or hired out for other events such as weddings, functions and political events, which is a supplemental source of income (Varma, 2015). It is firmly believed by many that the presence of elephants at several of these events acts as an indication of grandeur and/or has religious significance. Anecdotal information also suggests that these elephants are frequently hired by luxury hotels in the state as a means of 'entertainment' for their high-paying guests.

While the conditions described above might bring to the fore several issues faced by the animals, some of the ones that need to be noted as per a 2009 study are (Varma *et al*., 2009b):

1. Elephants spend an average of six years in Jaipur at Amer Fort, which means they are constantly changing handlers and exposed to different management systems, which is stressful for an elephant.
2. These elephants spend most of their day standing or walking on a surface that is not natural to them, which results in multiple injuries and medical conditions related to their feet and foot pads.
3. The quality of hygiene in places of housing is poor at best resulting in a high rate of infection and disease.
4. The sleeping patterns of elephants were highly disturbed, with most of them getting an average of 4 hours of sleep per night, which can result in sickness.
5. Elephants in the wild are known to walk for several miles a day foraging, while these elephants have restricted or stressed walking conditions on a non-conducive surface.
6. Elephants are social animals but under the conditions at Amer Fort, social interaction is dependent on their work schedule and is not a given.
7. When the elephants were not working, they were always chained and not permitted to walk freely.
8. Feed provided to elephants was a mix of straw, jaggery (unrefined sugar cane pulp pressed into blocks) and wheat bread, which does not amount to a nutritious feed.

For all the above reasons, several of the elephants were reported to display aggression towards people or display stereotypy. Furthermore, poor working conditions have led to most elephants suffering from either injury to the eye, injuries to the leg, abscesses from the howdah or tuberculosis, and in some elephants a combination of these. A 2018 report published by the Animal Welfare Board of India examined the health and working conditions of the elephants in Amer and found that 19 of them were blind in one or both eyes. Ten of them tested positive for tuberculosis and nearly all of them were found to be suffering from foot conditions of varying severity. A further 28 elephants were over the age of 50 and unfit for work, despite which they were ferrying tourists every day. The report further indicated the death of several elephants had occurred as a result of jaundice. Despite periodic deaths, the total number of elephants has remained in the same range – a matter that warrants a thorough investigation in itself as to the source of these 'new' elephants (Animal Welfare Board of India, 2018).

Captive Elephants in the State of Kerala

Kerala, in contrast to Rajasthan, is one of the smaller states of India in terms of land mass and is located on the south-west coast of India. A large portion of the state is covered by the Western Ghats mountain range, a tropical rainforest. The Western Ghats are a biological hotspot and the area has been declared a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Kerala is criss-crossed by several

lakes, canals and rivers, which provide for very fertile land. Unlike Rajasthan, Kerala is home to over 3000 wild elephants as per the census carried out in 2017 by the government of India (Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, 2017).

Elephant ownership in Kerala can be broadly divided into two categories: elephants owned by government agencies such as the forest department, and elephants owned by private individuals/trusts/societies such as religious institutions, etc. For the purposes of this chapter, only the elephants owned by private individuals/trusts/societies are considered.

Much like Rajasthan, Kerala is a state that has a high influx of domestic and international tourists. Most tourists visit the state for its natural beauty, wildlife and for religious purposes (Kerala Tourism Department, 2018). Historically, individuals owned elephants in Kerala primarily for the purposes of timber cultivation from forests. With mechanized modes of harvest that were more cost-effective and consumed less time, elephants moved hands from well-to-do landlords to just about any individual who could handle an elephant, which, in most cases, was the mahout. The mahout subsequently, for the purpose of business, started renting or leasing elephants out for religious or recreational purposes including begging (Varma *et al*., 2009b; Varma, 2015).

A 2010 study carried out by Compassion Unlimited Plus Action and the Asian Nature Conservation Foundation, found that 72% of privately owned elephants in India were in Kerala. All elephants were purchased from sources that ranged across six Indian states indicating a regular transaction of elephants across state boundaries despite regulations to govern them. A rather disturbing fact brought out by this report was that the majority (80%) of privately owned elephants in Kerala were males (since only male Asian elephants have tusks, the temples in Kerala prefer to have only males). One of the known sources of captive elephants in Kerala is those caught from the wild, which ecologically, makes for a grim future because of the constant capture and removal of males. The study further brings to the fore a concern that 99% of elephants owned by religious institutions were either purchased or received as a donation, thereby reducing elephants to mere currency (Varma *et al*., 2010). A 2003 report further indicated that one of the sources for raw ivory is from the male captive elephants of the state of Kerala (Traffic, 2003).

Conditions of privately owned elephants have been shown to be deplorable at best, with most of them getting 1 km^2 of total physical space in open shelters with a tree for shade. A total of 95% of the privately owned elephants lacked regular access to a large water body such as a lake/pond/river (Varma *et al*., 2010). It is well documented that elephants in the wild often spend hours at a water body, even using it to thermoregulate themselves. Further noteworthy is the fact that privately owned elephants in Kerala only experienced social interaction if their owner owned more than one elephant or during working hours. Otherwise, these social animals experience a solitary life. Elephants owned by religious institutions were documented to be chained for about 18–22 hours per day with chains on more than one body part (Varma *et al*., 2009a).

It comes as no surprise then that privately owned elephants, which are subjected to such inappropriate care and lack of enrichment and social interaction, display aggressive behaviour. A staggering 48% of elephants owned by religious institutions have either injured or killed members of the public or their own handlers (Varma *et al*., 2009b). Some of the more specific issues brought forth by Varma *et al*., 2010 are as follows:

1. Elephants are sourced from across different regions in India and, once in Kerala, are immediately pushed into service of a different nature from before, which results in stress for the animal and a higher risk of accidents.
2. Nearly 70% of the elephants were housed in shelters that were open to the sun all the time and to monsoon rain in season.
3. On average, elephants spent 19 hours per day in this poorly constructed and equipped shelter during non-working season.
4. Nearly half the elephants were bathed within their enclosure, while some received access to a nearby water body for bathing.
5. In the wild, elephants, especially males, have been observed to walk for long hours over a vast range. However, in captive conditions in Kerala, elephants only had the opportunity to walk during working hours across varying terrain such as tar roads and earthen surfaces.
6. Herd behaviour of elephants in the wild has been well documented and evidence for a matriarchal society is plentiful. However, in contrast, in captive conditions, interaction with other elephants is dependent purely on the owner having more than one elephant, and on the work schedule.
7. All captive elephants were chained in one way or another and often with multiple chains on one single individual. Some were recorded to have been chained for 18–24 hours per day.
8. While in the wild, elephants are free to pick and forage from a wide variety of vegetation; in captivity their diet was limited to easily accessible material and an astonishing 91% of elephants did not have access to straw/hay as food.

Owing to all the above-listed causes, invariably, the health of the elephants was poor, with many suffering from foot, eye, kidney and other injuries. It was further observed that none of the elephants was immunized. With poor husbandry skills, several elephants displayed behavioural issues such as stereotypy.

Regulations Concerning Captive Elephant Care and Welfare

There are a handful of regulations and guidelines that one needs to be mindful of and adhere to if elephants are to be owned or used under private ownership. These are listed and elaborated on below:

First, we shall consider the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. This is an Act that came into being in the year 1972 with a primary interest of safeguarding the ecological and environmental security of the nation's wild flora and fauna. The Act lists all endemic wildlife in six schedules (Schedules

1 to 6) with varying degrees of protection, wherein animals in Schedule 1 are afforded the highest level of protection. Elephants, along with several other conservation-dependent species, are listed under Schedule 1 of the Act thereby providing them with the highest priority in terms of legal status. This makes hunting of elephants, including capturing them or keeping them in captivity without permission, an offence that is punishable with the most severe penalties under the Act. Provisions under this Act lay down the basic principles of law that even allow for owning an elephant in the first place, failing which any elephant owned otherwise is automatically illegal.

Further, Section 40 of the Act requires that any person who owns or inherits an elephant by any means is required to declare such transaction to the concerned government authority in order to begin the process of acquiring legal custody of the elephant. Consequentially, Section 42 of the Act then requires that the competent government authority, who is also the head of wildlife services for a particular state, inspect any such claimant to ascertain their capacity to care for a captive elephant including space, financial resources and other housing, maintenance and upkeep facilities as may be required before granting a revocable certificate of ownership for the elephant in question. Furthermore, under Section 40, subsection 2 of the Act clearly states the protocols involved for transfer of custody of elephants and transport of elephants across state boundaries. Transfer of ownership/custody of an elephant can only take place via written permission from the head of wildlife services of the state, and transport of elephants between states can only take place if there are certificates of no objection issued by the state of origin and state of intended travel.

Section 43, subsection 1 of the Act places a clear prohibition on transfer of ownership of elephants by sale or any form of barter or offer for sale. Furthermore, Section 39, subsection 1(c) and Section 40, subsection 1 place a complete prohibition on trade of ivory or tusk in any form including ivory that has been imported into the country. This also implies that any tusk or ivory article already in possession needs to be declared to the government.

Violation of any of the sections above in relation to an elephant could earn the offender a jail term that may extend up to seven years and a penalty that may extend up to 200,000 INR (approximately US$2600) or both. In cases of repeated offence by the same individual or firm, the penalty may extend up to 5,000,000 INR.

Next, we shall review the Declaration of Wildlife Stock Rules, 2003 (DWSR). These were a set of rules passed in the year 2003 to provide an amnesty scheme to those who had in any way defaulted under the various sections of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, with a view to regulating and updating the stock of privately owned elephants, other wildlife and wildlife articles across the country. There are several salient features of these rules pertaining to elephants. Rule 11(3) mandated for the first time the insertion of a radio frequency identification (RFID) based microchip for every captive elephant across the country for the purpose of identification of each individual elephant. Rules 4 and 8 (and subsections therein) provided an opportunity for those who were in possession of undeclared elephants to declare them to

the relevant authorities and seek a certificate of ownership of the elephants if they met the eligibility criteria, failing which the elephants were confiscated.

We move on to review the Guidelines for Care and Management of Captive Elephants (GCMCE). In 2008, Project Elephant, a wing of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, concerned with the protection and care of elephants in captivity, and owing to each state government's incapacity to do so, circulated a set of guidelines for the states to follow (Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, 2008). It emphasized the need for microchipping individual elephants for the purpose of identification. It also stressed the point that elephants that were not declared under the WLPA, 1972 or DWSR, 2003 needed to be confiscated immediately. It highlighted that certificates of ownership for calves can only be issued to calves that are born to legally owned elephant cows. GCMCE also added the caveat that elephants that are being transported across state boundaries need a health certificate issued by a qualified veterinarian as a prerequisite for transport. It further placed the onus upon the head of wildlife services for the state that permission for transport to another state has to be for a stipulated duration and cannot be open-ended.

Next, we consider the Performing Animals Rules (PAR). This set of rules was passed in 2001 under the overarching Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960, wherein it mandates that if elephants are to be used for providing rides or for the purposes of safaris or other events, the owner needs to apply to the Animal Welfare Board of India for permission and only use the elephant as specified.

In addition, the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 (PCA) is an overarching Act that safeguards the interest of all animals – wild or domestic – to which any form of cruelty is meted out. While the Act, drafted in 1960, is outdated in terms of the penalties it can impose, complaints under this Act empower the state police to conduct a thorough investigation to report and highlight all forms of cruelty to elephants, which can form a foundation for custodian agencies such as the state forest department to withdraw certificate of ownership and consequently confiscate the elephant and move it to a facility with better care.

Aside from the laws and rules listed above, which provide for direct care or regulation of ownership of elephants, some aspects of environmental pollution around places where elephants are housed are also another arrow in the quiver for animal welfare activists who seek a better quality of life for these elephants in captivity.

Discussion on Effectiveness and Conclusion

While the regulations and laws listed in the section above pose what seems like a formidable challenge to irresponsible elephant ownership in India, the reality is far from it. As with most regulations their effectiveness fails when it comes to their implementation on the ground.

For instance, 19 elephants in Amer Fort were found to be blind, 28 of them were over the age of 50 and 10 of them tested positive for tuberculosis. Section 11 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act clearly disqualifies from employment any animal that is unfit for reasons of age, disease, infirmity, wounds, sores or other causes. Furthermore, the GCMCE specifies that an elephant of 2.55 metres shoulder height can carry a load of no more than 400 kg all-inclusive, and in hilly or difficult terrain, this load limit is reduced to 200 kg. In a clear violation of this, elephants at Amer Fort carry garments and a howdah, which in itself is about 200 kg. Over and above this weight, they carry the weight of tourists and the mahout. Add to this the fact that these elephants are housed and confined in living conditions that do not meet any of the standards set by the GCMCE or the Central Zoo Authority (CZA) for elephants in recognized zoos.

Furthermore, elephants in Kerala too are regularly used in religious events and for general display to the public despite documented injuries, wounds and signs of trauma in animals in a clear violation of PCA, 1960 and in non-adherence to GCMCE. To seek solace for these animals, in 2014, a public interest litigation was filed in the Supreme Court by the Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre in response to which the Supreme Court instructed the district administration to ensure the least possible stress to elephants during festivals and to ban the use of metal chains with spikes for tethering, to provide shade during non-working hours and to prohibit the release of firecrackers near elephants. Despite these instructions from the Supreme Court, blatant violations of the order and various acts and guidelines continue unabated.

A renowned religious institution in Kerala that owns over 50 elephants annually organizes an elephant race in which 10 elephants participate, with the winning elephant getting the reward of carrying the idol of the deity on its back for the remainder of the year on any special occasion (Animal Welfare Board of India, Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, 2014). Under relevant sections of the PCA, 1960, these participating elephants qualify as performing animals and hence need to be registered with the AWBI as performing animals prior to the race itself. However, in 2014, AWBI in its report clearly stated that none of the elephants 'exhibited' at this event are registered with them as performing animals.

In various investigative reports in both locations and several others, investigators have found blatant disregard for documentation of ownership and transfer of ownership of captive elephants. Laws regarding transport of elephants across state boundaries are flouted on a regular basis and some elephant owners get away with this by citing their poor financial conditions, with the elephant being their only means of livelihood. The guidelines laid down by GCMCE are not met in any privately owned locations across the country that have been thoroughly investigated thus far. The biggest failure of the GCMCE is the fact that while they are in place and serve as a benchmark, they are merely guidelines and are hence not enforceable by law.

The authors of this chapter believe that there is scope for better private elephant ownership under further scrutiny of the Wildlife Protection Act through its own definitions and sections.

> A 'zoo' is defined as an *establishment*, whether *stationary or mobile*, where *captive animals* are kept for *exhibition to the public* [which includes circuses and rescue centres but does not include licensed dealers in captive animals].
>
> (WLPA, 1972)

According to this definition, any religious institution or place of tourism that serves as a *stationary establishment*, where elephants are kept for *exhibition to the public*, qualifies as a zoo. Then, as per Section 38 of the WLPA, they need to be recognized by the CZA as Section 38 states that 'no zoo shall be operated without being recognized by the (central zoo) Authority'. If the definition of zoos is extended to include places of tourism and religious institutions and they fall under the purview of the CZA, they automatically have to adhere to more stringent measures laid down by CZA, failing which the establishment can lose their recognition leading to confiscation of animals. However, for unsatisfactory reasons and without due diligence, in 2015 the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change denied the extension of the definition of the term zoos to encompass places of tourism and worship (CZA; Varma, 2015, pers. comm.). One of the reasons given was a lack of workforce to impose the same and the fact that most places of tourism or worship only 'hire' elephants from private individuals and do not own the elephants themselves. These arguments hold no water as the definition of the term zoo can even extend to individuals as well thereby only strengthening the regulation further.

In conclusion, while the efficacy of regulations and regulatory bodies has failed elephants and their welfare in the past, we believe the onus now lies squarely on potential tourists who might subscribe to riding elephants or potential advocates to further amplify the voices of animal welfare activists, who have been crying themselves hoarse for decades now. Going back to the original premise of this chapter, the need for elephants to be used in tourism or places of worship will die down if the demand for the display and need to interact with these animals dies down as well. Elephants, as megafauna, as the largest living land mammal, have a vital role to play in the ecosystems they are present in. It is unjust to reduce their role to mere tools of entertainment for public consumption.

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13 Elephant Tourism Conservation and the Need for a New Strategy: Thai Stakeholder Attitudes

Ann Suwaree Ashton

National Institute of Development Administration, Bangkok, Thailand

Introduction

After the ban on logging in Thailand in 1989, many elephants and mahouts were forced to roam the city streets or take up work in the illegal logging trade, but those activities have now been banned, leaving elephants with tourism as their main source of income (Tipprasert, 2002). Several countries including India, Sri Lanka and Thailand use elephants to entertain tourists with activities such as riding, bathing and different kinds of shows, including drawing pictures and playing soccer (Laohachaiboon, 2010; Thongma and Guntoro, 2011; Lin, 2012; Cohen, 2015; Jarungrattanapong *et al*., 2017; Travel Weekly, 2019). Hence, elephant tourism has become a very popular industry attracting many tourists to travel to such destinations (Worwag *et al*., 2019). As a result, elephants globally, but particularly in Asia, are being trafficked into tourism to entertain tourists, and often suffer persistent abuse (Duffy and Moore, 2011).

From 2013–2016 many NGOs, and others including TUI, the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA), the Tourism Authority of Thailand and other animal welfare groups have taken an active approach to elephant welfare, especially in advocating for the removal all excursions to camps offering elephant-rides or shows (TUI Care Foundation, 2017). The elephant welfare issue has given rise to research into the current organization and operation of the elephant tourism camp business.

Elephant Tourism Business in Chiangmai

Among the many elephant tourism operators in northern Thailand are an increasing number of ethical elephant sanctuaries, such as Mae Taeng Valley

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(Happy Elephant Home), Maeklang Elephant Conservation Community (located at the foothills north of Doi Inthanon National Park) and another sanctuary located at Mae Taeng Elephant Park. Most of the ethical elephant sanctuaries do not allow tourists to ride elephants; the animals are not forcibly made to do anything – there is no prodding, no use of hooks or hitting them. They have freedom to move around and have plenty of room to do so; furthermore, the elephants receive adequate medical treatment[1].

The activities that ethical operators offer include: (i) a mud bath with the elephants; (ii) trekking to the river through a valley; (iii) learning about elephant behaviour; (iv) learning how to make elephant medicine, such as tamarind balls mixed with herbs to help the elephant's digestion; (v) collecting elephant food, such as sugarcane and maize, and replanting their food; (vi) feeding elephants; (vii) social interaction between tourists and the local community, such as joining in activities by learning about each other's culture and language, and food exchange; and (viii) elephant behaviour lessons. These tour programmes range from a half to a full day, or overnights deep in the forest accompanied by an experienced mahout. The overnight stay includes sleeping in a bamboo hut to wake up in the morning and see elephants nearby, giving tourists an opportunity to see the natural behaviour of elephants.

The managers of these elephant tourism camps work closely with the community where the camp is located. For example, they help in creating community awareness about elephant welfare, educate about animal treatment and employ locals in many jobs at the camps. Moreover, they buy elephant feed grown by local farmers. These programmes also provide young people with an opportunity to experience cultural diversity.

On the other hand, package tours that offer elephant-riding are still available, but with more consideration given to the elephants' needs. Only one or two tourists ride with the mahout, on a wooden seat strapped on to the back of the elephant. Elephants have been used as work animals over the centuries for lifting and pulling logs and they are strong, but their bodies aren't built to carry heavy loads on their shoulders. The criteria for elephant-riding is that the group size is limited to a total of 12 visitors per day, one person per elephant at a cost of approximately 5800 THB (approximately US$180) per person for a full day, or 3800 THB for a half-day.

Why is elephant tourism changing so rapidly?

The elephant can be seen as a high-profile animal because it is both a tourism attraction and important from an ecological perspective (O'Brien, 2002). In Thai culture the elephant is a sacred religious symbol, traditionally bringing good luck (Thongma and Guntoro, 2011). In the past the Thai king used elephants during wartime, and it is believed they played an important part in bringing victory (Duffy and Moore, 2010; Magda *et al*., 2015; Han, 2020). Traditionally, an elephant is part of the family and there is an emotional attachment with them (Masson and McCarthy, 2009; Dashper, 2020).

Over the past several years, there has been an increase in the number of pressure groups concerned with elephant welfare and cruelty in tourism businesses. This is especially the case when these businesses use them to entertain tourists (Çalik and Çiftçi, 2013; Fennell, 2013; Worwag *et al*., 2019; Baker and Winkler, 2020; Han, 2020). Animal welfare activists, NGOs and TUI have highlighted a need for legal action, and for strict adherence to prioritizing the elephants' welfare (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009; Duffy and Moore, 2011). In turn, businesses must develop action plans to provide management frameworks to address animal cruelty.

The Key Management Challenges for the Elephant Tourism Business

There are many challenges in dealing with elephant tourism (Berger, 2000). First, managers have to deal with the increasing voices calling for more elephant welfare, and at the same time make a profit (Bansiddhi *et al*., 2020). Dealing only with animal welfare means the elephants may not receive enough food or treatment for illness (Angkawanish *et al*., 2009). Furthermore, loss of income will affect mahouts, farmers and the local community, who earn money by supplying food for the elephants (Tipprasert, 2002; Han, 2020).

Businesses are caught between two groups: those for and those against the elephant tourism business. One group is concerned with elephant welfare; they believe it is cruel to use them for entertainment (Duffy and Moore, 2010; Duffy, 2014; Worwag *et al*., 2019). The other group expects to ride elephants when they visit a camp. For example, Worwag *et al*. (2019) found that there were significant differences in animal welfare concerns: Asian tourists in general have fewer animal welfare concerns than those who come from Western countries. Due to their different cultural background, people from Asia may consider using animals to entertain tourists to be normal. This study interviews people involved in the elephant camp business regarding how elephant camps can be better managed and what makes for success.

Methodology

A qualitative in-depth interview approach was employed, the respondents being elephant tourism camp owners/managers, researchers and staff. The participants were interviewed in-depth using a semi-structured technique with open-ended questions. The participants were selected from those who have been involved with elephant tourism in Chiangmai, Phuket and the north-east of Thailand. Face-to-face and phone interviews were conducted during April and June 2019 and February 2020. The selected areas are famous for elephant tourism in Thailand and attract many tourists to visit elephant camps; hence giving a depth of information from relevant participants

and helping to achieve the research aim. All interviews were conducted in Thai (the author of this chapter is herself Thai). Notes were taken during the interviews as it was felt that using recording equipment would not be acceptable to interviewees. The notes were transcribed into English when the researcher conducted the data analysis process. A total of eight participants were interviewed with ages between 26 and 62 years; they were mainly male with just one female.

Interview questions included: How have elephant camp managers responded to the changes in animal welfare perceptions? How have managers responded to travel agencies and tourists opposed to using elephants for tourism entertainment activity? Are these animal welfare rules effective? How do they organize elephant tours in a sustainable way? How are mahouts recruited and trained? Finally, what are their thoughts on elephant tourism innovations: coffee beans collected from elephant dung and elephant volunteer tourism?

Results – Elephant camp management in general

The elephant camps the researcher visited are mainly for tourists, but some allow tourists to ride elephants, while other do not. The number of elephants in each camp range from around seven elephants to 90. The elephant camps range in age from 3 to 25 years. The owners opened their elephant sanctuary because they want to help preserve the elephant's numbers. One elephant camp owner said that after he talked with the elephant authority at the Thai Elephant Conservation Center Lampang (northern Thailand) 24 years ago (around 1995) he became determined to help and rescue elephants.

Almost all owners started their businesses without knowing a lot about elephants, but had experience in tourism, often as tour guides bringing tourists to visit the elephant camps. Since they had been involved in this way, they saw the opportunity for starting a business that had high demand, especially now that elephant welfare has received attention from the public and official organizations. One noted, 'My purpose in opening an elephant sanctuary was because I was aware of the high demand from tourists and the public about elephant welfare and their wellbeing, so that's why I started my business; I have advertised as a sanctuary park where all elephants will be treated with ethics, such as no animal cruelty activities, and definitely riding is prohibited'.

When asked how they got tourists to visit it was found that some camps do their own international marketing, some rely on travel agents and tour counters in hotels and airports, and some only use word of mouth. Visitor numbers at big elephant camps have ranged from 3000 to 4000 per year, and for small camps, around 150–200. However, recent problems such as political unrest, the strong exchange rate of the Thai Baht and the spread of the COVID-19 virus (in 2020) have meant that a big camp may now receive only 5–30 tourists per day.

Mahouts usually find a job by word of mouth, especially when someone in their family or a person in the same village used to do this job. The majority of mahouts in one elephant camp were from Myanmar, while others are from an ethnic group that used to live in the mountains a long time ago. Mahouts must use no cruelty to elephants in any way, and if they do the owner will charge them a fine. One owner said, 'I once fined one of my mahouts 2500 Baht for using the bull hook and hitting an elephant too hard'. A mahout must know how to control them, train the elephants to do an activity, look after their health, bathe and feed them, and observe their mood and behaviour. A mahout's skill is ranked at three levels: lowest, looking after elephants in general; middle, an ability to train an elephant; and highest, able to be in control when an elephant is in trouble (elephant falls, gets disturbed).

In good times, the income from tourists that owners receive provides some profit, but if tourist numbers are low owners have to find alternative ways to cover their costs. In early 2020, international tourist numbers have declined dramatically, hence they are heavily advertising visiting elephant camps to locals, school children, local government officers and domestic tourists at a low price. All owners agreed that a business must set and follow animal welfare rules, service standards for tourists and good human resource practice standards.

Responding to Animal Welfare Issues

When asked about elephant cruelty, participants did not consider they are cruel to the elephants, and they treat and love them like one of their family members. They also are concerned that their elephants don't know how to survive by themselves, and if released into the forest might die.

The participants said that camp elephants have a good life, and the activity that they have to perform is easier than pulling logs. The elephants get used to performing activities for tourists, and ensuring elephant tourism businesses survive is vital for elephants. The cost of looking after one elephant is approximately 500 THB per day and some camps must pay 25,000–30,000 THB a month to rent an elephant. If elephants are not used in the tourism industry, it is difficult to see how to ensure they will survive.

Most participants accepted animal welfare had become a serious issue, and that some camp managers overuse and are cruel to elephants. The government has introduced laws protecting elephant welfare and requires every captive elephant birth to be registered, with the animal given an ID card and microchipped. This legislation requires mahouts working in elephant camps to obtain a licence, and elephant camp managers/owners have to have a permit to operate their camps from the Department of National Parks, renew that permit every three years and submit to inspections (Royal Thai Embassy, Washington DC, 2018).

One participant noted that there is still some tourist demand to get close to and to ride elephants. In particular, some travel agents advertise and sell elephant tourism packages to tourists with activities that include taking a bath with an elephant, a mud bath and other performances and riding (the more packages they sell, the more elephants have to take a bath). As a consequence, in the high season elephants may get foot disease; however, the money brought in means that owners ignore the animal welfare regulations. In response to the animal welfare restrictions, some elephant tourism camps have obeyed and complied with the government laws and restrictions and provide good hygiene and a clean place for their elephants to live. The animal welfare department holds inspections regularly to see how the elephants are treated.

Elephant camp owners/managers are mostly adhering to the government regulations. However, some ignore the rules and think about how much money they can make during the high season. The elephant tourism business can be sustainable and protective if animal welfare regulations are followed.

How Do Managers Respond to Tourists Using Elephants for Tourism Entertainment Activities?

Tourism camp managers identified two groups of tourists: one is opposed to using elephants for tourism entertainment activities, and another expects to interact closely and ride them. In Thailand, tourists who visit elephant camps come mainly from China, India, Malaysia, European countries such as Germany, Austria, England, and also from Australia, the USA and New Zealand. Tourists from Asia and those from European countries have different approaches when visiting elephant camps. Specifically, there is a high demand from Asian tourists for elephant touring, including riding, bathing and feeding by hand.

In contrast, one manager said that on one occasion a European tourist visited the camp and was crying when watching the elephant show. The manager comforted them and took the person away from the showground and tried to explain that he did not treat the elephants cruelly, and that the elephants get used to this kind of show and people riding them. As a result the manager decided that he would not sell elephant tourism packages to the European groups. The manager said that many European tourists see elephant tourism as animal cruelty; they do not support elephant-riding, and believe elephants have the right to live in places more suitable for them – in the forest if possible. Some elephant camp owners acknowledge this issue and sell a different package to that for Asian tourists, and in a sustainable and ethical way. For example, they offer a package that avoids animal cruelty activity: instead of providing elephant-riding and tracking tours, they offer bush-walking to see how the elephants live, including overnight stays and sleeping in a bamboo hut in the deep forest. They said this activity package

has garnered high demand, as people can enjoy walking and experience nature in the forests of Thailand and have an opportunity to interact with the local community.

In addition, the managers said that sometime tourists complain when they see a mahout pulling an elephant's ears or shouting very loudly at them. The managers said that sometimes tourists don't really understand elephant behaviour, such as they have to shout because the elephants sometimes behave very badly and don't follow their orders. Therefore, elephants are just like humans, or rather children: when spoken to normally they will not obey, but when there is an aggressive voice yelling at them they get scared and do as the mahout orders.

New Innovations for Elephant Tourism Conservation

One novel and innovative idea is to offer elephant dung coffee beans. For example, in the Mahasarakham Province of Thailand, a group of people within the elephant farm industry established this business, and many tourists have visited it. The process of making elephant dung coffee involves, first, selecting the coffee beans, usually from Arabica coffee plants; this type grows best at 1500 metres above sea level. Second, feed Arabica coffee beans to the elephants; they eat the beans voluntarily, and are not forced. Third, wait to collect elephant droppings. Fourth, the mahout will extract the coffee beans and dry them in the sun.

The response from customers and stakeholders has been reasonably good. The coffee beans are very valuable and worth around 40,000–50,000 THB ($1200–1500) per kg, making them the most expensive coffee beans in the world. The claim is that the process of the coffee beans passing through the inside of the animal allows particular enzymes to enhance the coffee bean flavour, helping to reduce the bitterness of the coffee; it has a stronger coffee aroma, and the coffee gives a slight sweet taste at the tip of the tongue after drinking it.

One example is the Golden Elephant Center in Mahasarakham Province in the north-east of Thailand. Established in 2009, initially the centre was formed because they wanted to rescue disabled elephants that were unable to give tourists a ride; presently there are 10 elephants at this centre. After this, the committee decided to establish the Elephant Dung Coffee Bean project. The project assists animal welfare groups in avoiding animal cruelty, creating jobs and raising income for many related people in the community. Interestingly, these special coffee beans have been exported to many countries around the world, in particular, Singapore, Finland and China (Moonvapee, 2019). In turn, this business has had a huge impact on local residents around the villages by creating many jobs and helping to raise more income for elephant survival, and by doing the right thing for animal welfare (Moonvapee, 2019).

Discussion and Conclusion

Many elephant camp managers focus on following animal welfare regulations. Second, they respond to tourist demand by changing elephant camp activities provided to match the requirements of different groups. Third, they are seeking new innovative ways to promote elephant tourism products and services to tourists. Fourth, they are implementing best practice in human resource management, with good working standards, wages, health care benefits and equal rights at the workplace; however, there must also be discipline for when staff don't follow the workplace rules.

Those managers/owners interviewed all agree that elephant welfare is important. There are two main opinions of tourists on elephant tourism: one group of tourists is for animal conservation and is against unethical elephant practice; another group wants interaction and to get close to them.

The argument about elephant tourism is still ongoing, particularly on how to end animal cruelty in tourism and improve the situation of animals, thereby gaining international acceptance. In this study, it was discovered that many elephant camps provide elephant activities that respond to tourist demand, such as by avoiding animal cruelty, and providing sustainable activities instead. As reported in past literature reviews, the challenge for elephant camps is how to meet tourist demands, even though one group's demand may oppose the other, but there can be a balance between the two groups. However, the product and services they provide for the elephant situation can still be based on good ethics and morals (Duffy and Moore, 2010; Duffy, 2014; Worwag *et al*., 2019). This study is in agreement with past studies asserting that it is important to launch legal action and ensure elephant welfare at all elephant camps (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009; Duffy and Moore, 2011).

The findings indicate that many (but not all) elephant camps are establishing standards based on elephant health and wellbeing, environmental sustainability and customer satisfaction. Managers/owners and tour agents are able to develop businesses successfully by proposing new elephant activities. Examples of this are package tours that include trekking and staying overnight with the elephants, or packages for tourists to visit elephant sanctuaries where the activity is not in conflict with animal rights, such as feeding elephants, collecting food and replanting the food. Another way is to develop new products related to elephants, such as selling elephant dung coffee.

The limitation of this study is that only elephant camp managers/owners and staff were interviewed. Local residents who live nearby and have not been directly involved with elephant camp tourism are yet to be studied. Hence, in the future maybe it will be beneficial to conduct a study based on this group and ask what they think about the current phenomenon of elephant tourism and animal welfare. Currently, the elephant camp business is facing a crisis, especially from the COVID-19 virus. A good idea for future research would be a study on the impacts of crises and how to survive such situations.

Note

[1] See photo 7 in the Elephant Portrait Gallery.

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14 Elephant Tourism, the *ABTA Animal Welfare Guidelines*

Clare Jenkinson

ABTA, London, United Kingdom

Animal Welfare in Tourism

Animal attractions and experiences are now a common part of many holidays, but while animal attractions are undoubtedly popular with customers, they want to be assured of good animal welfare standards. A 2017 ComRes survey found that 71% of respondents would be more likely to buy from a travel company that cares for animals. When travel providers and suppliers work together, visitors can have meaningful, rewarding experiences and standards of animal welfare and customer health and safety can be upheld. This approach can achieve longer-term business success, raise welfare standards across the industry, and strengthen the partnerships that exist between travel providers and animal-related attractions. This is a true for elephant venues as it is for other types of animal attractions.

About ABTA

ABTA has been a trusted travel brand for over 70 years. Our purpose is to help our members to grow their businesses successfully and sustainably, and to help their customers travel with confidence. The ABTA brand stands for support, protection and expertise. This means consumers have confidence in ABTA and a strong trust in ABTA members. These qualities are core to us as they ensure that holidaymakers remain confident in the holiday products that they buy from our members. We help our members and their customers navigate through today's changing travel landscape by raising standards in the industry; offering schemes of financial protection; providing an independent complaints resolution service should something go wrong; giving guidance on issues from sustainability to health and safety; and by presenting a united voice to government to ensure the industry and the public get a fair deal. ABTA has more than 4300 travel brands in membership, providing a wide

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range of leisure and business travel services, with a combined annual UK turnover of £39 billion.

The *ABTA Animal Welfare Guidelines*

ABTA supports its members on animal welfare by providing advice, guidance and tools to them. The 2019 edition of the *ABTA Animal Welfare Guidelines*, together with a series of supporting guidance manuals, set out basic welfare requirements and unacceptable practices, as defined by evidence supplied by experts. The guidelines have been developed in consultation with a broad range of experts across NGOs, academia and industry. They bring together existing guidance and are intended for travel providers to issue to their suppliers, for tourist boards and relevant destination authorities as well as animal attractions. The guidance manual (ABTA, 2019a) and its supporting guidance manuals (ABTA, 2019b, c, d, e, f) are intended to be practical guides for the suppliers of animal experiences and attractions offered within the tourism industry, in the absence of international regulations.

What is Animal Welfare?

Animal welfare refers to the physical and mental state of the animal. An animal may experience positive mental states if it is healthy, well nourished, safe, able to exhibit choice and control over its behavioural repertoire, and if it is not suffering from unpleasant, negative mental states such as pain, fear and distress. Other terms such as animal care, husbandry or humane treatment refer to how an animal is looked after. Reasonable animal welfare requires those responsible to ensure disease prevention and veterinary treatment, appropriate and enriching environments, shelter, management, nutrition, humane handling and opportunities for social interactions. Animals in a captive environment rely on the care and ability of humans to provide them with what they need to maintain their welfare.

The *ABTA Animal Welfare Guidelines* overview manual (ABTA, 2019a) and its supporting guidance manuals (ABTA, 2019b, c, d, e, f) build upon the principles of the extended Five Domains model (developed by Mellor and Beausoleil, 2015, originally based on the Farm Animal Welfare Council's Five Freedoms (Farm Animal Welfare Council's Five Freedoms, 1979) and the Welfare Quality® criteria. The extended Five Domains model is the most contemporary and well-accepted framework for measuring animal welfare. The main improvement from the Five Freedoms, on which it was based, is the consideration of positive welfare as well as negative, since minimizing negative welfare states does not automatically guarantee positive ones. Figure 14.1 shows the four main 'functional' domains, and how the fifth 'Mental State' domain integrates all the conditions from

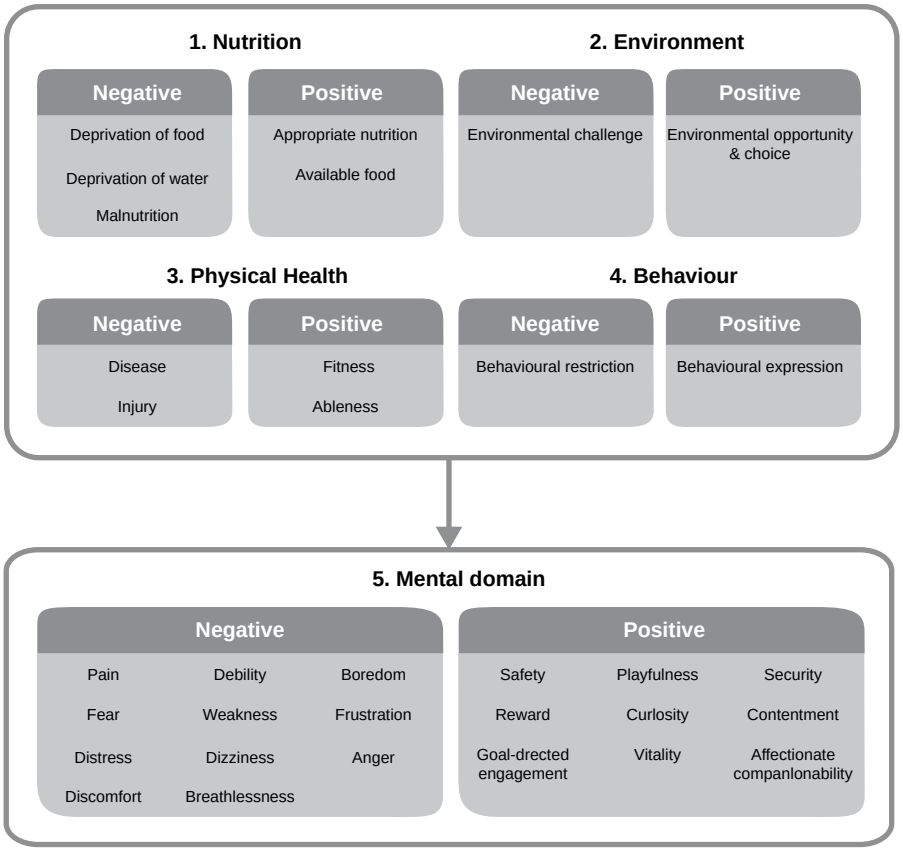

Fig. 14.1. Extended Five Domains for measuring animal welfare.

Source: ABTA

these four and describes indicators of an animal's positive and negative mental states.

Basic Welfare Requirements for Animals Managed and/or Dependent upon Human Beings

The *ABTA Animal Welfare Guidelines* (ABTA, 2019a) set out basic welfare requirements for animals managed and/or dependent upon human beings, structured within the Five Domains framework. The four physical and functional domains of Nutrition, Environment, Physical Health and Behaviour combine to result in the animal's Mental State. These requirements should be understood and implemented by suppliers to ensure that negative impacts are minimized or eliminated.

Nutrition

1. All animals have unrestricted daily access to adequate and clean drinking water in line with their species-specific needs.
2. All animals are provided access to food that is adequate in quality, amount and variety for the species, the captive environment and the individual animals' needs. Feeding routines should be species-specific, mentally stimulating and encourage natural behaviours.

Environment

1. In captivity, enclosures are environmentally complex, including natural substrate, structures, shelter and environmental enrichment, in order to encourage a normal and diverse behavioural repertoire.
2. All animals should be able to access shelter and a climatic environment suitable for their species-specific needs and seek privacy from view.
3. In captivity, enclosures are clean, hygienic, free of excessive artificial noise such as visitor or speaker noise, and well maintained (e.g. devoid of excessive faeces, urine or rotting food, litter, not waterlogged, not infested with vermin, etc.).

Physical health

1. The facility has access to a vet, either employed or externally contracted, who is knowledgeable and experienced in the health and welfare of the relevant animals.
2. There is a policy not to surgically modify the skin, tissues, teeth or bone structure of animals, and not to sedate animals, unless it is for the purpose of genuine medical treatment or improved welfare, and always under the guidance of an appropriately trained vet.
3. Complete, accurate animal stocklists, veterinary records and any appropriate licences or permits should be up to date and available for inspection. The required paperwork should be in place for all animals.

Behaviour

1. In captivity, enclosures (including pools) or methods used to contain the animals for temporary periods allow all the animals to move and exercise freely, and to maintain sufficient distance from other animals in case of conflict.
2. Depending on their species-specific and seasonal needs, animals should have the opportunity to interact regularly with other members of their species. Animals should not be prematurely separated from their young.
3. Any training of animals should never involve punishment or food deprivation.

Elephants in Tourism

In both wild and captive environments, elephants can benefit from tourism revenues that help to fund their care, and more broadly, fund elephant conservation. Elephant attractions can also be major contributors to economies and employment opportunities. In recent years, there has been considerable growth in scientific literature looking at the welfare of captive elephants in Asia. It is clear that elephant attractions require a carefully managed approach to meet welfare needs.

Managing Welfare for Elephants in Tourism

The *Elephants in Captive Environments* manual (ABTA, 2019c) sets out how to meet their basic welfare requirements across the four domains. For example, in terms of nutrition, diets should be specific to the individual's needs and should be predominantly composed of high-fibre roughage. The welfare risks of high calorie, low-fibre foods such as bananas and sugarcane are well documented, for example (Norkaew *et al*., 2019).

In terms of behaviour, elephants are active, inquisitive and intelligent animals. Ideally, they should have the opportunity to perform foraging/masticating behaviour for up to 13 hours per day and walk for up to 10 km per day.

A level of training of captive elephants is necessary for medical or enrichment purposes; however, traditional elephant training techniques include punishment, food deprivation and/or premature calf separation from the mother.

While there is work to promote alternative training methods, this is not currently widespread practice. For example, Bansiddhi *et al*. (2019) found that 60% of the 122 elephants they surveyed were controlled by hooks, and that this was associated with a higher frequency of wounds. Another study found that 85% of the 33 camps studied used hooks, and that other tools such as knives, nails and slingshots were also used (Bansiddhi *et al*., 2018).

Unacceptable Practices

In the development of the guidelines, contributors provided evidence that certain activities demonstrated a significant risk to animal welfare, and these activities have therefore been classified as 'unacceptable'. The full list of unacceptable practices is available in ABTA (2019f). Below are three unacceptable practices relevant to captive elephants in Asia:

Animal breeding or commercial trade in sanctuaries and orphanages

An animal sanctuary is a facility that provides short- or long-term refuge and/or rehabilitation for rescued, injured, confiscated, orphaned or abandoned

animals. Animal welfare should be the primary concern and living conditions for all animals should meet their species-specific needs.

Sanctuaries and orphanages should not breed animals or be involved in the commercial trade or loan of their animals to other facilities. Allowing animals to breed will divert valuable resources away from rescuing animals in need and can result in animals being kept in inadequate, overcrowded conditions.

Tourist contact or feeding elephants without a barrier

As with other animals, humans have been training elephants for centuries, using a variety of methods. Traditional elephant-training techniques include punishment, food deprivation and/or premature calf separation from the mother.

Hands-on tourist–elephant interactions (without a physical barrier between them) require a high level of control of the elephant, and therefore a likelihood of training methods such as punishment, food deprivation and/or premature calf separation from the mother.

Elephant shows or performances for tourists

Elephant shows and performances for tourist viewing are commonplace in countries such as Thailand. In the past, increased demand for elephant tourism has led to competition between venues to display more extreme and unusual 'tricks' (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009). The performances are rarely based on the animals' natural behaviour and have little to no educational content (Schmidt-Burbach *et al.*, 2015). Elephant shows can include elephant polo, elephant football, elephants shooting darts at balloons and elephants painting pictures.

Shows require a high level of control over the elephants, and therefore a likelihood of training methods such as punishment, food deprivation and/or premature calf separation from the mother.

Implementation of the Guidance

ABTA's role is to provide advice, guidance and tools to its members to support them to implement approaches that respect animal welfare. Implementation of the guidelines is voluntary.

The guidance and its supporting manuals are intended to be practical guides for travel providers to issue to their suppliers, for tourist boards in destinations, for destination governments and, ultimately and most importantly, for animal attraction and experience suppliers.

Responsible Transition

We are very aware that no longer selling an attraction doesn't mean the problem of poor treatment goes away, which is why members work with suppliers to help them develop a responsible alternative. For elephants, that would be moving to activities where the animals are viewed from an appropriate distance while providing them with as much access to their natural habitat as possible, and ensuring they are not subject to harmful training methods.

This clearly takes time, and it also requires travel companies to understand and work within the complexities around elephants in tourism, such as the dependence on these animals for communities' livelihoods and cultural attitudes towards animals. Making the practice unacceptable should help to emphasize the need for change to suppliers in destination.

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Section 5 Elephants and Their Stories

15 A Case Study of Elephant Venue Narratives

Jeffrey Dale Hobbs[1] and Piengpen Na Pattalung[2]

[1]*Phuket College of International Tourism, Phuket, Thailand*
[2]*Phuket Rajabhat University, Phuket, Thailand*

Introduction

Elephants are an important resource in Thailand's tourism industry. Tourists ride elephants[1], feed elephants, pose for pictures with elephants and watch them perform in various shows. However, does animal tourism help or hurt the elephants it depends on for sustainability? Research in Thailand by Schmidt-Burbach *et al*. (2015) suggests that there are 'significant concerns about the welfare of elephants at tourism venues, as well as concerns regarding the potential negative impact of the industry on the conservation of these species in the wild'. Bone and Bone (2015, p. 60) argue that 'The exploitation of animals and women in Thailand's tourism industry is both disturbing and disturbingly similar'.

Additionally, the concept of animal rights has been gaining ground in both the East and the West as Wayne Pacelle of the Humane Society believes that 'We're really seeing a rising tide of consciousness when it comes to the treatment of animals' (Allen, 2017). For example, the World Animal Protection organization has developed a 'Wildlife Selfie Code' that over a quarter of a million people have signed. The code's rules specify that pictures should not be taken with any animals such as chained elephants or drugged tigers (Coconuts Bangkok, 2018, 31 January).

Such concerns have the potential to significantly damage the profitability and viability of animal tourist attractions. The World Animal Protection organization reported that the Chinese are beginning to favour wildlife-friendly tours, so elephant-rides by Chinese tourists have declined by 13% and elephant show watching has declined by 26% since 2016 (TTR Weekly, 2019).

Based on these trends, what is the future of elephant tourism in Thailand? Soraida Sawala, founder of the Friends of the Asian Elephant Hospital, notes: 'This practice is going to lessen over time. I don't want elephants in this industry at all, but the ones in captivity can't go back to the wild. So, we have to find a way not to exploit or abuse those that are currently captive' (Touhy, 2017).

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One avenue for exploring the impact of animal tourism on elephants is to examine the narratives told about elephants at tourist attractions as these stories influence how people respond to these animals. As Bayha (2012, p. 29) points out, 'our stories can become our policies for wise wildlife management' or, we would caution, our stories might lead to unwise policies. Furthermore, laws, including those regarding the treatment of animals, have a greater chance of success when they fit within the narratives of the culture as the rationale for the law is more clearly understood and accepted (see Tait and Norris, 2011).

Review of Literature and Research Questions

The elephant is important to the tourism industry in many countries and numerous NGOs exist that have the goal of helping to develop regulations regarding the use of elephants in tourism (Duffy and Moore, 2011). One point of controversy that exists between the NGOs and elephant-using countries is over how the elephants should be viewed. NGOs 'see elephants as 'wild' animals vs local-level practices that value elephants as working animals, especially in Thailand' (Duffy and Moore, 2011). Duffy and Moore (2010) argue that viewing elephants as working animals leads to their commodification, which makes elephants easy (as compared with other countries) to acquire in Thailand (p. 754) and their survival dependent on their economic contributions to the businesses that own them (p. 758).

The dominant narratives about animals, such as elephants as working animals, are the narratives that will shape policy towards animals. Hickey (2009), in an article about the Endangered Species Act, writes, 'The side that succeeds in elaborating a narrative that definitively describes the problem has an enormous advantage. The way people think about a problem shapes what they are willing to do about it' (p. 441). There is evidence that narratives about animals can help form communities and ideologies centred on caring for a particular animal; for example, a study by Birke *et al*. (2010) points out that horse owners develop stories that involve moral discourse in regard to how horses should be cared for.

Our previous investigation of all types of animal attractions in Phuket (Hobbs and Na Pattalung, 2018) revealed that animal narratives centred on six themes: anthropomorphism and zoomorphism, commercial uses of animals, conservation and ethical treatment of animals, danger and mystery, interactions with animals and science. It is possible to narrow these six themes into one grand metanarrative – humans have the right to dominate animals. This domination of animals is accomplished by defining their characteristics in human terms, using their live bodies and their corpses to make money, owning the right to decide what is ethical and unethical in their treatment, labelling them as dangerous (a threat to humans that needs to be controlled by training, chains and cages), defining the nature of our interactions and by classifying them as we will (Hobbs and Na Pattalung, 2018). The current research seeks to discover if this narrative remains the same or changes when

only stories about elephants are considered. Thus, the following two research questions are proposed:

> RQ1: What narratives about elephants are communicated by tourist attractions in Phuket?
> RQ2: What do these narratives communicate to Thai and foreign tourists as appropriate beliefs, values and actions regarding elephants?

Answers to such questions are bound to be complex. As Herzog (2011, p. 279) notes, '…our attitudes, behaviors and relationships with the animals in our lives—the ones we love, the ones we hate, and the ones we eat—are, likewise, more complicated than we thought'. Yet, understanding the narratives surrounding animals can improve our moral discourse and reasoning by providing case studies and by increasing our knowledge of foundational stories (metanarratives) or mythologies (Anthony, 2009, pp. 264–265).

Foundational stories '…permeate the very fibre of our collective consciousness and capture central cultural commitments, which serve as foundational fodder that sources our moral intuitions or judgments' (p. 265).

Methodology

This section describes how a case study of the narratives about elephants presented at tourist attractions in Phuket was conducted. This discussion covers research purpose and design, sample selection, and data collection and analysis procedures.

Research purpose and design

A case study utilizing narrative rhetorical criticism was conducted to discover what narratives are told about elephants by the tourist venues in Phuket that feature them. Case study research using rhetorical analysis has the ability to provide unique insights to tourism research. Walle (1997, pp. 534–535) explains:

> [Etic/Scientific investigation] … leads to the possibility of oversimplifying reality by only examining phenomena in ways which reflect rigorous data gathering. As a result of employing such strategies, it becomes impossible to examine 'reality' in all its complexity. Emit/humanistic/artistic investigation, precisely because it is not hobbled by exacting research techniques, is free to ask questions which the rigorous researcher cannot easily pursue. [And,] … throughout history [emit] fools have often been the harborers of great wisdom precisely because they were able to transcend the conventions of their era and strike at the heart of the issue.

Sample selection

The subjects for the case study were animal and cultural tourist attractions which featured elephants and that were located in Phuket, Thailand. The

presence of both types of tourist venues featuring elephants makes Phuket an ideal location for the case study.

Additionally, according to a survey by Euromonitor International, Phuket is the 11th ranked tourist destination in the world based on the number of international arrivals, with over 10 million visitors each year (O'Hare, 2017). Travel insurance specialist Columbus Direct reports that '…Phuket has the highest number of visitors per square mile per day than any other tourist destination in the world' (Phuket News, 2019, 20 September). Another factor in favour of Phuket as the focus of the case study includes the negative international press that Phuket has received regarding the treatment of elephants. For example, an online campaign characterized a baby elephant at the Phuket Zoo as a real-life Dumbo (Sakoot, 2019). The Moving Animals website reported in 2019 (Moving Animals, 2019):

> Whilst documenting the animals confined to Phuket Zoo in Thailand, we met a skeletal baby elephant who was forced to 'rave' to music, 'play' musical instruments, and perform tricks, all for tourists' entertainment. (…)
>
> We were so moved by his plight, that we nicknamed him 'Dumbo' and started a petition asking for him to be retired to a nearby sanctuary. His story went viral and over 200,000 compassionate people from around the world demanded that the zoo release him to a sanctuary where he could feel happiness and peace.

Unfortunately, 'Dumbo' died while still at the zoo.

The specific tourist attractions selected were the Phuket Elephant Sanctuary, the Phuket Zoo, Pang Chang Kamala (elephant trekking), Phuket FantaSea and Siam Niramit.

Data collection and analysis procedures

Data were collected by observing the activities and artefacts (shows, buildings, stores, restaurants, activities, souvenirs, etc.) of these tourist attractions. As Bal (2009, p. 5) explains, 'A *narrative text* is a text in which an agent or subject conveys to an addressee ("tells" the reader) a story in a particular medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof'. Copious notes and pictures were taken at each site. While our method shares some aspects in common with participant observation, the two should not be confused. Our method is derived from rhetorical theory and the practice of rhetorical criticism.

Narrative analysis as developed from the narrative paradigm of Fisher (1987) was used as the primary means of analysis. Foss (2004) explains that of particular importance is the discovery of metanarratives (e.g. patriarchy) that serve as driving forces in the culture. According to the narrative paradigm, people use stories to explain their actions and 'a significant feature of compelling stories is that they provide a rationale for decision and action' (Fisher, 1985, p. 364). Previously, Fisher (1984, p. 2) had written that narratives function 'inevitably (as) moral inducements'. In other

words, all narratives are like *Aesop's Fables* – the morals are just not always explicitly stated. Such narrative analyses can be used, among other things, to determine how a narrative serves to guide the interpretation of an event, works as a persuasive argument, provides a revelation regarding a culture's identity and/or determines the likely effects of a narrative on those who hear it (Foss, 2004).

As such, our method of analysis involved narrative rhetorical criticism as we examined the 'texts' of the surface narratives in search of the metanarratives being communicated at tourist venues in Phuket that featured elephants. Postmodern thought has illuminated the hazards of relying too heavily on the traditional concepts of author, intent and audience (Covino and Joliffe, 1995, p. 76). People can tell stories that they are unaware of (and do not intend to tell) by using the scripts based on the metanarratives of their culture that are embedded in the language. For example, sexist language tells the story of patriarchy whether or not the speaker intends to convey that meaning.

Thus, our analysis presents stories or narratives that we have observed at the tourist locations. We are fully aware that other interpretations are possible, tourists often do not come up with the same story at a tourist attraction (Chronis, 2012, p. 1812). Our Results and Discussion sections present these metanarratives (and the metanarrative formed by these narratives) along with the evidence we observed that supports our interpretations.

Results

The observed attractions in Phuket presented narratives centred on eight themes regarding elephants: anthropomorphism and zoomorphism, commercial uses of elephants, conservation and ethical treatment of elephants, danger, interactions with elephants, science, religion and history (see Table 15.1).

Anthropomorphism and zoomorphism

The theme of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism was clearly present at three attractions – the Phuket Elephant Sanctuary, the Phuket Zoo and Phuket FantaSea. Anthropomorphism is the attribution of human characteristics to animals and zoomorphism is its opposite – the attribution of animal characteristics to humans. Examples of anthropomorphism include elephants engaging in human activities such as soccer, basketball, dancing and playing musical instruments as part of the elephant show at the Phuket Zoo. Also present at the zoo was a statue of an elephant with a human-shaped body holding a soccer ball. The script of the guides at the Phuket Elephant Sanctuary included references describing elephants in terms of human characteristics and emotions. The elephants were experiencing 'joy' and 'happiness' at their 'new and final home'.

Table 15.1. Tourism venues and the presence of themes.

	Phuket Elephant Sanctuary	Phuket Zoo	Pang Chang Kamala	Phuket FantaSea	Siam Niramit
Anthropomorphism and zoomorphism	X	X		X	
Commercial uses	X	X	X	X	X
Conservation and ethical treatment	X				
Danger	X	X	X	X	X
Interactions	X	X	X	X	X
Science	X				
Religion	X	X		X	X
History	X	X		X	X

Zoomorphism was present at Phuket FantaSea as tourists had the opportunity to purchase hats that would turn them into elephants or knick-knacks of elephants driving tuk tuks in various giftshops. Also, there is the possibility that the theme of religion overlaps with zoomorphism as some Buddhists believe that elephants represent characteristics that people are to emulate – such as wisdom, calmness and strength (Caron, 2019).

Commercial uses of elephants

The theme of the commercial uses of elephants was present at all five attractions. By their very nature, all tourist venues that feature elephants tell the story of how it is acceptable for humans to use elephants for commercial purposes. Elephants provide profits to their owners by performing in shows, providing rides and simply being there to be observed. Simply put, attractions make money by charging tourists to see and interact with their elephants. By buying a ticket, tourists are complicit in the narrative that humans have the right to use elephants to make money.

The story of the appropriateness of using elephants for commercial purposes is also told in the products featuring elephants that are sold at the stores of these attractions. The commercial nature of elephants was demonstrated at Pang Chang Kamala, where a mahout was yelling at an uncooperative bull elephant to hurry up and breed in order to pay for all of the food he had been given. At the Phuket Zoo, two statues of elephants holding large bags of money over their shoulders were located near the entrance.

As religion may overlap with the theme of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism, history may overlap with the story of using elephants for commercial purposes. For example, the Phuket Elephant Sanctuary makes references to the historical use of elephants in logging, trekking camps and shows. However, the narrative this time is negative towards such commercial

uses as a story of animal abuse in training and captivity is told as part of this story. The elephants are presented as unwilling participants in these commercial enterprises. One tourist remarked after hearing this presentation that 'It's just like slavery'.

Conservation and ethical treatment of elephants

The theme of conservation and ethical treatment of elephants was present at only one attraction – the Phuket Elephant Sanctuary. This is in keeping with their claim of offering an ethical alternative to the traditional tourist venues featuring elephants. Their elephants get to 'play, bathe, and socialize freely' while the less fortunate elephants at other attractions are forced to do behaviours that are not natural elephant behaviours, such as carrying tourists on their backs or performing circus tricks.

Danger

The theme of danger was present at all five attractions. Elephants were portrayed as dangerous by the chains and bull hooks that were present at four of the attractions to make sure the elephants remained well-behaved. Two of the sites, Pang Chang Kamala and Phuket FantaSea, posted signs warning of the danger involved in riding elephants. The sign at Phuket FantaSea warned that 'Although our elephants are domesticated, like all animals, they can be temperamental and unpredictable'. Pang Chang Kamala had one chained elephant that had the special warning sign of 'No Entry! It's DANGEROUS! Elephant in musth. XXX'

The story of danger told by the Phuket Elephant Sanctuary is somewhat different from the above stories. Elephants are dangerous because of their size and instinctual behaviours – not because they are temperamental and unpredictable. The Sanctuary provides a set of safety rules that are designed to help tourists observe the elephants safely.

Thus, tourists are told two conflicting stories regarding the danger associated with elephants. In one story, elephants are to be feared. In the other story, elephants are to be understood. Fear is invoked because it provides a strong justification for control.

Interactions with elephants

The theme of interactions with elephants was present at all five attractions. At every attraction, you were allowed to feed and take pictures with the elephants. Two of the attractions featured rides – Pang Chang Kamala and Phuket FantaSea. Interestingly, two additional attractions had made rides available in the past – the Phuket Zoo and Siam Niramit. The zoo still had its elephant-ride platform but the elephant-ride platform at Siam Niramit had

been removed. Was the absence of these rides due to ethical concerns, safety or liability concerns, or simply not having elephants trained in giving rides as we only observed two elephants at both of these sites? In other words, the story at two attractions had changed – possibly in an ethical, animal-friendly direction, but no explanation was provided. Could one ask? Yes, but if one has to ask, the story is not being told and the stated purpose of our methodology was specifically to observe the story being told. Asking a tourist attraction questions about its story runs the risk of changing the story by introducing elements the tourist attraction had not considered important to tell. Siam Niramit had also removed from its programme the performing elephant show. Again, no explanation was provided – just a sign where the schedule had been painted over.

Science

The theme of science was present at only one attraction – the Phuket Elephant Sanctuary. The Elephant Sanctuary presented an introductory film to all visitors that mentioned a few scientific facts about elephants such as the size of elephants, the size of their brains, and the number of elephants in captivity and in the wild.

Religion

The theme of religion was present at four attractions – the Phuket Elephant Sanctuary, the Phuket Zoo, Phuket FantaSea and Siam Niramit. For example, the Phuket Zoo had a shrine to Buddha framed by representations of elephant tusks next to the elephant enclosure. By this shrine was a statue of Ganesha – the Hindu God with the head of an elephant. Siam Niramit's cultural show featured a chedi[2] with elephants forming its base in its Lanna Kingdom scene as well as representations of kochasri (half-lion, half-elephant) in its Himmapan forest scene. The elephants' connection with religion demonstrate how deeply engrained elephants are in the Thai culture.

History

The theme of history was present at four attractions – the Phuket Elephant Sanctuary, the Phuket Zoo, Phuket FantaSea and Siam Niramit. The most prominent historical depiction of elephants is that of their role in war. The Phuket Elephant Sanctuary's opening film calls this their 'most important role'. A painting of King Naresuan sitting on top of an elephant battling the Burmese is featured in the elephant enclosure at the Phuket Zoo. Phuket FantaSea's presentation included a battle scene with war elephants and Siam Niramit featured an elephant war parade. This parade was led by a soldier

carrying a historical flag of Siam featuring a white elephant. The elephant truly is a cultural symbol of Thailand.

Discussion and Conclusion

What metanarrative about elephants can be derived from the above results and does this metanarrative differ from the narrative told about animals in general? The metanarrative told about elephants is both similar and different from the one told about animals in general. The metanarratives are similar in that the stories told about elephants at Phuket tourist venues communicate that humans have the right to dominate elephants. This domination of elephants is accomplished by defining their characteristics in human terms, using their live bodies to make money, owning the right to decide what is ethical and unethical in their treatment, labelling them as dangerous (a threat to humans that needs to be controlled by chains and bull hooks) and by defining the nature of allowed interactions. The metanarratives are different in that the theme of science, for all practical purposes, disappears. It is replaced by the themes of religion and history. The removal of science and the addition of religion and history to the metanarrative concerning elephants provides the authority of culture behind the way elephants are treated. In other words, we have the right to dominate elephants because this is part of what it means to be Thai. The heart of 'Thainess' is linked to the king and Buddhism (Sattayanurak, 2005). Linking elephants to both through war elephants and religious symbols implies that the traditional uses of elephants are connected to being Thai. This suggests that any change in the way elephants are viewed, talked about or treated in Thailand will come slowly and with great difficulty. According to Sattayanurak (2005), the Thai people's concept of 'Thainess' as being a 'priceless inheritance from the past' 'has functioned as an obstacle to prevent Thai people from adapting themselves to the rapid and crucial changes in Thai society'.

Perhaps, the Phuket Elephant Sanctuary offers some challenge to this dominant metanarrative in their arguments that elephants shouldn't be abused by cruel training methods and hard, back-breaking labour. However, they still voice humans' ability to decide or control the fate of elephants. They argue that their elephants are unable to survive in the wild – that's why they must be kept at the sanctuary. They call the sanctuary a retirement home for abused elephants. In essence, they have declared the elephants as incompetent to take care of themselves in order to justify their captivity. We do not doubt that these animals would have difficulty surviving in the wild. We are simply arguing that this decision is framed as a decision where humans have the right to decide. Whether good or bad for the animals, the humans are still in control.

One narrative that is told by Phuket animal and cultural attractions may, unwittingly, be pushing tourists in favour of the animal rights position. Anthropomorphism and zoomorphism stories help humans to identify as one with animals. Thus, if humans have rights, elephants have rights.

Recommendations

Based on the above discussion, we offer four recommendations related to the narratives told about elephants:

1. Elephant and cultural tourist attractions need to analyse the story they tell about elephants and decide if this is the story they want to communicate. Do they want to communicate a narrative of human domination or animal rights or somewhere in between? The story that is told should be based on a consideration of the attraction's personal ethics and the view of its customers regarding animals. The story that is told should be consistent and truthful.
2. Elephant and cultural tourist attractions need to be prepared to constantly adapt to tourists changing attitudes towards animals. These changes may occur due to increased awareness of animal rights and/or to a change in the location that tourists come from as different cultures view animals in different ways. For example, as noted above, the Chinese are developing more wildlife-friendly attitudes in tourism (TTR Weekly, 2019).
3. Elephant and cultural tourist attractions need to train and treat their animals humanely. To be believed, stories must be consistent with what the listener experiences. Tourist attractions need to be able to document this treatment, not simply claim it. It would be wise for these attractions to seek out independent animal rights organizations to certify the use of humane methods.
4. Any laws passed to protect elephants must take the culture's metanarrative into account in order for the law to be successful. Otherwise, the law may be interpreted in unexpected ways as society tries to make it fit the prevailing stories about elephants and/or it may simply be ignored. For example, it is common for people to argue that they are justified in disobeying a law when that law is in conflict with the religious stories they believe – 'We must obey God rather than human beings' (Acts 5:29, NIV)!

Notes

[1] See photo 16 in the Elephant Portrait Gallery.
[2] A chedi, or stupa, is a Buddhist shrine (usually dome-shaped) containing relics of the Buddha or important monks and used for meditation or ceremonial purposes.

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16 The Valuation of Elephant Sightings in Protected Areas

Andrea Saayman and Melville Saayman

North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

Introduction

The increased vulnerability of wildlife to poaching and illegal trade highlights the need to find a solution to the sustainable use of wildlife. While controlled consumption is allowed in many countries, it is especially illegal poaching activities that threaten the existence of many species in Africa today. One such species is the African elephant – a species that is poached mainly for its ivory tusks, but also due to the destruction elephants cause to crops and livestock. The African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) is currently classified as vulnerable, with an estimated population of 415,000 (Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, 2019). Actman (2019) reports that more than 100,000 African elephants were poached between 2014 and 2017. This increase in elephant poaching activity has also been reported in South Africa. While no elephant poaching was reported between 2000 and 2013 in South Africa's Kruger National Park (KNP), elephant poaching in the conservation area increased to reach 72 in 2018 (Poaching Facts, 2019).

The KNP is the largest conservation area in South Africa, and together with the other national and provincial parks, it remains one of the main drawcards for both national and international tourists. Together with the other species of the Big Five (the Cape buffalo, lion, leopard and rhinoceros), the African elephant is one of the main attractions for tourists to the country and the African continent[1]. Although the tourism industry is not as developed in many African countries, tourism to the continent is increasing at a rapid pace, with growth rates exceeding that of the worldwide tourism growth rate of 8% per annum (UNWTO, 2018). The unspoilt nature and wildlife of the continent provide tourists with the unique opportunity to see many vulnerable and endangered species in their natural environment, and it is therefore not surprising that the UNWTO (2015) highlights wildlife-watching tourism as a source of sustainable development in Africa and also as a driver for conservation efforts on the continent.

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Wildlife-watching tourism is defined by United Nations Environment Programme/CMS (2006) as 'a type of tourism that is organized and undertaken in order to watch or encounter wildlife. Wildlife-watching tourism exclusively relates to non-consumptive forms of wildlife-based activities…' The UNWTO (2015) found that the most common wildlife-watching activity on the African continent is safaris, and that most (96%) of these take place in protected areas. Poaching activities therefore hold serious consequences for the future of wildlife-watching tourism. Understanding the importance of and the value that tourists attach to wildlife-watching sheds light on the cost of poaching and extinction for this industry.

Based on the above, this research aims to determine the value that tourists on safari in protected areas in South Africa attach to elephant sightings and the relative importance of the elephant sighting compared with the other species in the Big Five. We also aim to determine whether tourists take the increased poaching of elephants – also in South Africa – into account when revealing their choice.

Literature Review

According to Moore and Rodger (2010), wildlife reserved for tourism purposes can be classified as a common pool resource and therefore it has the potential to suffer from the so-called 'tragedy of the commons'. The tragedy of the commons was introduced by Hardin (1968) to explain that uncontrolled access to natural resources will lead to the destruction thereof, due to individuals rationally seeking to maximize their own utility and profit. To minimize the likelihood that resources will be destroyed, some form of restriction is required, and Ostrom (2010) argued that a socially optimal outcome will require individuals to take actions that are not in their best short-term interest.

The difference between public goods and common pool resources highlights the dilemma that this causes for individuals. While public goods require 'giving up individual resources to create or maintain a common resource', a common pool resource requires 'individual restraint from taking from the resource' (Sell and Son, 1997, p. 118). The benefits from conserving these animals are currently not sufficient for those involved in poaching activities to entice restraint from taking the resource for personal gain.

Recent research by the UNWTO (2015) on the value of wildlife-watching tourism in Africa attempted to quantify the economic benefits that African countries derive from this tourism activity. Although they found that wildlife-watching tourism generates significant revenues, not only for National Parks and conservation areas, but also for other sections of the tourism industry, including tour operators and local communities that supply accommodation, food and tour guide services, the tourism industry is not actively involved in anti-poaching measures. To reach a socially optimal outcome, cooperation by all stakeholders should be encouraged and enhanced (Ostrom, 1998, 2006),

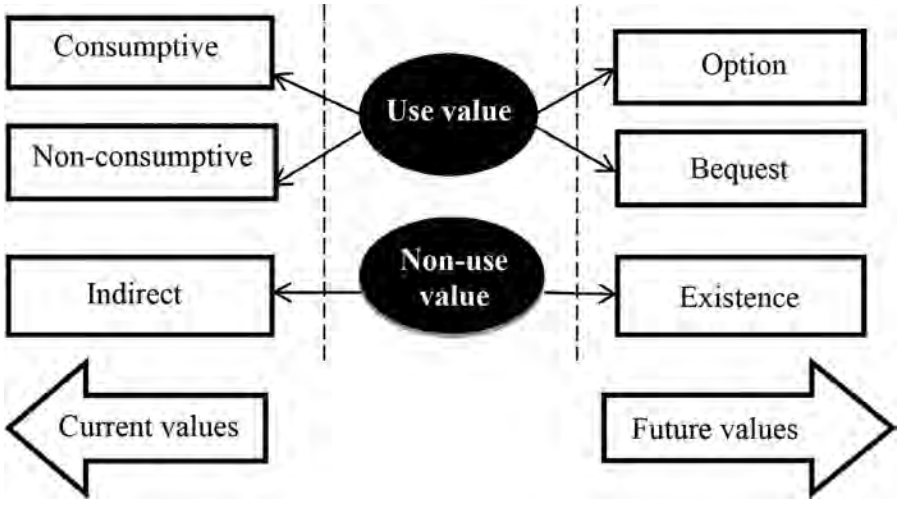

Fig. 16.1. Different use and non-use values.

Source: Makumbirofa and Saayman (2017)

since the value that individuals assign to wildlife depends largely on the benefits they derive from it.

However, quantifying the current tourism benefits that African countries derive from wildlife-watching tourism only represents one part of the story. The total economic value of any species includes not only current values, but also future (or intertemporal) values (see Fig. 16.1). In addition, there is a clear distinction between use and non-use values of wildlife.

Use values are the most obvious value of any environmental attribute, since it is the value that can easily be measured at its market price (Harris and Roach, 2009). With wildlife, there is a further distinction between consumptive and non-consumptive current use values (Boyle and Bishop, 1987), with the former referring to the value derived from consuming the animal (i.e. hunting or fishing), while the latter refers to activities such as wildlife-watching and photography (Kotchen and Reiling, 1998).

Current non-use value, also known as the indirect (or altruistic) value, is derived from activities that need not take place in conservation or natural areas. It is the value that arises from a feeling of joy when reading, watching photographs, movies or documentaries about wildlife, or simply the knowledge that others experience enjoyment from wildlife (Makumbirofa and Saayman, 2017).

Kotchen and Reiling (1998) divide future use values of wildlife into option and bequest value, with the former indicating the value attached to having the option to, directly or indirectly, use the species in the future. Bequest value is again a more altruistic value that is derived from the knowledge that future generations will be able to, directly or indirectly, use the species. It is therefore the value attached to leaving the world in a similar or better state for future generations (Harris and Roach, 2009).

The future non-use value can also be described as the existence (or intrinsic) value, and it is the belief by people that all species have a right to continue to exist, even if it may have no useful value to humankind. Harris and Roach (2009, p. 107) define existence value as follows: 'species have their own rights to exist, independent of human valuation, or that the existence of many different species means that we ourselves live in a richer world'. Since option value and bequest value of wildlife do not necessarily imply the future use of the species, some authors also classify them as non-use values. Using this classification, Stevens *et al*. (1991) showed that the non-use value of wildlife significantly exceeds the use value.

Method

Willingness to pay

What are the techniques that can be used to value environmental resources? The two broad categories of methods that are available to value the environment are (i) revealed preferences; and (ii) stated preferences. The revealed preferences approach entails observation based on the actual choices that individuals make, and the methods include the market price (a direct measure), the travel cost method and hedonic property and wage values (both indirect measures). Stated preferences, on the other hand, rely on surveys to elicit an individual's willingness to pay (WTP) for a certain outcome (Tietenberg and Lewis, 2012).

The direct method to elicit WTP is known as contingent valuation (CV). There are various alternatives available to ascertain respondents' willingness to pay, namely (i) an open-ended question; (ii) dichotomous choice; and (iii) payment cards (Makumbirofa and Saayman, 2017) (Fig. 16.2). CV has been the most widely used method in deriving values for natural resources that cannot be observed. It is a survey-based method and, in most cases, the respondents are asked to answer 'yes' or 'no' to a certain amount posed to him/her for the preservation of some natural resource. Although it is the most widely used method, it is not without criticism.

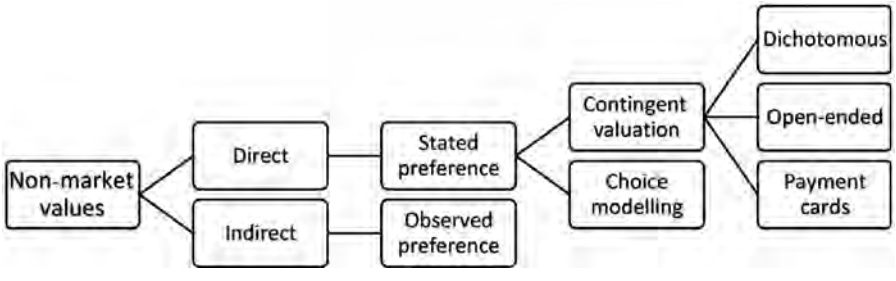

Fig. 16.2. Methods to find willingness to pay.

Source: Makumbirofa and Saayman (2017)

Five types of biases can be found in the answers given by respondents:

(i) strategic bias (i.e. strategically choose a high value to serve your own interest);

(ii) information bias (i.e. not having enough information to make a true value judgement);

(iii) starting-point bias (i.e. the lowest amount offered is too high);

(iv) hypothetical bias (i.e. since no money is actually paid by the respondent, he/she will be more willing to choose a higher amount); and

(v) the bias between WTP and willingness to accept (WTA), with the latter referring to the amount that the respondent will be willing to accept as compensation for the loss of the resource (Tietenberg and Lewis, 2012).

WTP can be directly linked to demand theory and consumer utility maximization. The amount that any consumer will be willing to pay for a product depends on his/her underlying preferences. This equality between the indirect utility (or Marshallian demand) function and the expenditure (or Hicksian demand) function provides the theoretical framework for the stated preference estimation (Marta-Pedroso *et al*., 2012). Dharmaratne *et al*. (2000) explain that a positive WTP indicates that the respondent will experience lower levels of utility if he/she does not have access to the environmental good, and the amount is therefore an indication of the value they place on having access.

Using CV, the WTP for an elephant sighting is solicited and compared over the years, to determine the changing value and importance of the African elephant to wildlife-watching tourists. This method has been used by, among others, Loomis and White (1996), Kotchen and Reiling (2000), and Halkos and Matsiori (2015), although the difference between this research and their research lies in the fact that we do not aim to estimate the existence or non-use value of the species, but rather the non-consumptive value.

Samples and survey sites

Primary data were collected from tourists on safari in three protected areas in South Africa over the years 2011 to 2013 and again during 2019. The three protected areas included in this research lie in four different provinces of South Africa. The Addo Elephant National Park is situated in the Eastern Cape Province, which was proclaimed in 1931 after conflict between farmers and elephants saw a severe drop in the elephant population (SanParks, 2019a). The Kruger National Park (KNP) spans over both the Limpopo and Mpumalanga Provinces of South Africa and was proclaimed in 1898 (SanParks, 2019b). It is the largest and best-known National Park in South Africa. Pilanesberg National Park (PNP) is located in the north-west province of South Africa. It is the fourth largest park in the country and was established in an inactive volcano crater in 1979 (Pilanesberg National Park, 2019).

Two surveys were conducted at Addo National Park during 2012. In total, 232 completed questionnaires were obtained from travel groups who spent at least one night in the Park in either a camping site or a chalet. During 2012,

26,029 chalet unit nights were sold in the Park and 8993 campsite nights. Given the total of 35,022, responses from 232 of these units represent a margin of error of 6% with 95% confidence. Approximately 31% of all respondents were foreigners, which is slightly higher than the 24.2% of foreigners who visited South African National Parks during the year.

At the KNP, three annual surveys were conducted between 2011 and 2013. Similar to the Addo survey, one questionnaire was distributed per overnight visitor group and the numbers of completed questionnaires received were as follows: 463 (2011), 392 (2012) and 436 (2013). The unit and site nights sold at the KNP ranged between 521,000 and 524,500 for the years. The samples therefore have a 5% margin of error with 95% confidence. All the surveys are also dominated by local respondents, which is the KNP's main market, with domestic tourism representing between 77% and 79% of all visitors over the various years.

One survey was conducted during August 2019 at PNP. A total of 315 completed questionnaires was received. Each visitor group consisted of an average of 3.17 persons. Given that a total of 152,500 visitors visited PNP since the beginning of 2019, the sample of 315 gives a margin of error of 6% with 95% confidence. However, since it is numbers of visitors, given the average visitor group size, the margin of error falls below 5%. Foreigners only represent 5.4% of the sample, although approximately 11% of all visitors to the park were foreigners for the year up to August 2019.

In all instances, a structured questionnaire was used to elicited respondents' socio-demographic profile, preferences for each of the Big Five (on a scale of 1 = most preferred to 5 = least preferred), and their willingness to pay for the various animal sightings. Instead of using dichotomous choice to assess WTP, an open-ended response was used, which, according to Togridou *et al*. (2006), leads to a higher response rate and a lower level of protest response. In addition, it leads to less inflated WTP estimates (Bateman *et al*., 1995).

Results and Discussion

First, the preferences of the various respondents were recorded and are subsequently discussed. The respondents had to rank the Big Five according to their preference, with 1 indicating the most preferred and 5 the least preferred. Tables 16.1 and 16.2 report the preferences of the respondents over the years. First, Table 16.1 indicates the percentage of respondents who listed the specific species as their favourite (i.e. as 1), while Table 16.2 reflects the ranking according to the median responses.

From Table 16.1, it is evident that throughout all the years, the leopard remains the species that is most often chosen as the most preferred. The only exception was during the 2012 survey at the Addo Elephant National Park, where the elephant was more often chosen as the preferred species. The buffalo consistently attracted the least number one positions of all the species of the Big Five.

Table 16.1. Percentage of respondents who prefer the species.

	Kruger National Park (KNP) (2011)	KNP (2012)	Addo Elephant National Park (2012)	KNP (2013)	Pilanesberg National Park (PNP) (2019)
Elephant	13%	12%	29%	15%	13%
Lion	25%	24%	20%	24%	21%
Buffalo	11%	10%	7%	12%	6%
Leopard	36%	38%	27%	31%	53%
Rhino	15%	16%	17%	18%	7%

Source: Compiled by authors

Table 16.2. Ranking of the Big Five.

	Kruger National Park (KNP) (2011)	KNP (2012)	Addo Elephant National Park (2012)	KNP (2013)	Pilanesberg National Park (PNP) (2019)
Elephant	4	4	2	4	4
Lion	2	2	3	2	2
Buffalo	5	5	5	5	5
Leopard	1	1	1	1	1
Rhino	3	3	4	3	3

Source: Compiled by authors

Table 16.2 indicates the median position of each species, with the leopard taking the first position and the buffalo the fifth position in all instances. The choice between the lion, rhino and elephant remains consistent in KNP and also correlates with that at the PNP. The only exception is again the Addo Elephant National Park, where the elephant takes second position in the Big Five, and is even more preferred than the rhino.

Table 16.3. Percentage of respondents who are willing to pay for a sighting of the species.

	Kruger National Park (KNP) (2011)	KNP (2012)	Addo Elephant National Park (2012)	KNP (2013)	Pilanesberg National Park (PNP) (2019)
Elephant	26.1%	27.8%	28.4%	35.1%	30.2%
Lion	27.2%	31.9%	30.2%	37.8%	30.5%
Buffalo	25.9%	27.8%	27.6%	34.9%	33.0%
Leopard	27.0%	32.4%	31.0%	38.5%	33.0%
Rhino	26.6%	30.4%	29.3%	36.9%	31.4%

Source: Compiled by authors

Table 16.4. Mean willingness to pay amounts (in South African Rand – 1 ZAR = US$0.05).

	Kruger National Park (KNP) (2011)	KNP (2012)	Addo Elephant National Park (2012)	KNP (2013)	Pilanesberg National Park (PNP) (2019)
Elephant	658.14	175.39	318.26	310.91	174.98
Lion	732.70	387.64	465.58	603.89	256.82
Buffalo	491.20	157.65	267.85	292.08	193.44
Leopard	960.17	564.85	629.07	788.14	296.15
Rhino	726.42	366.89	484.29	672.94	203.94

Source: Compiled by authors

The next tables summarize the WTP results, with Table 16.3 indicating the percentage of respondents who indicated they are willing to pay a positive amount to be able to view the specific species. The results are somewhat consistent with the most preferred species above, with the leopard attracting the highest percentage of respondents willing to pay for a sighting. This is not surprising, since a leopard is very hard to spot in its natural habitat. The results for the elephant are also in line with its relative importance in the Big Five, according to the respondents.

The mean amount that respondents were willing to pay for a sighting of the specific species is indicated in Table 16.4. The amounts were all deflated using the consumer price index for South Africa (2015 = 100) (obtained from the South African Reserve Bank), to be comparable over the various years. Similar to the percentages, the amounts also reflect the preferences of the respondents, with the amounts for the leopard consistently outperforming that of any of the other species in the Big Five.

Both the rhino and elephant present interesting results. While the rhino is only the fourth most preferred species during the Addo survey in 2012 and the third most preferred species during the 2013 KNP survey, the mean amount that respondents are willing to pay for a sighting is the second highest. The increase in rhino poaching increased the willingness to pay, since respondents cannot be assured of future sightings. The 2019 amount fell, with rhinos still very much under siege from poachers and generally kept away from public sightings.

The elephant is the second interesting case, since even though it is indicated as the second most preferred during the 2012 Addo survey, the mean WTP amount is the second lowest and not the second highest. During 2019, the WTP amount for the elephant is the lowest; even less than that of the buffalo.

Figure 16.3 shows another measure of central tendency, namely the median WTP amount. While the median WTP mainly confirms the results of the mean WTP, it is less influenced by outliers. It again reflects the preferences of the respondents quite clearly, with the median WTP for the leopard being consistently higher than any of the other species. The variability in the rhino

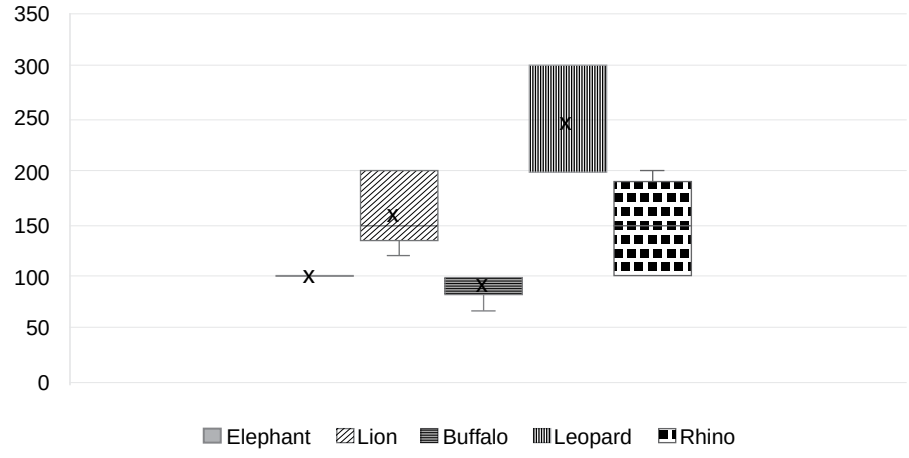

Fig. 16.3. Median willingness to pay amounts.

Source: compiled by authors

median amounts is also evident, ranging between 100 and 200 ZAR. The median amount for the elephant is the most consistent throughout the years, at 100 ZAR.

What do the preferences and valuation of the different species indicate? First, in order to shed some light on the reasons for the valuation of the different species, the scarcity of the various species in the different parks needs to be examined. In the KNP, the 2011 estimates of numbers for the different species were as follows: 1000 leopards, 1620–1750 lions, 13,750 elephants and 37,130 buffalo.[2] In the Addo Elephant National Park, leopards are rare, although they have been spotted; there are only six lions, 400 buffalo and more than 600 elephants. PNP does not publish species numbers, but sightings, and the following is said about the various species: leopards are rarely spotted, lion are common, while elephants (and rhino) are very common throughout the park and buffalo are extremely rare.

The valuation of the sightings of the various species therefore reflects the scarcity of the species quite accurately. In all parks, leopards are not abundant and sightings of them are rare. It is therefore not surprising that the valuation of a leopard sighting exceeds that of any of the other species. Buffalo is one of the most abundant species in all the parks surveyed, except for the PNP. The higher value assigned to the buffalo in this park (compared with the other species of the Big Five) is therefore also a reflection of the scarcity of buffalo.

The elephant remains an interesting case. All the parks still have an abundance of elephants and sighting of elephants are not scarce in any of the parks. The valuation of elephant sightings is therefore lower than that of leopard, lion and rhino (which are scarcer) in all of the parks. With the 2019 survey, this has not changed and indicates that wildlife viewing tourists in South Africa still benefit from the conservation efforts of the South

African authorities, which ensured an abundance of elephant in most of the conservation areas.

The changes in the valuation of the rhino, which has been subjected to poaching and a rapid decline in numbers over the past years, may shed some light on how wildlife-viewing tourists adapt to the changes in wildlife numbers. The mean WTP amounts for the rhino indicate that even though the rhino is a less preferred species than the lion in the Big Five, its valuation is higher than that of the lion, and only exceeded by the leopard, in the 2012 Addo Elephant Park and the 2013 KNP surveys. Increased awareness of elephant poaching and the dangers it poses therefore has an effect on increasing the value of the species to wildlife-watching tourists.

Second, to understand the variation in the mean WTP, the differences between the various samples may add additional information. During the KNP surveys of 2011 and 2013, 11.7% and 13.3% of the samples were foreign tourists, while the 2012 survey only included 5.6% foreign tourists. A third of the sample at the Addo Elephant National Park sample were also foreign tourists, while only 5.4% of the Pilanesberg sample consisted of foreign tourists. The amounts that foreigners are willing to pay for animal sightings are significantly higher than those for domestic tourists (see Saayman and Saayman, 2014).

Besides the differences in samples, the local economic conditions have also deteriorated significantly over the past years, with the South African economy experiencing recessionary conditions over most of the time-period under consideration. The lower mean WTP amounts during the 2019 survey therefore reflect not only the composition of the sample, but also the slack economic conditions of the country.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to determine the value that wildlife-viewing tourists in protected areas in South Africa attach to elephant sightings and the relative importance of the elephant in the Big Five. Using information from five surveys conducted at different parks in South Africa from 2011 to 2013 and again in 2019, we found the elephant to be the fourth preferred species in the Big Five. The exception is Addo Elephant National Park – a park established to protect the elephants, in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, from extinction. The elephants are clearly a drawcard for the Addo Elephant National Park, where it is the second most preferred species in the Big Five.

To determine the value that tourists attached to a sighting, CV was used. Although approximately a quarter to a third of respondents indicated positive amounts for a sighting across the years, the mean WTP reflects the scarcity of the species. The elephant is relatively abundant in all the parks and, in many instances, much easier to spot than the leopard or lion. It is therefore not surprising that the mean valuation of a sighting is much lower than that of the leopard and lion throughout all the years.

Although tougher economic conditions in the country also influence WTP, we found that tourists to South Africa's National Parks do not yet take the increased poaching of elephants into account when revealing their choice, nor in their valuation. However, the valuation of the rhino, which is facing a severe decline in numbers due to poaching, shows that wildlife viewing tourists do account for this in their valuation – albeit only when the scarcity becomes such that it influences their opportunity to view the animal in its natural habitat – either now or in the future. It is therefore imperative that the poaching of elephants should attract more media attention to inform current and potential tourists of the threat it is facing. If not, the non-consumptive value of the species will remain underestimated, until a crisis, similar to the one the rhino population is facing, is reached.

The success of South Africa in protecting and growing its elephant populations is undisputed and the subsequent effect of these conservation efforts established the country as a primary destination for wildlife-viewing tourism. The Addo Elephant National Park is one such success story where the conservation of the Addo elephant developed into a vibrant wildlife tourism economy with spillovers into a number of private lodges. However, recent events that saw a rapid decline in rhino numbers, even in South African National Parks, raised awareness that these vast expanses of land set aside for conservation are difficult to patrol and protect from poaching activities.

For the future conservation of the African elephant in the country and the sustainability of wildlife-watching tourism for communities, it is imperative that both conservation management and policy makers should proactively have plans in place to protect the increased onslaught from poachers, to ensure that the African elephant does not follow the same route as the rhino. Much can be learned from the protection of the rhino and proactivity in protecting the African elephant is of paramount importance. Part of this strategy should include raising awareness among communities to understand the importance of wildlife-watching tourism, and among tourists.

Notes

[1] See photos 13 and 18 in the Elephant Portrait Gallery.
[2] Most of the parks do not report rhino numbers to ensure the safety of their populations.

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17 Social Media: A Proxy Voice for Elephants

Kannapa Pongponrat[1] and Naphawan Chantradoan[2]

[1]*Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand*
[2]*Stamford International University, Bangkok, Thailand*

Introduction

This chapter focuses on raising awareness of the consequences and impacts of elephant tourism programmes on elephants, to understand issues in the current situation and to improve conditions for captive elephants, their mahouts and the ethnic communities in elephant areas. This chapter presents a preliminary analysis of data gathered from digital platforms such as websites, blogs, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter using content analysis methods. Topics include the issue of unethical elephant tourism practices, country image affected by unethical elephant tourism, and elephant health and safety conditions. This analysis may contribute to future developments of ethical practices supporting responsible tourism development.

Asian elephants are deeply embedded in Thai culture and are one of the most important animal species in international tourism. They were used in wars throughout ancient Thai history (Pimmanrojnagool and Wanghongsa, 2002). A white elephant featured on the red field of Siam's (as Thailand was once known) national flag. Early Siamese coins featured an elephant, and their images can be found in abundance in the compounds of many of the older temples. Prior to 1989 elephants and their mahouts were primarily used in teak logging by both government and private forestry companies. During the 1970s and 1980s, Thailand's forests were cut down to meet growing foreign demand for tropical hardwoods and wood furniture; teak was especially prized (www.factanddetail.com). Moreover, factors contributing to deforestation included gathering wood for fuel and traditional slash-and-burn agriculture. The extensive destruction of forests led to flooding and death in the mountainous areas of northern Thailand and the government imposed a ban on further logging, which resulted in unemployed elephants and mahouts (Polyapipat and Loh, 2015). Problems occurred after logging was banned by the government; some elephants were released but faced difficulty in adapting to the habitat in the limited Thailand National Park areas

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(Jenjob, 2015). Thousands of elephants became unemployed; many mahouts took their elephants to large cities such as Bangkok, begging for food and entertaining tourists, resulting in poor welfare conditions including problems of inadequate nutrition and elephants being hit by cars (Pimmanrojnagool and Wanghongsa, 2002). Mahouts needed to find a new source of income, and many turned to the tourism sector, including elephant shows, elephant-made products (e.g. elephant dung paper, organic fertilizer, elephant painting, etc.) and elephant- back riding programmes, which became very popular with tourists. To rectify this situation, a law banning elephants from the streets of Bangkok was passed in 2010 (Jenjob, 2015), and commercialized elephant camps mushroomed in tourism destinations throughout the country (Schliesinger, 2015).

Interestingly, every year on World Elephant Day, 12 August (www.worldelephantday.org), a discussion of the current situation and the risk of elephant extinction is actively featured in social and traditional media. Many Thais are also very interested in the elephant situation in Thailand, and concerns are clearly addressed by various organizations. The National Elephant Institute stated to the media that the number of elephants in the Kingdom of Thailand fell from 11,000 to 7000 in 2014 (Jenjob, 2015). The number of elephants in Thailand has continuously fallen. It was reported in 2018 that the total number of elephants in Thailand had dropped to 5700 (www.thailandelephant.org, 2018). Within those total numbers, 3000 were wild elephants. The rapid decline of the wild elephant population is not only because of the destruction of forest areas but also results from them being captured from the wild to work in the tourism sector. This and similar reports increased the authorities' and large organizations' awareness of the urgent need to preserve wild elephants in Thailand. For instance, the director of the National Elephant Institute gave an interview to Thai news reporters on World Elephant Day in 2019 (Thai PBS Online, 2017):

> Wild elephants are threatening and put into illegal business such as poaching for their ivories or skins due to high value, or a believe that people who own elephant trunk will have a good luck, and also problem taking away baby elephants from their mother to pet as baby elephants featured at hotels and entertainment complexes. All these mentioned problems need to be solved urgently to stop a situation of declining elephant numbers in Thailand [*sic*].

Moreover, when the reporter asked about encroachment into wild elephant habitat, the director of the National Elephant Institute expressed concern that:

> there is situation of human encroachment in the domain of the elephant due to extension of agricultural land-used. This led to problem that wild elephants need to come out from the forest to find food in villages. Consequence is elephants were shot with electricity by villagers for their safety, some elephants got injured, some were dead. This is urgent issue that related government authorities and community need to work together for solutions and identify conditions that people can live along with wild elephant [*sic*].
>
> (Thai PBS Online, 2017)

Many organizations and government agencies are now trying to collaborate to deal with these problems and to improve the conditions for elephants in the country. Improvements could be seen in 2017 and 2018 when the number of elephants in the eastern forest area increased by 7% and 10%, respectively, as reported by the Wildlife Conservation Office (Thai PBS Online, 2017). According to the National Institute of Elephant Research and Health Service, in 2017 there were about 2700 captive elephants working in 223 tourism venues throughout the country, with 980 elephants working in 78 elephant camps near Chiangmai. Elephants are also engaged in tourism in other areas of Thailand, notably Kanchanaburi, Phuket and Chonburi (Aryuwatthana, 2018). Most are engaged in entertainment programmes, trekking tours or are kept in hotel and resort grounds.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) created and developed elephant tourism to promote Thai elephant tourism programmes worldwide (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2017). These programmes may be divided into four themes: 'Elephants and Thai Livelihood', 'Legends of Elephants in Thai History', 'Elephant Camps for Learning' and 'Amazing Thai Elephants'. These four themes are applied in different tourist destinations, where large numbers of captive elephants are operated by private-sector organizations. The secretary-general of the Friends of the Asian Elephant Hospital in Lampang stated in an interview with the *Bangkok Post* (Carter, 2019):

> In 1995, there were just 22 camps. Now, there are 223 … as the number of visitors to Thailand continues to rise, so does the demand for elephants. According to World Animal Protection's 2017 'Taken for a Ride' report, 40% of tourists surveyed said that they intended to engage in elephant tourism on their trips to Thailand.

Polyapipat and Loh (2015) indicate that elephants have been portrayed in tourism as kind, gentle and smart animals that can do many things such as playing football, riding bicycles, painting, playing musical instruments, dancing and performing tricks. Tourists often dream of riding on an elephant and getting pictures taken with them as a once-in-a-lifetime aspiration. Most elephants are forced to entertain tourists through harsh, unethical training, and they often suffer from poor welfare conditions. These programmes have also had negative consequences and have resulted in detrimental changes to local ethnic communities, stimulating animal rights debates, particularly on social media sites. Six particular problem areas have been identified in elephant tourism businesses: regulatory context, injuries, nutrition, social environment, training, and a decline in the expertise and experience of mahouts (PETA, 2006). Duffy and Moore (2010) identified various ethical issues including:

- Where does the tourism industry obtain its elephants?
- What are the patterns of elephant ownership?
- How are the elephants used as a workforce in the tourism industry?
- What are the welfare implications of using elephants as a workforce?

A study by Shani and Pizam (2009) stated that public opinion was a driving force for the ethical operation of animal attractions and was more strongly associated with tourists' attitudes towards sites than belief in the ability of the legal system and institutional supervision to ensure elephant welfare. This is significant for elephant tourism businesses as word of mouth is a powerful influence on tourism development through its effects on choice of destination and activity preferences. Issues of unethical practice increasingly feature in public concerns both online and offline in Thailand and other elephant range countries, and in countries of tourist origin, particularly in the West. Moran *et al*. (2014) introduced the concept of 'e-WOM' (electronic word of mouth), which has become powerful in influencing consumer behaviour in the digital era. This study emphasized that e-WOM relies upon the experiences of one consumer with opinions and recommendations, which are shared among many digitally connected consumers. 'Peer-to-peer e-WOM is supported through numerous online platforms where consumers converge for topical, commercial, or social purposes' (Moran *et al*., 2014, p. 202). Such platforms include the social networking sites Facebook, Google+, Instagram, or Twitter, blogs or even YouTube.

In relation to the use of digital platforms and ethical tourism practices or conservation Goyder (2014, 26 August) mentioned that

> The increasing popularity of social media in the last decade has led to a considerable amount of user-generated content being shared online, with personal photography representing a significant portion of this. This finding was reflected in the results of the social analysis on tourist responses to elephant-viewing along the river, with 30% of photograph captions on Instagram making reference to conservation issues, including the loss of natural forest habitat.

His study also confirmed that

> …social media derived content can be used to supplement and enhance understanding of wildlife tourism experiences by providing up-to-date information pertaining to visitor experience and the location and conditions under which wildlife is observed. (p. 15)

Social media is a powerful mechanism to generate public awareness and concerns on many matters including conservation and protection issues. Viral campaigns or viral marketing refers to the spreading of a message that has a similar effect to a virus by using digital media as a transmitter (Klopper, 2002). Viral campaigns regarding the use of captive elephants for tourism purposes are a controversial issue. Generated content by users of various social media platforms shows that conflict between human beings and elephants has increased over recent years, but the most critical topic is the health and welfare of captive elephants used in the tourism industry.

This chapter focuses on social media roles and their impact on elephant tourism in Thailand. It aims to identify and discuss unethical elephant tourism practices, how the country's image is affected by unethical elephant tourism, and elephant welfare, particularly health and safety conditions

within elephant tourism practices. It seeks to find solutions for ethical elephant tourism while also trying to raise awareness of the lack of elephants' own voices about their roles in tourist attractions and activities. During our enjoyable visits to elephants, do we hear their opinions about their own welfare? This question is critical for the elephants themselves, tourists, business owners, mahouts and the regulatory government authorities.

Research Methodology

This chapter is based on qualitative research methods to explore the social phenomenon of elephant tourism in Thailand through digital platforms such as websites, blogs, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. 'Netnography' (a term introduced by Walter, 2016) was used as a method for this research to investigate how social media enables people to express and share their ideas, comments, and concerns, and raise awareness of particular issues among the active online community. The keywords used to identify specific posts and links in this research were 'elephant tourism Thailand', 'elephant rights', 'elephant welfare Thailand', 'elephant-riding' and 'ethical elephant sanctuary Thailand'.

In this study, non-participant observation as a 'netnographer' was applied. This entails examining online data from tourists, both in Thai and English languages, to identify social concerns in tourists' perceptions of and attitudes towards unethical practices in elephant tourism and tourism stakeholders' responsible actions. Content analysis methods were applied for data analysis, which identified key major issues in unethical elephant tourism practices, how a country's image may be affected by unethical elephant tourism, and elephant welfare, health and safety conditions. Analysis also covered understanding of social media phenomena relating to elephant tourism in Thailand. Cross-analysis with data obtained from digital platforms and secondary data from various sources such as government websites, news, reports, articles and journals was also conducted. This provided an understanding of how social media has a vital role in tourism development, especially when ethical practices in the tourism sector become a major concern for responsible tourism development.

Social Media Campaigns on Elephant Tourism in Thailand

Social media is commonly used as a platform by campaigners who agitate for rapid and fundamental or radical changes (Di Minin *et al*., 2015). User-generated content is commonly regarded as a reliable source of data by other users and has high impact on people's emotion, often leading to actions and petitions. We Are Social and Hootsuite's latest collection of Global Digital 2019 Reports show that the number of social media users in Thailand has reached 51 million people or 74% of the total population of the country.

The most used social media in Thailand are Facebook, YouTube, Line, FB Messenger, Instagram and Twitter (Kemp, 2020)

Social networks can form links between items or users such as hashtags or followers, or by using quality ratings such as likes on Facebook or retweets on Twitter. Instagram is widely used for real-time posting of individual pictures while Twitter is mainly used to pass shared content and links provided by others. Facebook is frequently used to share individual pictures with feelings and ideas (not necessarily in real time) but posting can include hashtags for a collective social opinion or so called digital public engagement (Di Minin *et al*., 2015). Social media also provides an understanding of social phenomena and identifies the key stakeholders in given issues. Kiran and Vasantha (2016) argue that social media is related to big data and has generated wide information accessibility, influencing consumer decision making in marketing. They cited statistics from a 2015 Nasscom-Crisil report that over 7000 photos are uploaded on Flickr per minute, over 600 videos are uploaded on YouTube per minute and Twitter alone generates 12 terabytes of data every day. This study also mentioned that social media is an important wave in the technological revolution as impacted by the influence from the social group the particular consumer subscribes to, as consumers trust recommendations from people they know.

Considering social media impacts on elephant tourism, emotion-driven messages lead people to have different reactions towards the posts and shares on social media. In the case of elephants, great concern is evident from many social media users. The majority of elephant-related posts on social media platforms focus on the inhumane treatment of captive elephants and wild elephants; bloggers and activists use the momentum to raise awareness and to raise funds for elephant protection campaigns. Feedback from the general public on the well-known pages and posts is explored in this chapter, to provide a better understanding of the positive and negative connotation of the issues. The reactions towards posts are consolidated from social media and websites/blogs listed in Table 17.1.

Based on the social media platforms presented above, this chapter will now provide some significant data with examples to illustrate social media campaigns contributing data and information on considerations, challenges and ethical concerns regarding captive elephant tourism issues.

Impact of Social Media Campaigns: Can You Hear Elephants' Voices?

Studies by Cohen (2008, p. 2015) showed that elephants are trained for foreign tourists' satisfaction. Many of the camps offer shows that demonstrate mahout skills and elephants' ability to respond to commands for entertaining activities, trekking and riding programmes, but these cause increasing concerns about elephant welfare. Many cases of unethical elephant tourism practices are illustrated in photos of torturing elephants, taken by tourists

Table 17.1. Examples of social media platforms related to elephant tourism in Thailand

Address	Like	Followers
Facebook		
https://www.facebook.com/Khonthaimairakchang	616	626
https://www.facebook.com/elephantsinjapan	1,961	2,048
https://www.facebook.com/ivorybelongstoelephants	2,189	2,202
https://www.facebook.com/Thaielephantrefuge	11,326	11,520
https://www.facebook.com/samuielephantsanctuary	18,888	19,342
https://www.facebook.com/worldelephantday	27,954	28,369
https://www.facebook.com/elephantloverspage	68,532	69,371
https://www.facebook.com/ElephantVoices	346,921	340,232
https://www.facebook.com/savetheelephants.kenya	572,784	561,719
https://www.facebook.com/pg/wildlifesosindia	698,326	694,217
https://www.facebook.com/AnimalsAustralia	1,661,555	1,632,915
Instagram		
https://www.instagram.com/bela_elephant	-	199
https://www.instagram.com/babyelephant.s	-	17,081
https://www.instagram.com/96elephants	-	29.105
https://www.instagram.com/elephantfamily	-	31,008
https://www.instagram.com/blesele	-	35,658
https://www.instagram.com/elephants_of_insta	-	44,491
https://www.instagram.com/unitedforwildlife	-	109,318
https://www.instagram.com/elephantnaturepark	-	141,049
https://www.instagram.com/sheldricktrust	-	638,713
Twitter		
https://twitter.com/an0itslate	848	2,415
https://twitter.com/stae_elephants	3,765	4,800
https://twitter.com/EnviroAction	1,490	14,083
https://twitter.com/ElephantCrisis	250	14,958
https://twitter.com/EIA_News	4,772	18,205
https://twitter.com/DSWT	5,421	155,430
Websites/blogs		
https://www.unilad.co.uk/animals/elephant-calf-collapses-from-exhaustion-while-giving-rides-to-tourists		
https://shortyawards.com/3rd-socialgood/freebilly-the-elephant		
http://www.ktvu.com/news/now-trending/baby-elephant-at-heart-of-viral-social-media-rescue-campaign-dies-in-thailand-zoo		
https://www.savetheelephants.org/blog		
https://blog.nationalgeographic.org/2014/08/12/a-tribute-to-elephants		
https://www.insideasiatours.com/blog/2016/07/13/responsible-elephant-tourism-part-2		
https://www.thepetitionsite.com/331/067/588/elephant-mason-lodge-stop-using-elephants-for-your-business		
https://expertvagabond.com/elephants-in-thailand		

and posted on Facebook; for example, photo images on the Animals Australia Facebook page (Animals Australia, n.d.) showing pictures of tourists on the left enjoying an elephant-ride compared with another picture of an elephant with its foot in chains, with short explanatory phrases accompanying the pictures. This post alone led to more than 220,000 shares around the world with a massive number of critical comments posted. Debate ensued on whether or not the elephant shows and elephant-riding should be banned from tour itineraries.

Many captive elephants in the Thai tourism industry suffer from poor living conditions and are forced to take part in animal shows that feature unnatural behaviour achieved through brutal training methods. Kontogeorgopoulos (2009) mentioned a number of problems found in elephant camps in northern Thailand, including lack of an appropriate set of laws and regulations, injuries related to giving rides, inappropriate use of the ankus (the hook used to break and then control elephants), poor nutrition, inadequate social environment, harsh training practices, long working day and the declining skills of mahouts. Many modern mahouts do not have a family tradition of working with elephants and do not understand their needs or their body signals. Elephants' moods can change suddenly, and owing to their size and strength they can be very dangerous. Mahouts unfamiliar with elephants rely on dominance, using the elephant hook as a weapon (Bansiddhi *et al*., 2020, p. 6). For trekking, shows and painting, for example, often negative reinforcement training is used, where the animal performs the correct behaviour in order to escape or avoid pain, discomfort or an unpleasant experience with a particular object or behaviour through physical punishment (Pryor, 1999; Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018). This is obviously a contradiction of animal welfare based on the 'Five Freedoms' identified by the Farm Animal Welfare Council (1979): freedom from injury and disease; fear; hunger; thirst and malnutrition; thermal or physical distress; and the freedom to express normal behaviours.

Moreover, Bansiddhi *et al*. (2020) mention that the Thai Department of Livestock Development, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives issued standards for elephant camps. These included regulations on elephant shelters, health care, food and water, mahout management, environmental and waste management, tourist service and safety, and required a system of record-keeping to be introduced by 2020, following additional standards including a camp scoring and certification system issued by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports in 2009. Unfortunately, these standards are not enforceable, and many camps do not participate because there is no penalty for not complying with regulations; there is little incentive to follow those announced. Other than a logo that can be put on their website, certified camps receive little to assist in the promotion of tourism, and fewer than a dozen have been certified (Bansiddhi *et al*., 2020, p. 3). As a result, criticism of elephant tourism in Thailand is increasing. For example, Tripadvisor and its booking service, Viator, announced in 2016 that they will no longer sell tickets to hundreds of attractions where travellers come into contact with animals or endangered species held in captivity, including elephant-rides.

Considering the role of the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) in elephant standards in the tourism sector, its guidelines categorize activities such as riding or bathing as unacceptable. This led to ABTA's members, including the UK's largest travel companies, discontinuing the selling of elephant-rides and similar activities to consumers. Meanwhile, ABTA's members also work with local suppliers in destinations such as Thailand to support responsible elephant tourism and animal welfare (www.ABTA.com). A responsible activity would include viewing elephants from a respectful distance while providing them with as much access to their natural habitat as possible and ensuring they are not subject to any punishment or cruelty. Font *et al*. (2019) also address in their study that ABTA is well positioned to develop guidelines to promote destination sustainability that legitimizes the vision of more ethical methods of engaging with animals as a commercially viable proposition. In this study, ABTA states that 'by choosing to book a holiday with an ABTA Member, tourists will help to raise and uphold animal welfare standards across the whole tourism industry' (Font *et al*., 2019, p. 127).

Below are some significant comments from an informative post regarding elephant-back riding in Thailand and some cruel training processes, posted on the elephant section of www.expertvagabond.com, mentioning that they will never support the use of elephants for entertainment on their travels. Many comments show sympathy to the elephants and their calves that have to endure torturous routines every day.

> I feel guilty that I rode elephants before during my first few trips to Thailand. I don't do it anymore after realizing what it does to the animal. They are gorgeous and beautiful. We should not endorse using them for a commercial purpose. (Anonymous 1)
>
> This is horrible. I never knew this. They need to go to prison for their evil acts. I love elephants and I do not appreciate them being abused just so us humans can ride on them. I do not want to hurt them so I will not ride on one. (Anonymous 2)
>
> Thank you. My family is going in a week and I was doing my research on elephant sanctuaries and have not found any as informative and convincing. Now I can make an informed decision not to go to the ones that offer riding and theatre. (Anonymous 3)

From the examples above, the issue of unethical elephant tourism also links closely with the regulations on wildlife tourist attractions in the country, and the policy and practices that control and educate both the tour operators and the tourists. The discussions of one key issue link with other key issues, indicating a web in which all issues are connected to each other, reinforcing the power of social media to influence change.

Thailand has always been regarded as a major elephant tourism destination. Consequently, the Asian Captive Elephant Working Group (ACEWG), a group of national and international elephant experts from scientific and practical disciplines, was established in 2015. This aimed to ensure a sustainable and high quality of life for captive elephants in South-east Asia,

including issues surrounding the use of elephants in tourism in Thailand. However, a number of posts about elephant tourism on social media today are critical of Thailand in this respect.

Many comments on Facebook mentioned that there is a lack of attention from public authorities, and that the country should seriously consider alternative and more innovative tourism approaches that encourage people to be engaged in ethical elephant tourism. However, it is difficult to differentiate between good elephant camps and abusive camps in Thailand, and even the experts cannot confirm the situation as there is little or no information available from travel agencies. Frazier (2019) noted that since there is no clear policy or assessment of the elephant camps, some media are aggressively promoting a total ban on elephant camps for tourism purposes in Thailand. This is supported by an earlier study of Moorhouse *et al*. (2017) in which high levels of tourist dissatisfaction were recorded on TripAdvisor: 15 of the 188 attractions had 30% or more negative reviews and two, both of which hosted rides, shows and interactions with captive elephants, had 70% negative reviews. An example of a negative review found in this study was:

> I have never been so upset. Those poor animals. Something really needs to be done. It's cruel, nasty and the filth these poor helpless animals are living in…

The country's image has also been affected by news articles, such as an article in *The Telegraph* with the headline 'The Dark Side of Animal Tourism in Thailand':

> photogenic animals might be the perfect fodder for social media posts but many of them are exploited and abused according to an expat who's devoted his life to saving them.

In the article the reporter mentioned an earlier post of pop star Rihanna with a wild animal that raised awareness across the whole world about wildlife tourism in Thailand, and another photo of drunk tourists playing with an elephant calf late at night in Bangkok (Goyder, 2014, 26 August). Just a photo alone can raise questions and lead responsible tourists to reconsider their next holiday destination.

Moreover, examples of social media posts that portray negative destination images and unethical elephant tourism can be found across many social media platforms. The number of shares, likes and retweets increases if the content is directly related to animal rights or the health and safety conditions of the elephants. Based on exploring various social media platforms, posts with photos of calves and elephant torture more aggressive and emotional reactions in both local and international media.

Another example can be seen on a Facebook fan page called Khonthaimairakchang (Khonthaimairakchang, n.d.). There is a photo of an elephant calf lying on the floor in an elephant camp with a rope tied to his mother that had 626 followers and received 109 'dislike' clicks from the public. Several comments show disappointment and anger with the elephant camp. Some of the feedback also related to how the government neglected

this problem, while many comments requested that the camp be more responsible and ethical in conducting tourism business.

> How many lives to trade for money and popularity of the venue? Have empathy and kindness all disappeared from human heart? Waiting for bad deeds to get back might be too late, how many elephants will be gone? (Anonymous 4)
>
> No matter how many governments we have, they have never really taken this issue seriously. (Anonymous 5)

Social media provides a powerful new platform to recommend, support, complain about or comment on campaigns raising awareness and influence. In the case of unethical elephant tourism in Thailand, there are impacts on the country's tourism image, which are particularly serious for its role as an international tourist destination. Animal rights becomes a focus for tourists' decision-making as influenced by social media, with voices raised by tourists who care for animal welfare more than their own desires and satisfaction.

Although animals are viewed as voiceless creatures, they have the right to live in normal conditions just like humans. Social media acts as a surrogate for animal voices within. Yet, the question 'Can you hear elephants' voices?' must be seriously considered for real actions, protection and solutions from all related stakeholders.

Conclusion

An exploration of social media campaigns related to Thailand's elephant tourism was undertaken to understand public concerns regarding the industry. Three issues related to the elephants were categorized:

- unethical elephant tourism practices;
- country image affected by unethical elephant tourism; and
- elephant welfare and health and safety conditions.

Social media has raised awareness of ethical elephant tourism in Thailand through various campaigns, and this has had an impact on the tourism sector, stimulating government authorities and related key stakeholders to reconsider management and controls on elephant tourism. Restrictions for responsible and ethical practices especially regarding animal rights are demanded by users on social media, and will affect tourism entrepreneurs and Thailand's image as a sustainable tourist destination. Government authorities, tourism businesses, local communities and tourists need to be aware of the serious issue of unethical tourism programmes and must seek solutions by focusing on:

- enforcement of government policies to promote elephants' welfare and quality of life for both mahouts and elephants; and
- enforcement of ethical practices through controlling and monitoring processes in elephant camps, especially those related to tourism, with effective education programmes for owners, mahouts and tourists.

People raise their voices through social media, showing concern for ethical elephant tourism based on their perceived information, thoughts and feelings as humans. This may ignore the elephants' perspective. Even though the impacts of social media on elephant rights are strong and drive awareness and improvement of elephant welfare, there is no understanding of the feelings of the elephants on their captivity and treatment. The elephants' voices are not heard since there are still limited mechanisms to track and assess the life cycle and ecosystem of elephant tourism.

This chapter provided significant findings from the exploratory analysis of social media and its effects on elephant tourism; however, there are still some limitations. The key ones are the reliability of information posted online without the original source cited and that the social media platforms do not include a counter-argument from operators of elephant tourism. For future research, it is recommended to explore more the thoughts of the operators of such businesses as well as the challenges they face. There is also a need for future research related to perceptions and adaptive mechanisms of tourism entrepreneurs to support ethical elephant tourism.

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Section 6 What Next? Proxy Voices for Elephants

18 Modernizing Human–Elephant Interactions

Andrew McLean

Human Elephant Learning Programs Foundation (H-ELP), Tuerong, Australia

Introduction

The Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*) is in a fundamentally different situation to the African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*). First, African elephants outnumber Asian elephants by around 10:1 and the wild population of the Asian elephant is estimated at only 30,000–50,000 individuals (Choudhury *et al*., 2008) and of those, 10,000–15,000 are captive (Maurer *et al*., 2017). Furthermore, the remaining wild population is severely threatened and on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Endangered Species. Chief among threats to the diminishing wild population are loss and degradation of habitat, poaching, and consequent population disconnection and unbalanced family groupings (Choudhury *et al*., 2008).

While ill-informed animal lovers call for releasing captive animals into the wild, it is plainly impossible with depleted habitats. It is clear that humanity's current responsibility is to provide optimal welfare for captive elephants, and this means improving human–elephant interactions and welfare in all aspects through education. However, a large impediment surrounds the history of human–elephant interactions in captivity. Similar in many ways to the history of horse training, elephant training throughout Asia is ancient. It has its roots four to five millennia ago in the Indus Valley (Fleischer *et al*., 2001) and, like the training of horses, elephant-training techniques are entangled in folklore and legend, handed down from generation to generation.

Interestingly, with both these species, the prevailing methodologies for successful human–animal interactions arise from mankind's historical obsession with hierarchical relationships: a fixed linear hierarchy where rank is maintained by ritualized aggression. Notions of dominance and submission underpin the hierarchy where one individual is said to 'respect' the one of higher rank, and therefore do what is asked. This is manifest in the military, schools, religion, business and, until recently, even in family relationships (McLean, 2013). Central to this belief structure is the mindset

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that the animal is born knowing how to be of service to humanity and merely needs to acquire respect in order to become compliant and 'willing to please'. This flawed concept assumes that such notions of 'respect' and fixed hierarchy are natural in the animal world, which we know is incorrect (McLean, 2013; McGreevy *et al*., 2018).

In the science of ethology (animal behaviour) it is now mainstream knowledge that animal hierarchies are more dynamic, adaptive, resource-based and filial than previously thought, and earlier beliefs that rigid hierarchies exist in horses and dogs have now been debunked (Weeks *et al*., 2000; Packard, 2003). However, in the general world of the training of ridden animals (including elephants), the belief that success in training comes from dominance through ritualized aggression is unfortunately still typical (Barkath, 1974; Bradshaw, 2009) and with regard to elephants in Nepal and India at least, it may also have its roots and stronghold in the Hindu religion and culture (Kamal Ghaire, pers. comm., October, 2007) in a similar way that Christianity maintained the utility and benevolence of animals for human purposes.

Training ideologies that are based on dominance and submission are dangerous for animals and people. This is because they give rise to the false notions of animal benevolence (kindness) and malevolence (hostility). This in turn justifies punitive training methods where animals are punished because they 'know what they have done' or they 'know what they should be doing'. Punishment is a very questionable training tool because it is associated with fear and frustration in the punished animal (Lindsay, 2000) and has been shown to inhibit learning (Parker *et al*., 2008). In addition, high levels of fear derived from punishment may contribute to pathologic emotional states (Kandel, 2006). Mills (1998) summarized a number of problems associated with punishment:

1. It is non-directive, suppressing but not enhancing alternative behaviours.
2. It has the potential to desensitize an animal to the punishing stimulus if the intensity is not optimal.
3. It carries the risk of deleterious emotional changes that can interfere with attention and learning.
4. It may be associated by the animal with the person delivering the punishment.

Although many places in Asia are now moving towards more humane methods, punishment is integral to the early training of many elephants across much of Asia. It is believed that restraining the elephant for a period of days, in some cases with reduced or non-existent water or food, and then subjecting the animal to pain from spears, and metal and wooden implements until the animal ceases to retaliate renders them submissive so that they 'succumb to human will' (Bradshaw, 2009). The form of restraint may include tethering the elephant's neck to a post (Nepal), tethering both forelegs and both hindlegs to separate strong posts in the ground (northern India) or placing the animal in a training crush such as the *phajaan* (Thailand)

and the *kraal* (southern India and Sri Lanka) and the training *crush* (Laos, Indonesia and Myanmar).

When animals are subjected to pain that they are unable to predict, control or escape, they typically show hyper-reactive behaviours and, if these are of no avail, they may descend into passive coping mechanisms. Passive coping mechanisms are characterized by ambivalent behaviours, displacement behaviours (obsessive behaviours such as retentive trunk movements), hypo-vigilance (diminished alertness) and quiescence (inactivity) (Moberg, 2000; Keay and Bandler, 2008). Prolonged exposure to unpredictable, uncontrollable and inescapable pain can initiate the onset of 'learned helplessness' where animals become 'tolerant' of pain. This is dangerous for both mahout and elephant because it is believed to be associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which causes affected animals to attack some time later when triggered by stress or even sudden noise (Bradshaw, 2009).

Some of the cardinal features of chronic PTSD in humans are hyper-arousal symptoms, aggression, marked avoidance behaviours and the re-experience of the symptoms of the trauma. In soldiers experiencing severe inescapable and prolonged trauma in war, post-trauma reactions are frequently evident, and, according to research, significantly higher in prisoners of war. PTSD may show up as sudden hyper-aggression and violence triggered perhaps by a mild fearful experience or a relatively benign situational trigger, such as the noise of a balloon bursting at a children's birthday party or a conflicting emotional situation (Creamer and Forbes, 2004). It is believed that in the traditional methods of 'breaking' elephants, the early exposure to unpredictable, uncontrollable and inescapable pain has been responsible for the high death rate of mahouts and elephants during training (Bradshaw, 2009; McLean, 2013).

While statistics are scant and variable, non-peer-reviewed data suggest that the death rate of both mahouts and elephants is unacceptably high. In Kerala, with an elephant population of around 900, a survey of human and elephant deaths in human–elephant interactions from the years 2007 to 2009, including statistics by district, was released in 2010. It revealed that the mean human death rate from interactions with elephants was 2.44 per month (80.7% were mahout deaths). On the other hand, the mean elephant death rate from human interactions was many times higher (ELA (Elephant Lovers Association), 2010). However, it has been suggested (V. Menon, Wildlife Trust of India, pers. comm., 12 March, 2011) that these figures are overstated, although still alarming, and human death rates in Kerala (excluding killings by wild elephants) are around 12–18 deaths per year. Elephants in Kerala are frequently used for ceremonial activities and sudden noises such as fireworks are not uncommon triggers of elephant hyper-aggression.

Learning Theory

The previous scenario that is inspired by notions of dominance and punishment is completely unnecessary and exists because there is one missing

feature in the training ideology. That link is known as 'learning theory'. This body of knowledge describes the learning processes of all animals including humans. It began with the tradition of the behaviourists, culminating in the work of B.F. Skinner, whose theoretical contributions form the basis of training animals in zoos (Hothersall, 2004). This knowledge is less than a century old and it explains the outcomes of the interaction between humans and animals, including elephants and their mahouts (McLean, 2013). Fundamentally, animals are motivated to obtain certain goals and, on achieving them, their actions are rewarded and the beginning of a stimulus–response connection is born. With repetitions, actions form into habits (Skinner, 1971) and trained behaviours that arise from discreet signals become reliable. When elephant training is based on 'learning theory', such a violent start in life can be eliminated resulting in a mentally secure elephant that is confident and bold in challenging circumstances.

Learning theory as it applies to elephant training largely includes the following learning processes:

- *Habituation*: is when an animal becomes accustomed to a stimulus. For example, an elephant has to become accustomed to other animals and events in his environment as well as the saddle and the mahout on its back. Habituation is a natural phenomenon where, over time, the elephant gradually loses its fear of things in the environment that may be initially fear-inducing but in reality are not dangerous to the elephant. So, the elephant's reaction to the aversive stimulus diminishes to the point where it does not react at all. Knowledge of habituation also provides more than half a dozen solutions and techniques for desensitizing animals including elephants to stimuli of which they have become afraid (McLean and Christensen, 2017).
- *Positive reinforcement*: is the *addition* of something pleasant such as food that rewards a response. To be effective the reward has to arrive at the same time as the desired behaviour. So, any behaviour that results in food, or some other desired thing, can increase the likelihood of that behaviour. To overcome this timing problem, many methodologies employ a whistle or a hand-held clicker to mark the precise moment of the desired behaviour, and then food or other positive reinforcer (such as caressing) follows soon after. This is known as *secondary positive reinforcement*. However, without such devices as whistles or clickers, a distinctly uttered precise word of praise is sufficient to mark the moment of the correct behaviour (like the whistle or clicker) and then food follows after. If words are used in this way, it is essential that they are only used within this learning process otherwise the predictability of the word leading to something of value to the elephant diminishes. *Target training* is another well established methodology of positive reinforcement. It involves positively reinforcing the elephant to touch a 'target' (a specially chosen object such as a coloured stick) and then once paired, using the target to train an elephant to move towards it and touch it with a foot or trunk or other body part and also to follow it. It is showing great efficiency and

safety in the zoo setting and in more recent years in elephant camps in Asia.

- *Negative reinforcement*: also called pressure-release, is the *removal* of something unpleasant (such as pressure on the body) which rewards the desired response. For example, when you are not putting on your seatbelt an irritating noise makes you do so, the good behaviour is rewarded by removing the noise. The aversive stimulus has been removed! Avoiding aversive stimuli is fundamental to animal learning and survival. In all ridden animals, tactile signals are used on the animal's body to control them and thus negative reinforcement is the most salient learning process when ridden or when a person makes any form of physical contact with the animal to move it. Therefore, it is essential that mahouts are trained how to use negative reinforcement correctly in order to learn to move the elephant with the lightest of tactile control. In practical terms, the pressure begins as a light touch that is continued or, if there is no response, the pressure is increased, and then removed as soon as the animal gives a near-correct or correct response. Soon it learns to respond to very light tactile pressure because it precedes and predicts the stronger motivating pressure. Even the lightest touch can be negative reinforcement if its removal causes a reaction in the animal (McLean and Christensen, 2017). For example, the mahout presses on the elephant's ear base with his toes and, as soon as the elephant goes forward, the mahout stops pressing and the pressure ceases. With repetitions, and as a result of precise timing of removal of tactile pressure, the elephant learns to move from the lightest of tactile signals on its ear base. Animal training based on negative reinforcement is only ethical if pressures are reduced to very light tactile (or voice or visual) signals over time and that they are always removed when the elephant complies. When negative reinforcement is augmented by positive reinforcement, this is known as *combined reinforcement* (McLean and Christensen, 2017; McGreevy *et al*., 2018). Combined reinforcement provides the most efficient way to ensure the most reliable control of the captive animal including in the ridden situation. In all situations, the sequence for training is:

1. voice signal;
2. light tactile pressure;
3. increasing to motivating level of pressure, e.g. faster tapping with a stick or fingers;
4. removal of tactile pressure/signal and addition of voice praise; and
5. food/caress reward.

With precise timing, number 3 (above) is soon no longer needed because the elephant now reacts to the predictive effect of 1 and 2, and then finally 2 may also disappear as the elephant now reacts to the human voice signal. When the correct response is reliable, number 5 is now delivered sporadically (this is technically known as placing the response under a *variable schedule of reinforcement*, which is known to make behaviours more resistant to extinction).

Training sessions are finalized when a consecutive sequence of three to five improved or correct responses occurs. However, if the elephant achieves this set of responses easily (as they usually do), then a maximum of two more sets of these repetitions (of three to five correct in a row) is deployed, which accelerates the learning. Each learning set is separated by around two minutes to allow the elephant's brain to refresh oxygen and glucose. By the third set of repetitions, in the majority of cases the elephant is consistently offering the correct response on the first or second attempt. Training sessions are limited to 20 minutes or less. Interestingly, when elephants are free to leave the training at any time (because there are no ropes, fences or chains confining them), they typically choose to finish training sessions after around 20 minutes. The key to achieving this efficiency is the timing and consistency of points 1 to 5, making it easy for the elephant to get the answer right and the supplying of appropriate motivators of combined reinforcement.

In many simplistic discussions on animal training, negative reinforcement unfortunately is often confused with punishment of the animal, such as, for example, a scolding voice, a smack or tap with a stick or another object. This interpretation of positive and negative as a value judgement is incorrect. Negative reinforcement is not termed negative because it is worse than positive reinforcement, but because it is about *subtraction* of an aversive stimulus when a desirable response emerges. This removal increases the likelihood of the correct response next time. So, because of its intrinsic control via touch signals that are proportional to their associated responses, negative reinforcement should not be regarded as something to avoid but rather as something to use correctly so that all pressures on the animal's body reduce to light, unobtrusive signals. When managed correctly, this is the basis of the mahout's thorough control of the elephant in hand and when ridden, and confers control even in difficult or fearful situations when trained correctly. Unfortunately, traditional elephant training systems do not teach this pressure release training correctly, and through ignorance it frequently flows on to punishment.

- *Punishment*: on the other hand is defined as a decrease in the likelihood of a response due to the application of an aversive stimulus (e.g. the animal kicks and it gets smacked). Punishment is non-directive; that is, it doesn't always increase the likelihood of the correct behaviour emerging, it only seeks to prevent an expression of the incorrect one. The most damaging use of punishment is not for the elimination of undesirable behaviours but the use of punishment for non-compliance. For example, it is extremely detrimental for an elephant to be punished for not doing something it was asked to do because, in all likelihood, it did not know what to do and wasn't trained correctly to do so in the first place.
- *Classical conditioning*: is how new signals such as voice commands are learned. When reliable responses have also been learned through the use of pressure-release (or negative reinforcement), then new signals can be added to elicit the same response. This is achieved by the elephant making an association between the new signal (usually a voice command)

and the response it has already learned. Classical conditioning works most efficiently by giving the new voice command before the already known tactile signal, because of the predictability of this arrangement. Eventually, the light tactile signals can be replaced or augmented with voice signals.

Early Applications of Learning Theory to Elephant Training

The first elephant training system using the full range of learning theory was started by the Working Elephant Program of Asia (WEPA), an organization based in Finland. The purpose of elephant training in Nepal and later in India was for wildlife surveillance, census and anti-poaching. Following the success of WEPA workshops in Chitwan, Nepal in 2006 and 2007, the director-general of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) offered the elephant breeding centre in Bardia National Park as a pilot programme, where all five young elephants were to be trained using learning theory principles, so that a comparison could be made with traditionally trained elephants at a later date. Four years later, the learning theory methodology was approved by the director-general of the DNPWC for elephant training throughout Nepal.

Through the ill-health of WEPA's director, Helena Telkanranta, WEPA was temporarily contracted and in 2009 the Human Elephant Learning Programs Foundation (H-ELP) was formed in Australia, bringing together a group of people with various skills to facilitate such training in Asia. At the outset, H-ELP's programme focused on teaching mahouts as well as training elephants. Integrating learning theory with cultural practice, mahouts are taught the use of the above-mentioned learning processes and the principles of training that arise from this knowledge. The elephants are trained with a programme centred on the progressive development via combined reinforcement and classical conditioning of their on-the-ground and ridden responses culminating in working elephants that are safe, confident and reliable.

With the indispensable support of H-ELP's many partners, elephant training workshops have been conducted in India (Assam and Kerala), Thailand (Chiangmai, Chiang Rai and Kanchanaburi), Laos (Luang Prabang) and Myanmar (Bago). Workshops are aimed at training elephants humanely for their various roles including anti-poaching. Elephants trained along these humane and scientific lines are calmer, safer and more reliable than traditionally trained elephants. The programmes have demonstrated that mahouts are enthusiastic and adept in the new and logical methodology.

It is important to recognize that, with the use of modern training methodologies, there is no objective reason to believe that training elephants is necessarily cruel. In Assam for example, the young elephants that the H-ELP Foundation trained there were free to roam the National Park and yet would turn up for their 20-minute training session with regularity and without any signalling or coercion from humans. It is essential that modern

training methodologies become widespread across Asia to eliminate pain and suffering and the associated risks to humans as well.

The use of elephants for anti-poaching and wildlife census purposes in National Parks is of great importance and, for these purposes, elephants need to be well-trained and confident. Unlike any other 'vehicle', the ridden elephant provides many advantages: wildlife is not disturbed, they move silently, they provide a tall vantage point, and they traverse all terrains and water. The use of elephants in this way is of increasing importance due to the ominous new development of the elephant skin trade (van de Water and Matteson, 2018). An early life characterized by punishment and learned helplessness (pain tolerance) impedes the building of confidence for such tasks and promotes fearful behaviours and negative affective states (McGreevy *et al*., 2018).

The use of modern learning theory to train elephants has been successful in Asia although precise comparative texts to compare this training with traditional training in terms of outcomes have not yet been produced. It has been the experience of the H-ELP Foundation that it is successful not only with captive elephants but also with rescued wild elephants. For example, during one of our workshops in Kerala, India, in 2013, one of the mahouts who attended the workshop the previous year rode his elephant, 'Agasthya', many kilometres to the H-ELP workshop the following year. The history of this elephant was that he was found wounded in a trap, and the mahout applied the learning theory principles of combined reinforcement and classical conditioning that he had learned the year before to that elephant, and he rode it many kilometres to the workshop in Kerala and for all intents and purposes Agasthya was perfectly trained, reliable, confident and calm. Similarly, in Nepal as well as Thailand, adhering to learning theory principles has trained many elephants and solved many previously thought 'unsolvable' behavioural issues in elephants. Although there is still some resistance to the infusion of science in animal training, most people would agree a confident secure child is not raised by fear and punishment but by creating clear boundaries and rewarding desirable behaviour. This is the essence of learning theory for animal training also.

Elephant Ecotourism

A major development in the elephant ecotourism world has been the rise of not only animal rights campaigns but also the rising antithesis of tourists who have witnessed traditional elephant training and management and have become outraged. Social media has added extra fuel to the increasing abhorrence of riding elephants with the perception that it is impossible to humanely train elephants to be ridden. Particularly in Thailand, many elephant camps have now switched from riding elephants to providing opportunities to feed and bathe elephants (Baker and Winkler, 2020). Advertising for such experiences emphasizes the distaste for riding elephants and the perceived better ethics of just feeding and bathing them.

While the public generally seem to believe that such activities protect the welfare of the elephants, such beliefs are flawed. Furthermore, opportunities to mingle with elephants in these camps increases the danger to tourists of such interactions. However, from the actual welfare point of view, unrestrained feeding of high-carbohydrate, low-fibre foods *ad libitum* has increased obesity levels in these captive elephants, with consequent deleterious effects on their health including insulin spikes (Norkaew *et al*., 2019) and raised cortisol levels.

What is not realized by the public in general is that the riding of elephants confers at least some physical exercise and enables to some extent the consumption of the animal's normal high-fibre diet and also some socialization with other elephants. These are important needs in elephants and therefore the remit of the H-ELP Foundation has now expanded to include the emphasis and education of current animal welfare knowledge and management as well as more humane training and human–animal interactions.

Elephant Welfare

While the welfare of animals has been variously considered in recent history, it is only in recent years that animal welfare has become embedded as a science in its own right. A major landmark in the progress of animal welfare science was the development of the Five Freedoms model. For the first time, scientists were able to precisely identify health and physiological deprivations in captive animals, which simultaneously informed the way to alleviate them. The Five Freedoms model enabled governments and legislative bodies to construct codes of practice for the care and husbandry of companion animals, service animals and animals in zoos.

However, deficits in the Five Freedoms model became apparent in that it did not inform, to any extent on the real wellbeing of animals in terms of positive welfare states. In other words, it did little to inform of what makes a life 'worth living'. These concerns began to reveal the difference between 'care' and 'welfare'. Taking good care of an animal has historically been about ensuring shelter, adequate food and water, safety and physiological health. However, there is more to a worthwhile life than physiological wellbeing. All animals, including elephants, have certain species-specific mental needs that foster holistic positive welfare states. The Five Domains model (Mellor and Beausoleil, 2015) refers to five broad domains such as nutrition, environment, physical health, behaviour (including human and animal interactions) and the mental domain, and within each of these domains refers to positive welfare states. Henceforth, from the Five Domains model further steps towards ensuring improved welfare for animals emerged, and the Five Domains model is now accepted as the benchmark for welfare for companion animals, farm animals and zoo animals (Blackett *et al*., 2017; Veasey, 2017). Many codes of zoo welfare have led to improvements in the lives of animals particularly in the form of enrichment (DEFRA, 2012; WAZA, 2017). Furthermore, the Five Domains model has facilitated an assessment of a

variety of human–animal interactions from veterinary care to transportation in animals such as horses (McGreevy *et al*., 2018).

Aside from the physiological, health and safety needs of elephants, the basic mental needs that promote positive welfare states can be summarized into four major needs that are measurable:

1. *The need for movement*: Deprivations manifest as locomotory stereotypies in elephants including swaying, trunk movements, foot swinging and stereotypical walking patterns.
2. *The need for social contact*: Social animals such as elephants need tactile contact. It is well documented that tactile contact and its effects, largely via oxytocin, are paramount to the mental security of social animals including humans (Bretherton, 1992; Uvnäs-Moberg, 2003). The deprivation of social contact manifests as stereotypical behaviours that contribute to locomotory stereotypies. It is known that group housing ameliorates locomotory stereotypies in other species (Visser *et al*., 2008).
3. *Foraging needs*: The species-specific need to express foraging behaviours manifests in elephants as the need to eat high-fibre plant material. Elephants are known to graze and browse for around 13 hours per day. In other grazing species, foraging deprivations show up as oral stereotypies such as repetitive chewing and mouth movements (Visser *et al*., 2008).
4. *The need for mental stimulation and communication*: In the wild, an animal's life is replete with stimuli and while this diversity is difficult to replicate in captivity it can be, to some extent, ameliorated by providing opportunities to move and explore the environment. Included in this is the importance of communication not only with other elephants, but also with humans in the form of humane, predictable reward-based training. Dysfunctions in training are known in behavioural science to cause mental conflict and chronic stress. If training involves pain that is uncontrollable and unpredictable, it can lead to learned helplessness, a condition in which animals learn to tolerate and remain unresponsive to pain, causing mental trauma (Maier and Seligman, 1976; McLean and Christensen, 2017).

The Future of Elephant Ecotourism

Because of prevailing issues in training and welfare in many elephant camps, it is of great importance that captive elephants are provided with best-practice and culturally sensitive modern training techniques. This is possible by continuing the establishment of mahout schools and educating mahouts and other personnel in learning theory and elephant welfare. If elephants are to be ridden, such as for National Park surveillance and anti-poaching, then working hours, days, weeks and months of the year must be regulated and enforced. Saddlery and other apparatus used on elephants should

be ergonomically constructed and well-fitted. Regulations should also be established on the elephant's age for riding as well as the number of humans astride based on a ratio of the elephant's mass vs. carrying capacity and the morphology of the elephant's vertebrae.

In addition, optimal elephant welfare should be provided concurrently with proper veterinary and management care. Undeniably it is extremely difficult to provide living conditions identical with the elephant's natural world because for one thing the estimated home range size of Asian elephants has been estimated to exceed 100 km^2 (Baker and Winkler, 2020). Nevertheless, providing opportunities for elephants to forage in as natural conditions as possible is desirable. Such opportunities also include the ability to socialize and move freely for extended periods (Thitaram *et al*., 2015).

In the past decade the term 'compassionate conservation' has emerged, which redefines humanity's responsibility towards nature as embodied in modern attitudes towards ecotourism (Baker and Winkler, 2020). Compassionate conservation emphasizes ethically- and scientifically-based practices that value animals in terms of their own subjective experiences and their deserving of a life worth living (Bekoff, 2013; Baker and Winkler, 2020). There is no evidence that humane training is detrimental to elephants and in all likelihood the ridden situation may confer some improvements in foraging, social and movement domains compared with the current trend of tourists simply feeding and bathing them. It is likely that in the future, elephant-centred ecotourism would be based partly or even substantially on purely observing elephants in their natural settings. However, if the demand for riding elephants remains, then the need for humane training and management is critical.

Conclusion

It is not feasible for the 10,000–15,000 captive elephants across Asia to be returned to their ever-shrinking habitats. Furthermore, because elephants form a crucial part of myriad rural economies and their task in poaching surveillance is as yet unsurpassed, it makes sense that working elephants are trained and managed in the most humane and welfare-friendly way using learning and welfare principles that precisely align with the elephant's ethogram and learning processes. More broadly speaking, if learning theory and optimal welfare were to be systematically incorporated into elephant training and management in the ecotourism setting throughout Asia, 'social licence' for the use of elephants in ecotourism would be more likely to be sanctioned.

In all sectors, such necessary improvements in the lives of elephants would reveal a corresponding decrease in the death rates of mahouts and elephants and an increase in the animal's positive welfare states.

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19 Validating a Captive Elephant Welfare Index

Vivek Gurusamy[1] and Clive Phillips[2]

[1]*Independent Researcher, University of Queensland School of Veterinary Science, Brisbane, Australia*
[2]*Centre for Animal Welfare and Ethics, University of Queensland, Gatton, Australia*

Introduction

The welfare and management conditions of captive elephants (Asian: *Elephas maximus* and African: *Loxodonta* spp.) is contentious (Barber, 2009). Welfare assessment should focus on their physical, psychological and social requirements in confinement (Veasey, 2006). Such a complex evaluation cannot easily be achieved through a single measure of welfare, as welfare is focused not only on the health of an individual but also on its emotional experiences and perceptions of its environment. For elephants a comprehensive approach is required to relate health, behaviour and physiology with husbandry (Clubb and Mason, 2002). Physiology increasingly relies on non-invasive techniques, for example, faeces for glucocorticoid metabolites (hereafter cortisol) (Brown, 2000), or urinary cortisol for a more immediate measure. Social dominance and group size correlate with faecal cortisol (Foley *et al*., 2001), and newly introduced females induce stereotypes and increased cortisol (Schmid *et al*., 2001).

Captive elephants are usually kept in either zoos, sanctuaries (natural protected environments for unwanted, injured or endangered elephants) and timber or tourist camps. Sanctuaries offer more space but less human contact. Asian zoo elephants have shorter lives, higher infant mortality and more health problems than those in the wild or timber camps (Clubb *et al*., 2008), where elephants do logging work. Hence people argue that elephants should not be kept captive (e.g. Farinato, 2004; In Defense of Animals, 2012), due to mortality risks, inadequate space, use of chains, training procedures and an inappropriate social environment. Nevertheless, because of public concern, captive elephant care now offers better veterinary care, nutrition, environment and enrichment to increase behavioural choices (Hutchins and Smith, 2003).

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Natural conditions are the reference point for understanding species biology and nutritional requirements in captivity. Sanctuaries usually care better for elephants than zoos, with more space, facilities for social interaction, natural feeding and walking, to meet their behavioural needs (Hutchins, 2006)[1]. Comparison of mortality and health issues in timber camps and zoos (Clubb *et al*., 2008) confirms that the former usually provide a better captive environment. Space in particular (Hutchins, 2004), social companionship, veterinary care, activity levels and other psychological requirements are better in sanctuaries than zoos (In Defense of Animals, 2004). Furthermore, sanctuaries can provide woodlands, grasslands and both indoor and outdoor enclosures (Clubb and Mason, 2002). However, the bond between keeper and elephant is weaker, with a lower staff:elephant ratio in sanctuaries than zoos (Ruhter and Olsen, 1993), but likely not tourist camps. Captive elephants in the timber camps of south and South-east Asia work about 5–8 hours per day, with 12–16 hours per day for foraging and social interaction, including with wild elephants if the sanctuary is located near a forest (Bist *et al*., 2001; Mar, 2001, p. 196). Nowadays few camps haul timber, supporting ecotourism and safari rides instead (Tipprasert *et al*., 2002; Millspaugh *et al*., 2007).

Zoos fail the needs of elephants mostly in terms of space availability, environmental complexity, provision of forage and natural substrates, climatic conditions and social housing (Hutchins, 2006; Veasey, 2006). Zoo and captive animal regulatory authorities established protocols for elephants in captivity, but these have limited use. Maple, 2007 argues that not the amount but quality of space, e.g. roof height, floor type, chaining and noise, is paramount with elephants adapting to reduced areas.

Elephant welfare would benefit from an index like the (farm) Animal Needs Index (ANI) (Bartussek, 1999) to integrate housing, environment, climate, management and animal-based measures (Ofner *et al*., 2000). A validated welfare assessment tool could address the ongoing controversy about captive elephant welfare (e.g. Mason and Veasey, 2010), which is part of the wider debate about captive elephants' role in conservation, education and recreation (Jamieson, 1985). A welfare index for captive elephants at the population level exists (Mason and Veasey, 2010), but individual animals are important (Ohl and Putman, 2014). Scores from elephants and their husbandry (Gurusamy *et al*., 2014) could help create a welfare index with stakeholder and expert support. We used non-invasive methods to assess welfare status and management conditions of elephants in Indian zoos and sanctuaries, and related these to a welfare index, which was further tested around the world.

Materials and Methods

The captive elephant welfare index (CEWI)

Our index assumes that captive elephant welfare is related to husbandry attributes of varying importance, and that these can be provided in different systems. Past experiences are not usually considered, even though they

Table 19.1. Zoo and sanctuary areas, elephant numbers and space/elephant.

	Zoos			Sanctuaries		
Number	Size (ha)	No. elephants	Space/elephant (m^2)	Size (ha)	No. elephants	Space/elephant (m^2)
1	22	8	15,000	200	64	31,250
2	102	6	30,800	10,800	22	172,730
3	510	6	75,300	32,100	27	170,370
Mean	211	6.66	40,366	14,400	37.7	124,783

influence stress responses (Schmid *et al*., 2001). We consulted 10 elephant welfare experts to identify 15 attributes related to captive elephant welfare (Gurusamy *et al*., 2014). These each had 3–6 systems relevant to elephant welfare rated by 242 stakeholders (zoo directors, elephant-keepers, relevant scientists and welfare advocates) (Gurusamy *et al*., 2014).

Index validation

Three zoos and three captive elephant sanctuaries in southern India were used to validate the CEWI with measures of behaviour and physiological stress in Asian elephants. Two sanctuaries were in the forest fringes of Tamil Nadu, and the third was in a southern Indian city, along with the zoos. There were more elephants in the sanctuaries than the zoos and they were provided with more space (Table 19.1). Each elephant had its own mahout.

Elephants in zoos

In the three zoos there were five females and four males recorded, mean age 34.9 ± 2.76 years. Elephants were outdoors, unchained during visiting hours in a display area, but protected from the public by a moat or fence. At night they were individually chained (Table 19.2). Daytime enrichment took the form of a water pool, palm branches (as feed) and dirt to throw around their enclosure.

Cooked rice, bananas and mineral/vitamin supplements were provided at 07.00 and 17.00 hours, taking 30 minutes to consume. Forages were eaten all day. After the first of these feeding times they were given a bath by the mahout[2] and cleaned for approximately 30 minutes, then used for six public rides daily, each lasting 15 minutes.

Elephants in sanctuaries

In each, three males and three females were recorded, mean age 37.3 ± 2.04 years. Most were captive born, wild, injured, sick or orphaned elephants, the latter in enclosures. Bathing for 30 minutes at 08.00 hours was followed by green forages, with cooked rice and bananas at 15.00 hours. One-hour safari rides with a mahout occurred twice daily, except during March–June.

Table 19.2. Daily activities for zoo and sanctuary elephants.

Hour	Zoos	Sanctuaries
00–06	Chained	Forest
07	Feeding; bathing	Return from forest
08	15 min public rides	Bathing
09		Forage feeding
10		Chained and used for two 1 hour safari rides
11		
12		
13		
14		Feeding
15		
16	Feeding	Forest
17		
18–24	Chained	

In the two larger sanctuaries elephants were released into the protected forest during the dry season, and usually taken there just for the night at other times. Elephants were chained centrally when not in the forest, working with the trainer or on safari rides within view of each other but out of reach.

Behaviour observation

Twenty-seven elephants, six in three sanctuaries and three in three zoos were selected for behaviour recording. An ethogram of common behaviours in five categories (Table 19.3) was used to record 24 hours in each sanctuary and zoo. Within each hour, each elephant was watched continuously for 10 minutes. Elephants < 6 years and adults in full musth or oestrus (temporal gland secretion, urine dribbling, aggressive) were excluded. Musth-like walking and ear waving were included.

Urinary cortisol measurement

Urine samples of at least 10 ml were collected for determination of cortisol, a hormone response to stress, from three elephants in each sanctuary and zoo used for behaviour recording. Urine samples were collected as 'free-catch' (70% of samples), but if not possible (30% of samples) a recent (< 10 minutes) sample was absorbed into a sponge. There was no significant difference in cortisol concentration between methods. Five samples per elephant were collected between 08.00 and 17.00 hours.

Table 19.3. Ethogram for elephants in zoos and sanctuaries.

Behaviour	Notes
Maintenance behaviours	
Feed/drink	Usually with aid of trunk
Digging	With foot or tusk
Manipulate object	Move, push, toss (away from body) or pick up objects
Manipulate enrichment/ chain	
Rub body	Against, e.g. rock face/wall
Self-maintenance	Touch, rub or groom own body using mouth, trunk or appendages
Self-mutilation	Leg bite, kick, or leg slam into ground, head butt or scrape hard against object, scraping body against object
Work with trainer	Including responding to commands and working within daily management routines
Aggression to trainer	Including lunge with trunk or running forward in charge
Elimination	Defecation/urination
Throw	Throw hay, dirt, sand on body, especially back, stomach and legs
Explore	Use trunk or toes to explore substrate, bars, chains or other objects in their immediate environment
Public interaction	Interact with or watch public
Short travel	Locomotion within a zoo or main area of sanctuary
Long travel	Movement into the forest and safari rides in zoo or sanctuary
Tail erect	Without defecating
Idle	Standing or lying motionless, including sleep.
Vocalization and trunk movement towards body parts	
Trumpet	
Purr	Low, pulsating, tonal rumble
Other vocalization	Other vocalization, include slurp, boom and scream
Trunk tip to scalp	
Trunk tip to ear	
Trunk tip to feet	
Trunk to body	
Musth display behaviours	
Musth walk	Bull walking with head held high and rolling swagger
Ear wave in musth	
Head movements in musth	Head toss and trunk curl
Urine dribble in musth	From penis sheath
Social behaviours	
Social affiliation	Play or trunk tangle with, or caress, conspecific

Continued

Table 19.3. Continued

Behaviour	Notes
Contact aggression	Conspecific attack with trunk, mouth or legs, sparring, head butt, pushing, and tusking.
Non-contact aggression	Includes mock charge and threat display with ears erect
Submissive	Pawing, arched back, ears flat against head, foot swinging, in response to aggression
Approach	Walks deliberately towards another
Inspect urine or faeces	
Touch (other than below)	One animal puts its trunk on conspecific's body, except mouth, temporal gland or genitals and gently smells and/or probes conspecific
Trunk to conspecific mouth	
Trunk to conspecific temporal gland	
Trunk to conspecific genitals	Touch genitals of conspecifics with trunk
Reverse	Reversing posterior into the side of a more dominant elephant
Rear push	Push conspecific with hind quarters
Stereotype-like behaviour	
Sway	Move body from side to side in rhythmic pattern
Head shake	Vigorous shaking of head, ears flat against the body
Head rock	Head rocking from side to side repetitively
Head weave	Repeated movement of head and trunk in figure of eight
Trunk curl	Repeatedly curl trunk tightly inwards then uncurl
Trunk twitch	Repeated movement of trunk in jerking manner
Trunk bounce	Repeated bouncing or dragging distal portion of trunk on ground, sometimes with booming vocalization
Trunk twiddle	Twirling trunk around in repeated circles

Index performance survey

A survey was conducted among zoological parks and sanctuaries holding captive Asian and African elephants to test their performance on the CEWI. The elephant databases www.elephant.se and www.asianelephant.net provided information about zoos and sanctuaries holding elephants (2217 locations). A total of 191 zoos and sanctuaries were sent a generic email/web contact form to be completed by an experienced elephant keeper. A total of 31 completed responses were returned; no reply was received from 96 institutions for multiple reasons.

Results

In the stepwise regression relating urinary cortisol to stakeholder-rated importance values for the welfare attributes measured in the six zoos and

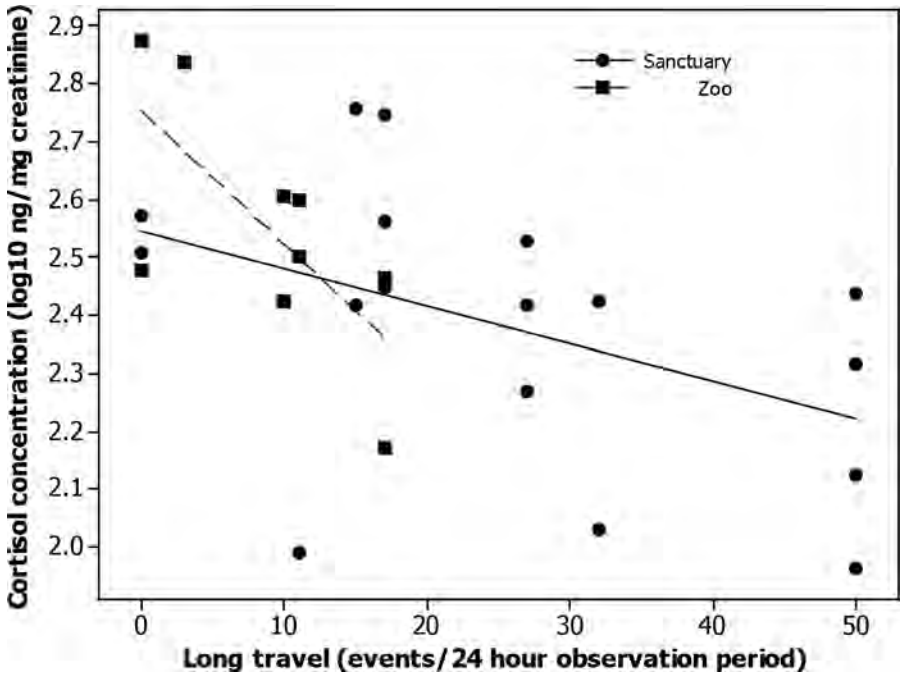

Fig. 19.1. Variation in urinary cortisol concentration with long travel, with regression lines plotted separately for elephants in sanctuaries (—) and zoos (- - -).

sanctuaries, two significant attributes emerged. The first step was enclosure type ($P = 0.001$) and the second diet ($P = 0.004$) (r^2 of 99.7):

$$CORT_{urine} = 1929 - 225\ (\pm 101.3)\ \text{Enclosure Type} - 56.4\ (\pm 41.4)\ \text{Diet}$$

Where $CORT_{urine}$ = urinary cortisol concentration (ng/mg creatinine) and Enclosure Type and Diet = importance value for each zoo's Enclosure Type or Diet.

When the CEWI scores were regressed against the behaviour variables, two significant correlations emerged:

- Head weaving (coefficient –0.92, $P = 0.001$); and
- Idling (coefficient 0.69, $P = 0.004$).

Significant individual attribute/behaviour correlations were observed for the six zoos and sanctuaries. Large 'Group size' was negatively correlated with tail erect (TU) ($P = 0.003$). Elephants in zoos where 'health care' and 'enclosure security' were at a low level had more frequent elimination ($P = 0.006$ and 0.003, respectively) and head shake (Shake) behaviours ($P = 0.005$). A high level of 'Enrichment' was associated with less self-mutilation ($P = 0.008$) and high levels of 'Keeper knowledge and experience' with less trunk curling ($P = 0.004$) (Figs. 19.1 and 19.2).

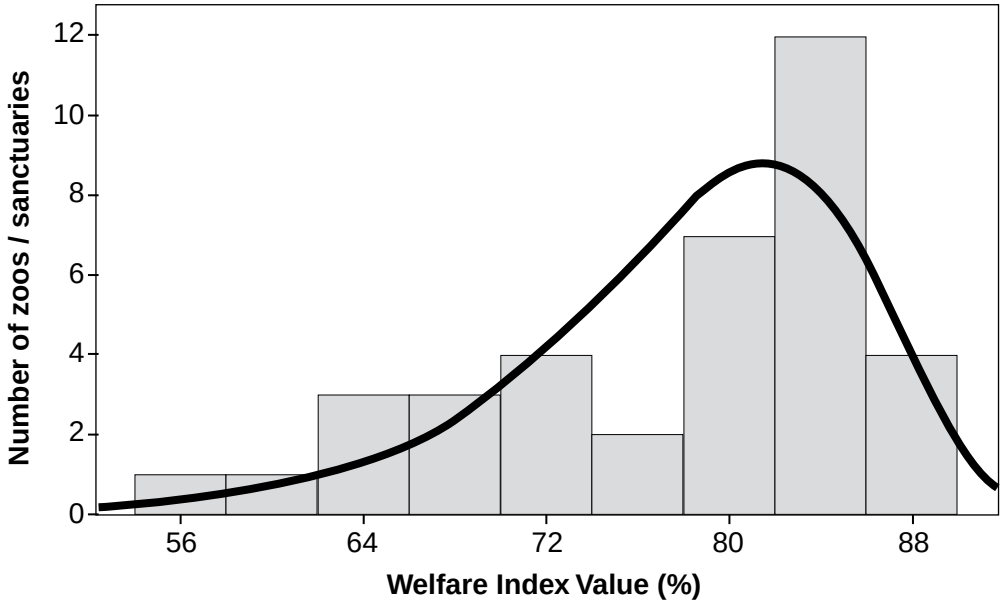

Fig. 19.2. Welfare index scores of zoos and sanctuaries that participated in the survey with plotted Weibull curve.

Differences between zoos and sanctuaries

Urinary cortisol was greater in elephants in zoos (395.5 ng/mg creatinine) than sanctuaries (270.9 ng/mg creatinine) (SED 180.19, $P = 0.001$). Elephants in sanctuaries spent more time manipulating enrichment, travelling long distances, placing their trunk in conspecific's mouths, or using it to touch their temporal gland or genitals (Table 19.4). Elephants in zoos approached conspecifics more and engaged socially, and inspected eliminations more than those in sanctuaries. Elephants in zoos swayed less but twitched and twiddled their trunk more than those in sanctuaries. The proportion (%) of behaviour recorded shows that elephants in zoos (Z) engage more in stereotypes than those in sanctuaries (S): sway, Z 0, S 67; head shake Z 67, S 50; head rock Z 0, S 0; head weave Z 100, S 83; trunk curl Z 67, S 17; trunk twitch Z 67, S 17; trunk bounce Z 33, S 11; trunk twiddle Z 11, S 0.

Survey of CEWI performance

Only 38% and 30% of the enclosures had the best system for the first two highly ranked attributes 'substrate in the enclosure' and 'group size', respectively (Fig. 19.3), while the attributes 'health care', 'enrichment', 'enclosure type', 'enclosure size', 'keeper knowledge and experience' and 'diet' had the best system scores in over 70% of enclosures. Only 10% of

Table 19.4. Behaviours (events/24 h) significantly different ($P \leq 0.05$) between elephants in sanctuaries and zoos.

Behaviours	Zoos	Sanctuaries	SED[a]	Probability
Manual enrichment	23.0	40.1	5.84	0.02
Long travel	24.3	6.4	5.45	0.01
TrunkCM	1.1	4.5	1.07	0.01
TrunkCT	0.1	4.4	1.66	0.04
TrunkCG	4.8	6.4	3.86	0.02
Affiliation	38.7	24.0	5.89	0.05
Approach	20.5	7.7	2.69	0.001
InspectUF	31.1	17.1	4.15	0.01
Sway	3.6	24.9	6.15	0.002
Twitch	29.7	7.8	6.75	0.01
Twiddle	5.4	1.1	1.30	0.01

[a]Standard error of the difference between two means.

enclosures had the best system for 'enclosure provision', 8% for 'interaction with handler/keeper' and none of the zoos had the best system for the attribute 'display duration'.

Discussion

Welfare index correlation with behaviour and urinary cortisol

Zoos and sanctuaries with low CEWI scores tended to have elephants with high urinary cortisol and head weaving, a stereotypy common in zoos (Kurt and Garai, 2001; Clubb and Mason, 2002), low levels of idling and throwing hay/dirt/sand over the body. Comparing urinary cortisol with the CEWI systems, increased urinary cortisol was closely associated with poor 'enclosure type'. This may have been because of the restraining of elephants in indoor enclosures with chains, with the consequent separation from conspecifics, creating social deprivation and restriction of natural behaviours, especially the opportunity to walk, causing stress. Stakeholders considered the poorest method of enclosing elephants was an indoor enclosure only, followed by an outdoor enclosure with no shelter. The greatest support was for providing elephants with both indoor and outdoor enclosures. In our survey, 62% of zoos/sanctuaries indicated that they had concrete flooring in their indoor enclosure, potentially causing foot disorders. Concrete floors reduce locomotion and lying, restricting blood flow, nail wear and muscular activity, especially if elephants are chained for prolonged periods (Wiedenmayer and Tanner, 1995).

Small group sizes were negatively associated with tail erect (TU), indicating alertness, and bad 'health care' and poor 'enclosure security' with increased elimination and head shaking. High defecation rates can

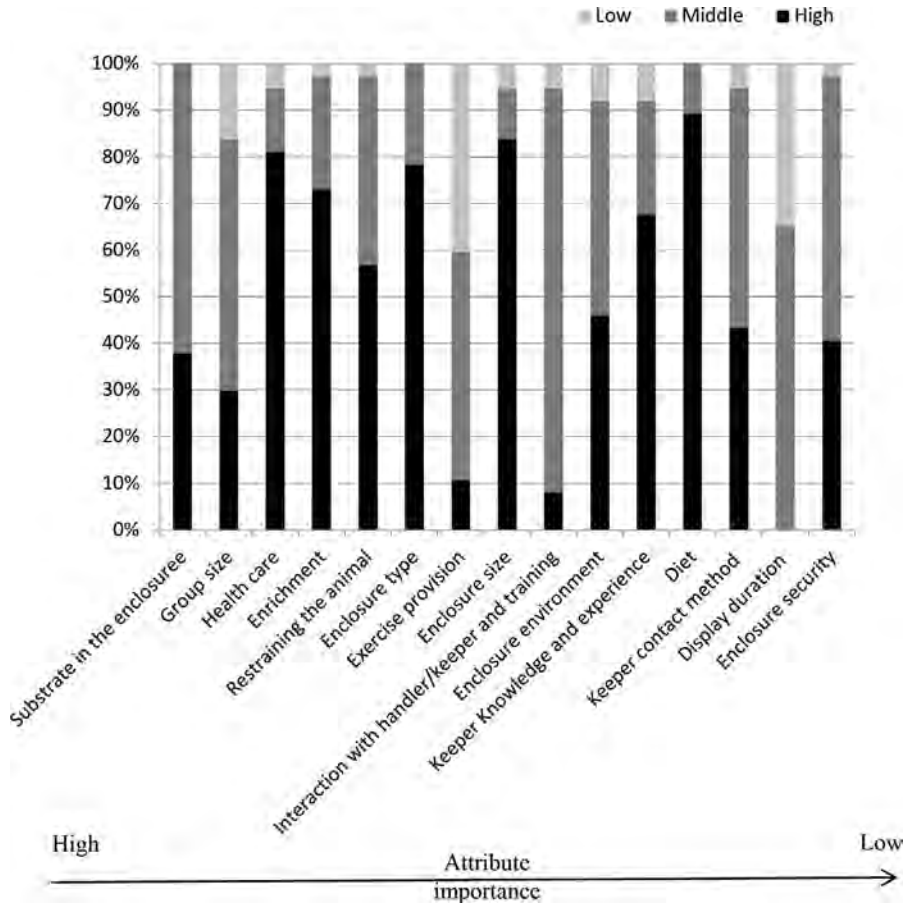

Fig. 19.3. Percentage of CEWI survey zoos and sanctuaries selecting each system for each attribute, showing proportion of zoos and sanctuaries self-reporting that they operated at the lowest, middle and highest rating of system for each attribute. Attributes are ordered from highest (left-hand side) to lowest (right-hand side) importance for achievement of good welfare.

indicate stress, and poor enclosure security may have increased interaction with humans and stress. Increased zoo visitor numbers increase corticoids in rhinoceros (Carlstead and Brown, 2005). Good keeper knowledge and experience in our study was associated with less trunk curling. Stereotypic behaviours indicate poor welfare, with less normal behaviour, for example, in social isolation and poor environments. Two stereotypic behaviours (trunk twitching and twirling) were more common in zoos than sanctuaries, aligning with increased cortisol. Stereotypies in elephants are accompanied by increased cortisol (Schmid *et al*., 2001). Although swaying has been reported to be common in zoo elephants (Stoinski *et al*., 2000), with individual variation (Wilson *et al*., 2004), the higher levels in sanctuaries than zoos may relate to the greater difference in freedom between being in the

forest and being restrained, compared with the zoo elephants, which are more used to confinement. Such behaviours are indicative of stress, but also may themselves act as a coping mechanism (Mason and Mendl, 1997).

Social interaction, such as touching conspecifics' mouths, temporal glands and genitals, were more common in sanctuaries than in zoos, suggesting more investigative behaviour as they check other elephants, either to assess dominance or their physiological status. These behaviours were associated with low cortisol. Zoos and sanctuaries provided different opportunities to alleviate stress through social behaviour, by placing the trunk in the mouth of a conspecific in sanctuaries, and affiliation and inspecting conspecifics' eliminations in zoos.

Trunk in conspecific mouth may have an appeasement function as it negatively correlated with cortisol, as was 'long travel', suggesting that safaris into the forest may play a beneficial role in enriching the elephants' lives. This could be utilized in elephant camps, which regularly take tourists for rides.

Performance on CEWI

The electronic survey demonstrated the potential of the CEWI to be used as an assessment tool (despite a low response rate) that could benefit elephant tourism camps. Data volunteered by the camps could potentially be used to chart improvements over time, and if further validated could be used to benchmark performance, particularly in top tourism camps. Only 38% of the institutions had the best system for 'enclosure substrate' (the most important attribute), and only 30% the optimum 'group size'. More than 60% of institutions had concrete flooring or a hard surface for their elephants in either one of the indoor or outdoor enclosures. Foot problems are a common cause of mortality and health impairment, with a hard substrate most adversely affecting foot health (Buckley, 2001; Csuti *et al*., 2001), and natural and soft substrate floors producing healthy feet (Buckley, 2001). One of the ways that tourism camps could improve their elephants' welfare is by avoiding concrete floors for their elephants.

Elephants are highly social animals living in organized family structures, but 70% of the zoos and sanctuaries did not meet the optimum social requirements, and 16% had solitary elephants. Tourism camp elephants should never be kept in solitary confinement, and even though housing bulls separately in any enclosure is allowed in certain circumstances, they should still have eye contact with other members of the herd and when appropriate be allowed to touch and feel other elephants. Enrichment, although scored highly by more than 70% of institutions, is hard to provide with benefits, as a regular rotation and modification of the enrichments is necessary. Environmental enrichment is important for elephants with poor social housing and little contact with conspecifics, and less necessary if the elephants are given positive reinforcement training and exercise (e.g. Rees, 2000). This will reduce stereotypic behaviours (Shepherdson *et al*., 1990).

Some (22%) of the surveyed zoos and sanctuaries provided only outdoor and not indoor enclosures, which tourism camps should provide. Even though the majority of the zoos and sanctuaries (84%) met the space requirements for captive elephants recommended by accepted BIAZA (2010) standards, these are the minimum necessary within a zoo setting not for tourism, where the elephants will have the additional stresses of constant interaction with people, some of whom may abuse them. The home range of elephants in the wild is estimated as 16,968 ha (Casamitjana, 2011). In our study, zoos and sanctuaries provided 0.024 and 0.074%, respectively, of the minimum home range, so tourism camps should seek to provide more space. Sometimes the space is not always available; for example, when the sanctuary elephants were chained up.

Most (87%) of surveyed facilities achieved the best score for diverse food, while 13% of facilities provided only concentrate food or browse/roughages. However, the limited opportunity in our study to characterize dietary provision within the framework of the questionnaire, and indeed several other attributes, should not lead to the assumption that dietary provision was at an excellent level. Dietary management is an important factor in preventing health and foot problems of captive elephants, as high-energy diets lead to obesity, which, coupled with inadequate exercise, is the single most important risk factor for foot problems (e.g. Harris *et al*., 2008). The importance of this attribute is emphasized by the fact that in our study diet was one of the factors related to cortisol, with poor dietary provision related to high cortisol concentrations. In tourist camps people feeding elephants with sugary supplements, such as bananas, sugarcane or pumpkin, will cause obesity and reduce their welfare (Norkaew *et al*., 2019).

Restraining tourism camp elephants in captive enclosures is recommended only during health checks and for veterinary procedures, since it restricts behavioural freedom and socialization needs. Forty-one per cent of our surveyed facilities either restrained the elephants in the indoor enclosures or during specific times or all day. An exception is elephants in musth, which are difficult to control. Restraining elephants causes stereotypic behaviours and aggression (Kurt and Garai, 2001).

Few zoos (10%) achieved the highest scores for 'exercise provision' and 'interaction with handler/keeper'. Inadequate exercise causes obesity and arthritis, and Harris *et al*. (2008) found that UK zoo elephants were fatter than working elephants in India, who also had improved locomotion. Interactions with handlers are positive enriching experiences if the training methods are through positive reinforcement, although minimization of training to that necessary for veterinary care may also support positive welfare benefits. Elephants develop social bonds with keepers, provided the staff turnover is not excessive. Most zoos (84%) reported using positive and negative reinforcement training but some (5%) admitted to using occasional punishment during training. Interaction with handler and positive training methods both have psychological benefits, acting as a form of occupational therapy for captive elephants (e.g. Koehl, 2000).

Most (68% of zoos/sanctuaries) claimed to have experienced keepers with extensive knowledge, while 24% rated their keepers' knowledge to be more experience-oriented than theoretical. Keeper knowledge is now considered to be paramount in maintaining elephant welfare as the keepers are the only source of contact with their animals, as well as providing mutual welfare benefits for both keeper and elephant (e.g. Gore *et al*., 2006).

'Display duration' and 'enclosure security' were the least important attributes, but no zoos/sanctuaries apparently had elephants on public display for long periods daily. There is a major risk of this in tourist camps, which don't usually have much enclosure security, such as barriers or moats separating elephants from people. Only 41% of the enclosures had sufficient distance between the public and elephants with a proper barrier. Proper enclosure security governs the safety of both the animal and the public (Gupta, 2000; BIAZA, 2010).

Conclusion

A CEWI is described, with relationships to urinary cortisol and behaviour, providing evidence of validity as a measure of elephant welfare. Although initially tested in zoos and sanctuaries, it could be tested with tourist camp elephants. The index is based on expert opinion and uses a multiple parameter assessment. It also may indicate some aspects of husbandry and welfare management that need improvement in tourist camps. The long-term use of a welfare assessment tool such as CEWI could identify change in welfare provision for elephants, as well as enabling comparison between camps that would encourage improvement overall. In addition to this anticipated development of the index, recognition will need to be given to changes in scientific opinion and the growing knowledge of elephant cognition and social needs, in the light of which the CEWI will have to be assessed and modified in the future.

Notes

[1] See photo 9 in the Elephant Portrait Gallery.
[2] See photo 10 in the Elephant Portrait Gallery.

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20 Promoting Elephant-Friendly Tourism

Marjorie van Strien[1] and Jan Schmidt-Burbach[2]

[1]*Inclusive Tourism and Livelihoods Specialist, Raamsdonk, Netherlands*
[2]*World Animal Protection, Berlin, Germany*

Introduction

To address the existing welfare concerns for captive elephants in the tourism industry sustainably, there is a need for understanding of local circumstances and development of tailor-made solutions (Duffy and Moore, 2011). Advocates for a change of current practices highlight that elephants' complex needs as endangered wild animals cannot be adequately met in captivity, and that ongoing commercial use of captive elephants risks encouraging poaching and illegal trade (e.g. Moorhouse *et al*., 2015; Schmidt-Burbach, 2017a). Global acceptability of elephant-riding has dropped by 12% between 2014 and 2018, showing a change in tourist mindsets (Schmidt-Burbach, 2017a). Many tour operators and travellers are moving away from excursions that involve elephant-rides and are instead seeking other or more elephant-friendly activities (Font *et al*., 2019; Schmidt-Burbach, 2017b).

A fundamental concern in this debate is the potential effect of reducing demand for elephant-rides on the care for these animals. Dismissing elephant-riding does not necessarily improve the welfare of the animals; in fact, it may lead to its deterioration. The elephant's welfare depends to a large extent on the income generated by their owner(s); there is a correlation between the fixed cost of elephant care and the disposable income of its owner(s). The owners often find it challenging to compensate for a loss in elephant-based income. Thus, developing routes to change will require replacing the income from elephant-rides with revenue generated by more humane alternatives. Proposed solutions include offering elephants more self-determined time in natural environments enabling expression of more natural behaviour, better management practices at elephant camps and enforcing a set of (practical) regulations to ensure good management (Bansiddhi *et al*., 2020; Schmidt-Burbach, 2019). Although these are useful ideas in a general sense, these concepts require an assessment of their applicability and strategy for implementation in the local context of an individual destination.

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The village of Sauraha in Nepal is a principal entry point to Chitwan National Park and has been influenced by multiple events over the past few years, affecting the local tourism dynamics and specific tourism products like elephant-back safaris. The global debate on animal welfare visibly influences the local market dynamics for elephant safaris. At the same time, there are other local factors at play that may be of stronger influence. The destination has been affected by local political and economic challenges that have increased cost of operations, intensified competition and challenged potential visitors. Furthermore, Sauraha is attracting emerging markets with different values and expectations in comparison with the traditional markets and which are charged lower prices for services. During interviews for this study, local elephant owners noted there are times when they receive less income from their elephants than is needed to maintain them (World Animal Protection, 2017). Understanding these local realities is crucial to prepare appropriate interventions for improving elephant welfare.

This chapter will therefore explore the impact of recent events facing destination Sauraha and reveal how understanding this is key to informing a tailor-made strategy to improve welfare for captive elephants. This research was conducted in the context of an ongoing partnership between World Animal Protection and the Elephant Owners' Association of Sauraha, and involved interviews with stakeholders in Sauraha and Kathmandu, as well as a visitor survey. Findings show that there is an increasing interest among private elephant owners to consider alternative management styles, especially to alleviate personal liability.

The History and Business Model of Elephant Safaris in Sauraha

Captive elephants have a long history in Nepal as a mode of transportation, for labour, an instrument in warfare, a valued (export) commodity and a symbol of spirituality (Locke and Buckingham, 2016). The history of elephant husbandry by the Tharu, especially for royalty, has been well documented by Locke (e.g. Locke, 2011). Under the rule of King Mahendra, the Tarai was transformed into a system of protected forest areas due to efforts to eradicate malaria, build roads, as well as in-migration and deforestation (Locke, 2008). In the early 1960s, the king gave permission for the establishment of the first safari resort, Tiger Tops, which offered tourists elephant-back jungle expeditions to view the megafauna of what became Chitwan National Park (in 1964). Since then, elephants have played a key role in patrolling the protected jungle areas of Nepal and are used by the tourism industry for elephant-back safaris (World Animal Protection, 2017).

Nepal has a history of 40 years of elephant-back safaris, and is a popular tourist activity across all markets. Elephant-rides mainly take place in the buffer zone of Chitwan National Park and are operated by local communities as part of a community tourism offer. The safari product was established as a component of buffer zone management involving local communities and ensuring welfare benefits for them in the process (Bhusal, 2012).

Communities earn an income from tourism activities, including elephant safari-rides, guided jungle walks and canoe-rides and other adventure activities in the buffer zone. These activities are considered a positive force for nature conservation (Sofield, 2000; Bhusal, 2012). There are 65 elephants in Sauraha privately owned or co-owned by about 100 people. The number of owners fluctuates slightly, due to elephants occasionally being sold. All owners are members of the Elephant Owners' Cooperative, a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise. Each elephant is represented by one vote in the entity. Therefore, if an elephant has multiple owners, they must identify one representative. Most elephant owners are also involved in other business; about 50% of them are involved in hospitality.

In 1998, Sofield and Bhandari found that an elephant purchased for about US$15,000 would earn its owner in Sauraha that same amount per year, so over a period of years the return on investment was significant. The growth in visitor numbers since 1998 means this income has only increased. In 2015, it was estimated that elephant owners were making between an estimated $1000 (June–July) and $2300 (October–November) per month (World Animal Protection, 2017). This was calculated based on a minimum cost for elephant care of $617/month. With recent visitor numbers, it is likely that elephant owners are still making a reasonable profit each month; however, an earthquake in 2015 and other disruptive events have reduced visitor numbers.

Elephants in Nepal are considered work animals – which stands in stark contrast to them being considered biologically wild animals and classified as endangered internationally. Generally, people – including elephant owners and mahouts – care for their work animals, as they are crucial to their livelihood and to the profitability of their business. However, these owners often lack knowledge and the resources to do so adequately. Additionally, elephant carers often employ management methods not conducive to good welfare of the animals, but which are deemed necessary to ensure the safety of people in close contact with them. Thus, elephant-keeping does not offer species-adequate conditions and creates welfare concerns (Schmidt-Burbach *et al.*, 2015; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020). As per Coulter's definition (2016, p. 6), elephants, like other work animals in Nepal, 'do work of various kinds for people, and people garner material, social and/or personal gain from that work'. Different stakeholders hold very different understandings of the role of elephants (and animals in general) in the tourism industry (Duffy and Moore, 2011); understanding local realities and perspectives is relevant to crafting elephant management solutions that make business sense, are more humane and mitigate unintended consequences.

Elephant Tourism in Sauraha (2014–2018)

The tourism sector in Nepal faces regular challenges from short- and long-term disturbances, as the country is sensitive to natural disasters and its political–economic climate remains unstable (van Strien, 2018). Despite this complex and dynamic context, Nepal has achieved a gradual growth of its

tourism industry, reaching a record high of 1,173,072 international visitor arrivals in 2018 (Ministry of Transport, Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2018). Sauraha, however, has experienced very little increase in its visitor numbers. The destination appears to face challenges tapping into the national growth of the tourism industry.

The town of Sauraha offers the most popular gateway to Chitwan National Park, the third most popular destination in Nepal. The national park authority records show 178,257 visitors between August 2014 and July 2015. It is estimated that between 80% and 90% of these enter through Sauraha (local stakeholders roughly estimate 150,000 visitors a year). Chitwan National Park is the main reason to visit the town, and about 70%–80% of the visitors engage in an elephant safari (authors' estimate, based on 2014, 2015 and 2016 statistics). However, from August 2015 to July 2016 only 87,391 visitors (45% of the year before) were recorded visiting the National Park. The most influential event causing this steep decline was the Gorkha earthquake, which struck in April 2015. Visitor numbers to Nepal were down by 32% (538,970) in 2015. Despite Sauraha not having been physically affected, it suffered from the overall decline in tourist arrivals to Nepal. The earthquake event was followed by a political–economic crisis. There were major protests in the south of Nepal in response to a new constitution that was promulgated in August 2015. The formulation process experienced years of delay caused by disagreement over a handful of politically sensitive issues, the most important being the demarcation of federal provinces (Manandhar *et al.*, 2017) and ethnic issues largely unaddressed during the civil war (Miklian, 2008). The protests escalated into a 5-month-long blockade at the border between Nepal and India, which heavily affected the availability of supplies (including petrol, gas, cooking oil and medicine) and which ended in mid-February of 2016 (van Strien, 2018).

The country's tourism industry recovered in 2016 and experienced surging arrivals in 2017 and 2018 that surpassed the previous record high (2014), but visitation to Sauraha and Chitwan National Park remained low. While before the earthquake about 20% of travellers to Nepal would visit Chitwan, in 2018 this had decreased to roughly 10%. Major delays caused by a road-widening project of the Narayanghat–Mugling road section that connects Sauraha with the capital city Kathmandu and the key tourism destination Pokhara was a large factor. Furthermore, an influx of new hospitality entrepreneurs led to growing competition for Sauraha, opening up alternative destinations from which to access Chitwan National Park. This combination of factors has affected Sauraha's tourism industry, emphasizing the need to review previous tourism models to boost its attractiveness in line with modern tourism demands.

Methodology

This book chapter builds on field research that was conducted by the authors under commission from World Animal Protection over the course

of six months, from July until December 2017, in Nepal. The purpose was to obtain more detailed information on the current state of elephant tourism and local perspectives of the desire and need for a change in the business model. We conducted 35 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with tourism industry stakeholders in Sauraha and Kathmandu. The in-depth interviews were interactive, allowing respondents to talk freely about their business context and entrepreneurial decisions in their own words. A conversational atmosphere with iterative questioning allowed interviewers to capture information that is difficult to grasp using structured interviews or questionnaires. To make interviewees feel at ease, researchers took notes with pen and paper. Elephant tourism has become a sensitive topic for many local stakeholders and the use of a recording device would have made some feel uncomfortable and less willing to share. Nonethe less, we were aware that due to the method of hand-written recording there may have been more room for bias. Despite best efforts, it cannot be denied that 'the researcher will almost always retain control of interpretations, having the power over inclusions and exclusions, the contextualization and the storylines that are used to shape the narratives' (Westwood, 2004).

Two discussion meetings were held between staff of World Animal Protection and the Elephant Owners' Cooperative. Such group meetings were not only to get individual responses, but also to see how a group created discourse about a certain topic (Scholte *et al*., 2015). Facilitation was of key importance to minimize potential bias due to powerful individuals leading the discussion. Group meetings were also considered a suitable stakeholder involvement technique to motivate participatory decision making. During the discussion meetings, pen-and-paper notes were taken by the researchers.

Furthermore, in December 2017 we surveyed 248 tourists in Sauraha, aiming at developing an understanding of the motivation for riding an elephant among different markets (based on country of origin) and their attitudes towards alternative elephant-related activities. Responses were obtained through direct administration of questionnaires in the presence of an interviewer. Visitors were approached at various locations including at the elephant safari, on the streets in the town of Sauraha, and at hotels and restaurants. Interviewers spoke Nepalese, Hindi and English. In a few instances, guides served as Chinese translators. We selected tourists at random, which resulted in completion of surveys with visitors from a range of nationalities (Nepalese 31%, Indian 24%, Europeans 14%, Chinese 11%, North Americans 11%, Australians and New Zealanders 6% and a small sample from other markets 3%). For most respondents (77%), this was their first visit to Chitwan. Eighty-four per cent of the Nepalese visitors were first-time visitors, and 58% of the Nepalese came on an organized tour, booked with a travel agency or tour operator before arriving at Chitwan. The primary data have been complemented by a number of secondary sources, such as visitor arrival statistics from the Government of Nepal and newspaper articles.

Results

Interviews with tourism entrepreneurs in Sauraha and Kathmandu revealed that the demand for elephant-riding is declining among traditional markets. Inbound tour companies in Kathmandu highlighted that most European and American tour operators requested them to remove elephant-riding from their itineraries, while maintaining Jeep safaris and canoe-riding among other activities. Data from the Elephant Owners' Cooperative also confirmed this observation (World Animal Protection, 2017). However, the destination is attracting rapidly emerging markets – notably Chinese, Indian and Nepalese visitors – among which elephant-riding is popular. Hospitality entrepreneurs in Sauraha frequently mentioned the increase of Chinese tourists visiting the destination, especially in organized group tours, fuelling the development of group tour infrastructure.

Within Nepal, it is common practice to offer different prices to tourists from various countries. Nepalese pay 800 NPR (approximately $6.60) per person to ride an elephant, while South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) visitors pay 1500 NPR and international visitors from other countries pay 2100 NPR (World Animal Protection, 2017). Stakeholders interviewed mentioned that tour groups (particularly Chinese) sometimes negotiate a discounted rate. Changes and fluctuations in market dynamics can thus significantly influence the income from elephant safaris. The current business model makes elephant owners vulnerable to these variations.

Private elephants are generally not kept communally; commonly they stay overnight with their mahouts in a shelter provided by the owner. Currently, it is the responsibility of the individual elephant owners to cover costs of care-takers (mahouts), shelter, food and health care for an elephant[1]. In this business model, each elephant owner is individually liable. They pay these costs from the income they receive from the work activities their elephant performs (e.g. elephant-riding, elephant-washing). When elephant activities made more than the cost of caring for the elephants, owners made a profit. Some months, the income would be almost three times the cost of the elephant (World Animal Protection, 2017).

However, decreased income from elephant activities and an ageing captive elephant population mean that all elephant owners interviewed are facing a less certain future. Some owners have started looking into alternative ways to make an income with their elephant that would be more appealing to all markets. One owner has already placed his elephants in a large corral where they can walk around chain-free and guests can observe the elephants from the terrace of his restaurant. Most owners however cannot do this as they do not own the land required, their land is not centrally located or they do not have the funds necessary to make the investment. Some owners are considering selling their elephant, either to another interested party in Sauraha or to a buyer in India. Most elephant owners agreed that there is a need to investigate alternative opportunities. They felt it would help their discussion to have more insight into the market demand.

In this light, the Elephant Owners' Cooperative and World Animal Protection undertook a survey to develop a better understanding of the observed changes in market composition and their interests (or not) in elephant-related activities. Our survey was completed by 248 respondents. Some 150 of these respondents (62%) (among which 96% were Chinese, Indian and Nepalese – the remaining 4% were American and Dutch) had taken an elephant-ride in the buffer zone of Chitwan National Park. The remaining 93 respondents (38% of total sample) did not ride an elephant during their visit to Sauraha and came from 16 different nationalities. All respondents engaged in other activities offered at the destination; for example, 53% went on a Jeep safari, 55% took a canoe-ride and 38% went on a bicycle-ride. Some 56% participated in elephant-washing, including 16% who did not ride an elephant. These 16% of respondents considered that washing an elephant is not harmful to the elephant, while riding is. Also, 68% visited the elephant breeding centre, including 24% who did not ride an elephant.

The survey found a significant difference in awareness of animal welfare concerns: 93% of tourists who went on an elephant-ride were completely unaware or vaguely aware of the ongoing global debate regarding the treatment of elephants related to elephant-riding. In comparison, 54% of tourists who did not participate in elephant-riding were well aware and 46% were vaguely aware of these concerns (hence none of them was unaware). Ninety-five per cent of tourists who did not ride an elephant were of the opinion that riding is not good for the elephants. One Chinese tourist specifically mentioned, 'We did not ride an elephant, because we did not want to hurt the animal'. Most visitors (61%) visited the National Park on a Jeep safari.

Tourists from India showed the least awareness, with 57% of them being unaware and 26% being somewhat aware of the global debate. Those 21% of Indian visitors who did not ride an elephant were well aware of the global debate. Most Nepalese (68%) were vaguely aware of the global debate, but all except for two rode an elephant. The five Americans who rode an elephant were well aware of the global debate and two Dutch tourists who rode an elephant mentioned they were vaguely aware.

Most respondents (97%, or 236 tourists) were interested in observing elephants in their natural habitat. This was a significant finding, as it included all respondents who did not ride an elephant and a large majority of respondents who did ride an elephant. If offered this type of experience, 56% would be interested in walking with the elephants through the jungle, and 40% would like to observe elephants from canopy walks or watch towers. Combining the experience with hospitality, 37% would enjoy seeing elephants from the terrace of a café or restaurant.

The survey also showed that tourists are willing to pay more for such an experience; where 64% would pay up to 5000 NPR (about $50) and 19% would pay 10,000 NPR (about $100) or more. That is at least double the current price of an elephant-ride (which is about 2,500 NPR for foreigners). Ninety-seven per cent of the 150 tourists that engaged in elephant-riding stated that they enjoyed their experience and would likely do it again, if an opportunity presents itself in the future.

Presented with the results of the study, elephant owners expressed an interest in a new business model that would reflect the trends in the market and provide a sustainable business solution. Most elephant owners expressed a willingness to support a tourism business that recognizes the social, psychological and physical needs of elephants, and supports the health of the elephants as a community. At the same time, while elephant-riding remains a profitable business model with some growing new markets, most elephant owners are hesitant to phase out elephant-riding entirely.

Discussion

Tourist destinations are influenced by local circumstances but also feel the effect of events influencing the wider tourism industry at national, regional and even global levels. In order to survive and succeed in a highly competitive and continuously evolving business environment, tourism destinations and enterprises must manage change, and change is today considered the norm rather than the exception (Hall, 2017). Change processes need to be analysed in an integrated way, taking into consideration individual companies, market demand and the tourism industry value chain (Gersch and Goeke, 2007). Ranke (2015) acknowledges that influential events can appear as single, sequential or combined in their origins or effects. Yet, they are frequently analysed as individual incidents occurring in an identifiable time and space, overlooking the complex diversity of additional factors and long-term issues that influence the outcome of recovery efforts. There is little knowledge about how the tourism industry experiences successive multiple events and stressors and how it may influence a destination or company's established paths of operation and management.

Such a mixture of multiple events and stressors has been identified as affecting Sauraha's elephant industry in this study. A decline in visitor numbers due to (i) the 2015 Gorkha earthquake; (ii) the construction of the access road from Kathmandu; (iii) increasing competition from alternative access points to Chitwan National Park; and (iv) changing market dynamics, all affect the local economic situation and the income of individual entrepreneurs, including elephant owners. This combination of events has put elephant owners in a situation where they have been unable to achieve the income they received prior to 2015 (World Animal Protection, 2017).

Adopting a more cooperative business model would reduce risks and costs. Currently, private elephant owners are individually liable for costs, allowing for little flexibility to adapt to such combined external factors. 'Selling' their elephant to the Elephant Owners' Cooperative in return for share(s), to minimize their personal risk while remaining involved in the elephant activity, would reduce insecurity and would allow the Cooperative greater flexibility to adapt to the changing tourism situation by implementing more encompassing changes to modernize their tourism offer. Another co-operative option is not to house elephant(s) and mahouts on their own, as this creates potentially dangerous situations; for instance, threats from elephants

wandering into town. Instead, bringing all elephants together in one location would likely reduce costs and also allow for socialization, which is one of the key elements promoted by animal welfare codes (Veasey, 2020). To pursue this new approach a large area of land is required, and a cooperative business model needed.

A centralized facility could be better marketed and become a new flagship attraction for the destination. Tourists are willing to pay more than double the current price of an elephant-ride for a more ethical elephant experience that does not include riding. This echoes the findings of a WAP survey of 2501 tourists to Thailand, where 34% stated they were willing to pay $50, $100 or more than $100 for such experiences. This suggests there is potential for economic sustainability of such alternative elephant tourism models (Schmidt-Burbach, 2017a). It should be noted that it is well documented that attitudes alone are generally poor predictors of buyer behaviour (e.g. De Pelsmacker *et al.*, 2005). In attitude research, people often give socially desirable answers. Especially in situations in which respondents want to conform to social norms, which could be the case with ethically sensitive issues such as elephant-rides, attitudes measured tend to be more positive than actual behaviour. However, 44% of respondents who rode an elephant claimed to be unaware of the global debate around elephant-riding.

The proposed changes to elephant tourism will benefit from further research and business planning. For example, a location needs to be identified for the resettlement of the elephants to be sheltered communally. Permanent construction inside the buffer zone is currently restricted and conveniently located land is limited. Furthermore, there are additional stakeholder groups that deserve attention. Mahouts would remain employed in the reform model, but they need to acquire new knowledge and skills to implement the desired management practices. Beyond the elephant-related stakeholders in this chapter, there is a Community Forest User Group that would be affected by any changes to the current model. This Group, representing about 1200 members from nearby villages, maintains and monitors the section of the National Park's buffer zone in which the elephant-rides take place. The Group receives a portion of the fee tourists pay for the elephant-ride, which is put in a community fund that is used for infrastructure and social development (e.g. roads, health care, education). The Group earns an income from managing various 'ecotourism' activities in its section of the buffer zone, including canoe-rides, guided jungle walks, homestay and other activities. The fees from overseeing the elephant-rides has been estimated to bring in 41% of their income (World Animal Protection, 2017). The income from these 'ecotourism' activities contributes to the motivation of the Group to maintain its zone. Any decline in income could potentially affect its conservation efforts.

Since this study, World Animal Protection has continued their collaboration with the Elephant Owners' Cooperative to develop a comprehensive business plan that can be used as foundation for generating investor interest and guiding the development of Sauraha towards an elephant-friendly destination.

Conclusion

This chapter has showcased how understanding local circumstances can inform a tailor-made strategy for improving elephant welfare while still being in line with solutions proposed in the literature. Only by understanding the local challenges facing a destination can we identify paths that bring local stakeholders together in a business model that delivers desirable results for all. Improving the elephant safaris in Sauraha is considered desirable by local stakeholders, as the current business model is being challenged and puts individual elephant owners at risk. As a result, elephant owners have started looking into alternative business models and are considering a management strategy that would be more elephant-friendly. While tourists are still looking for elephant interaction, this does not necessarily have to be in the form of riding an animal. Our survey has shown that all markets show an interest in seeing elephants in their natural habitat. Although captive elephants cannot experience a natural habitat due to space constraints, a closer-to-natural environment can be created. A few good-practice elephant camps have been developed in this way, although thus far with smaller numbers of elephants than would potentially be the case in Sauraha. As the third most popular destination, Sauraha has tremendous potential to re-emerge as a tourist attraction in Nepal. However, to stop or even reverse the current declining trend of tourism in Sauraha, the elephant owners and the Sauraha community need to show initiative towards developing an elephant-friendly model, using the momentum in support that currently exists.

Note

[1] See photo 12 in the Elephant Portrait Gallery.

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21 The Paradox of Elephant-Friendly Tourism

Daniel Turner[1] and Naut Kusters[2]

[1]*ANIMONDIAL, Brighton, United Kingdom*
[2]*European Centre for Eco and Agro Tourism (ECEAT), Amsterdam, Netherlands*

Introduction

The welfare and protection of captive Asian elephants are pressing issues for global tourism businesses. Finding a viable solution that will protect the integrity of the destination and business, the welfare of elephants and the livelihoods of mahouts is a priority, but, until now, initiatives have failed to make a meaningful difference. This chapter considers the current tourism interactions with captive elephants, the challenges encountered by stakeholders and, importantly, presents an alternative, elephant-friendly approach.

The involvement of captive Asian elephants in tourism appears very different today as compared with a decade ago. Fewer Western-based travel companies are offering their clients elephant interactions, compared with Eastern-based companies. Many of the elephant attractions no longer offer riding and now operate under the guise of elephant-friendly regimes, promoting themselves as an 'elephant sanctuary', 'no riding, no hook' facility, an 'elephant rescue centre' or 'free-roaming elephants'. New activities such as elephant-bathing[1], 'walking with elephants' and 'be a mahout experience' now dominate the offerings to Western tourists, whereas the many attractions that still offer the traditional riding and circus-style performances are mostly visited by Asian tourists.

Elephant tourism remains a very contentious topic. Communications by stakeholders may well have the best of intentions, but often include incomplete, inaccurate and conflicting information. Some may focus on self-promotion, while others accuse their competitors of misdemeanours. Meanwhile, the future of hundreds of businesses, thousands of elephants and possibly tens of thousands of livelihoods lie in the balance; their futures potentially facing uncertainty, which also affects their communities. There is little wonder that tour operators and travellers struggle to know what to do.

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What is clear is that the status quo is far from ideal. Investigations have unearthed increasingly poor animal welfare across all types of facilities (Schmidt-Burbach *et al*., 2015; Bansiddhi *et al*., 2019; Daly, 2019), many of the new 'experimental' tourist activities are placing both tourists and facility employees at risk of physical injury, and a high proportion of captive elephants are obese, due to inappropriate diets and a lack of exercise. Elephant tourism must either find a new reliable path or continue to see standards fall.

Captive Asian Elephants and Tourism

The use of elephants in tourism was first established in Thailand in 1989 following the imposed controls on timber extraction. Tourism then provided a lifeline for the 2000 displaced elephants and the first tourism elephant camps were created (Hamdi, 2019a). By the late 1990s, the elephant camp had become a popular attraction across Asia and in Thailand, the most popular. The riding experience was able to offer large numbers of tourists a unique experience, while the huge economic benefits attracted more local business and created a greater demand for more conditioned elephants. The term 'conditioned elephant' refers to an elephant trained to undertake various unnatural tasks for tourists' enjoyment.

Large numbers of elephants were also captured from the wild, which contributed to the decimation of wild elephant populations, and abusive training techniques were deployed to provide tamed animals to the industry. In effect, the growth in tourism, boosted by the popularity of elephant tourism, has caused many of the issues highlighted by opponents of elephant tourism propaganda today.

In 2020 there are thought to be around 400 elephant camps operating across South-east Asia: with reportedly 250–300 in Thailand (Hamdi, 2019b). The numbers of captive and conditioned elephants in some elephant range countries are now greater than the estimated population of wild elephants. In Thailand, for instance, there are 4700 registered, conditioned elephants (with an equal number, if not more, of mahouts), versus an estimated 3000 wild elephants. Thailand is thought to have the highest population of elephant camps in Asia, but it is Myanmar that probably has the highest number of conditioned elephants, estimated at 6000 (WCS, 2017). Considering that the reported cost of maintaining an elephant in suitable conditions in the region is about US$50 per day, with local incomes at less than a third of that, there is increasing concern over the affordability of the industry, and its future, particular with tourism on the decline (Cavanagh, 2019).

Thailand in particular has made a concerted effort to address the growing concerns about elephant tourism, improve animal welfare standards and increase knowledge of good animal husbandry. The Government has established elephant hospitals, mobile health clinics, and required all captive elephants to be registered and microchipped. Furthermore, many elephant camps across Asia are affiliated with universities and training institutes. For example, TECC, the Thai Elephant Conservation Center in Lampang

is linked with the Chiangmai University Center of Excellence in Elephant Research and Education, which provides mahout training, veterinarian skills and medical care. TECC was established in 1993 and currently cares for more than 50 Asian elephants. Although a popular tourist attraction, it is also an important facility for elephant welfare in Thailand (Cavanagh, 2019).

TECC has initiatives to ensure employees are appropriately paid, deploy more appropriate elephant training techniques and receive training in first-line veterinary care through its mahout training school. TECC is among an increasing number of camps with a policy to improve standards for elephants and their carers; there are also commendable efforts by tourism businesses, scientific institutions and animal protection NGOs to improve standards in individual elephant camps. Even government-led initiatives, such as most recently implemented by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (Wanapinyosak, 2019) seek new commitments to tackle the issues surrounding elephant tourism.

The Changing Face of 'Elephant Tourism'

At a time when the travel and tourism sector could well be a key influencer of meaningful change, offering a solution to this growing problem, many travel businesses are choosing to no longer sell elephant camps in their holiday offerings. This is largely a reactionary decision following pressure from animal protection NGOs that seek to influence tour operators selling elephant-riding, to 'stop sale' and no longer offer these types of activities. While travel companies are rightly managing their activities' impact on animals, tour operators are more likely to influence attraction activity as a client (sending regular guests), as opposed to removing the attraction from sale.

The change in consumer choice and tour operator engagement has been dramatic. This has left many elephant camps, particularly those with many elephants and a limited operational area, with little option but to reduce their prices and standards in order to attract new (usually Asian) tourist markets where animal welfare concerns are different. This has enabled many such camps to continue offering traditional riding practices, circus-style performances and gimmick activities such as elephant painting to fulfil this demand.

At the same time, changing consumer trends have significantly broadened the spectrum of operating elephant facilities. New tourist activities and management regimes have emerged, creating so-called elephant sanctuary facilities that promote a hook-free and chain-free environment, bathing opportunities with elephants and so-called observation-only experiences with free-roaming elephants. This has presented the elephant camps and tourism businesses with more challenges: how to manage conditioned elephants under potentially dangerous circumstances, how to guarantee tourist and mahout safety, and how to meet tour operator and customers' demands.

Arguably, these changes have exacerbated the problem. Public campaigns have tended to focus on the perceived issues, such as elephant-riding,

the use of the bull hook and the chain, while generational, traditional knowledge and animal welfare science have been largely sidelined. Few have considered the application of animal welfare indicators such as body condition, stress-hormone levels and behavioural assessment. In fact, the public debate has focused on ethical dilemmas, rather than evidenced-based scientific research.

According to a recent review of elephant-friendly tourism there are two polarized schools of thought on how to address the concerns and improve the conditions and operations of elephant camps. One group calls for a phasing out of all hands-on activity and instead to observe the animals from afar, while the other advocates reform of training techniques and camp management (Hamdi, 2019a). Whatever the solution, success is unlikely without the support of the tourism industry, which fundamentally has the means, a responsibility and an interest in helping to find the solution.

One promising solution, proposed by the Tourism Authority of Thailand, is to encourage better 'communication, cooperation and compromise' among' stakeholders to continue the discussion and set in motion a more universal set of standards that benefits everyone – elephants, their mahouts, elephant business owners, (inbound travel agencies), and tour operators' (Wanapinyosak, 2019). Tourism can once again be part of the solution: supporting and saving the lives of thousands of elephants and their mahouts from an uncertain future.

Establishing Standards for 'Elephant Tourism'

In 2016, the European Centre for Eco and Agro Tourism (ECEAT, 2019) and several inbound Asia-based tour operators (e.g. Buffalo Tours, EXO Travel and Khiri Travel) developed the *Elephant Friendly Initiative*. The aim was to standardize and make scientifically relevant the assessment of captive Asian elephant facilities in Asia and consolidate the efforts of individual tour operators that had been undertaking their own assessments of elephant camps so as to guarantee minimum animal welfare, social and environmental standards. As part of the development process ECEAT worked closely together with Chiangmai University, the Asian Captive Elephant Working Group and numerous other experts through an extensive peer-review process. This included consultation with veterinarians, elephant camp owners and managers, animal protection NGOs and researchers in captive elephant welfare. Also, feedback was delivered from the Born Free Foundation and World Animal Protection (WAP) in order to define the higher performance levels, and they have been aligned with the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) guidelines. Further consultations will take place on a regular basis, based on new scientific information and practical realities and solutions on the ground.

The Captive Asian Elephant Welfare Standards reflect current understanding of elephant welfare. They are established on evidence-based knowledge and consider the practical implications of managing elephants within the

typical highly managed, captive environment in Asia. The standards consist of 190 'minimum' and 'best-practice' criteria, which ensure quality elephant care and management, tourist safety, mahout welfare, operational efficiency, community involvement and sustainability. Ultimately, they offer a 'universal set of standards that benefits everyone', with a focus on elephant welfare. The initiative incorporates the standards within a wider multi-level standard covering attraction auditing, mentoring and accreditation.

As with any wild animal, an elephant can be unpredictable and potentially dangerous, irrespective of whether it is born in the wild or in captivity. Therefore, for any activity where tourists are in close proximity or in direct contact with elephants, there must be constant supervision by a competent mahout. Pregnant or infant elephants should not be involved with tourist activity. Elephants require sufficient space to move about freely and comfortably, express normal behaviour (grazing, social interaction, etc.), on their own terms, in order to maintain a healthy condition. For example, while the chaining of captive elephants overnight may be commonplace, longer chains (up to 20 metres) will permit elephants to graze more naturally. Furthermore, elephant diets should be high-fibre and high in nutrients, and provided in sufficient quantities to permit 16 hours of feeding a day. Highly calorific foods, like bananas, sugarcane, vegetables and bread, should be kept to a minimum, as large quantities are likely to lead to obesity and related health problems. In a zoo environment, captive elephant diets should comprise 80% vegetation (freshly cut branches, grasses, hay) and 20% high-fibre foods.

Embracing these welfare requirements and operational safeguards, the Captive Asian Elephant Welfare Standards are applied through a robust auditing procedure, the outcomes from which provide an evaluation of the status and performance of the captive elephant facility, irrespective of the type of facility, its size or numbers of elephants.

Pilot Assessment Phase

To trial the Captive Asian Elephant Welfare Standards, an auditing procedure and corresponding criteria were created, along with supportive guidance to facilitate accurate interpretation by elephant camp management and auditor teams. Furthermore, in partnership with the Chiangmai University Center of Excellence in Elephant Research and Education, auditor training was developed and piloted in 2018, involving 30 participants from four countries.

The auditor training was conducted by ECEAT in partnership with the Chiangmai University. The logistics were financed by ECEAT (own resources) and the trainers contributed their time on a voluntary basis. They included experts from Chiangmai University, the Asian Captive Elephant Working Group and the animal welfare auditing company Global Spirit. The auditors to be trained were nationals from Thailand and Myanmar, and international sustainability, animal welfare and tourism experts based in the region.

A total of 27 elephant facilities were selected by 15 inbound tour operators, which had agreed to participate in the initial pilot programme. These

included facilities in Thailand, Laos, Myanmar and Indonesia. The auditing procedure consists of an online self-assessment, completed by the facility, and an additional onsite assessment by an appointed auditor team[2]. This produced a written assessment of the status and performance of each camp, detailed in a 50+ page report, together with supportive visuals, documentation and interviews with management, mahouts and staff. The reports for the 27 elephant camps have already been published and are helping tour operators identify appropriate elephant facilities (ECEAT, 2019). The reports are only available to those tour operators who supported the initiative.

Findings from the pilot assessment indicated that, on average, all 27 facilities complied with the minimum animal welfare criteria. These included the provision of food and drinking water, basic medical care, hygiene, non-abusive training practices, access to social interaction and elephant registration. In addition, on average, the facilities met 77.5% of the required best-practice animal welfare standards. These include excellence in animal husbandry and housing, access to an appropriate diet, with a diet plan, and fresh water, onsite veterinarian expertise, and training procedures and tourist interactions based on the highest of standards.

Best-practice shortfalls included the overuse of chains less than 5 metres in length, the improper use of control tools such as a knife or nail instead of the traditional hook and insufficient daily exercise for the elephants. Assessment against sustainability criteria identified shortfalls in education interpretation, the inclusion of public health and safety measures, and overuse of single-use plastics. The assessment also highlighted some immediate needs to address public health and safety risk and inappropriate tourist activity and conduct (including uncontrolled contact, noise and inappropriate dress) that placed both the animals and the tourist at risk. Inappropriate dress includes, for example, mahouts who are not recognizable to tourists wearing their normal clothes rather than a simple uniform and without an identification tag that would give them a degree of authority over tourists if a dangerous situation arose. Women tourists who wear bathing suits during elephant-bathing activities distract the young male mahouts from their work, thus also creating potentially dangerous situations.

Improvements and Considerations

While the pilot assessment was successful in establishing a universal set of standards, there are several observations and issues to consider before finalizing the standards. The following may require further research and stakeholder consultation:

- A requirement for elephants to have access to social interaction with other elephants is likely to present an issue for animals that are unrelated or incompatible. For instance, a camp's elephants are often acquired from different sources and locations, but this may cause conflict and

heightened costs for the facility to cover extended mahout working hours while the original elephants adjust to the new and unfamiliar ones.

- A requirement to keep elephants on longer chains (up to 20 metres) may mean that more space is required to keep the elephants. This may prove difficult because many elephant camps tend to occupy a small area of land, or lack the financial resources to provide the required infrastructure to ensure all animals have access to shelter and other welfare provisions (e.g. a 10-metre chain would require a shelter that is six times larger than is needed for a 2-metre chain).
- A requirement to provide elephants with enough exercise (at least 7–10 km a day of walking) is hindered by the fact that elephant-riding or walking with elephants is discouraged or prohibited. It was observed that elephants in non-riding camps were overweight and were not appropriately exercised.
- While facilities with 5–10 elephants are considered more manageable, many camps keep 30–50 elephants. Noting that there are minimal options for relocation and a limited likelihood of rehabilitation for wild release, solutions are unclear and will likely be costly. Furthermore, larger camps can employ up to 250 people, who often live in nearby villages. Relocation would have a social impact and a significant expense.
- Bull elephants are difficult to manage, particularly in 'free-roaming' facilities, and may require intensive controls. Bull elephants are often kept out of-sight and in inappropriate conditions (e.g. on a short chain, contained within a small enclosure, without access to shelter, etc.), which remains a problem.
- Abandoning the hook, as advocated by animal protection NGOs, presents another problem. The hook is a traditional tool used to guide an elephant, and vital to the mahout's work. Since their prohibition by some camps, mahouts use knives or a stick with nails as alternative control tools. These are considered less effective and more harmful.
- The transition from elephant-riding to alternative interactions with the elephants, such as bathing and walking, has increased public safety risks, particularly when supervision is lacking and there is a high tourist to elephant mahout ratio.
- It is important to recognize that there is a broad spectrum of operating elephant camps across Asia. Not only do they differ in size, elephant numbers and types of tourist activity, as well as the country of operation, but there are also differences in how they are managed. The ratio of female to male elephants, individual ages of the animals, their characters and the social structure also differ between camps. It may not be possible to apply one set of standards to all elephant facilities.
- The second edition of ABTA's Animal Welfare Guidelines (ABTA, 2019) advocates an end to all public hands-on interactions with elephants where there is not a physical barrier (including elephant-riding, bathing and uncontrolled feeding). Compared with the first edition of the Guidelines, these stricter requirements have caused both confusion and concern among inbound tour operators (Hamdi, 2019b), who recognize

that they contradict current practices in the majority of elephant camps in Asia. This leaves many tour operators in a dilemma: to implement the Western ideals or to follow the traditional or cultural practices.

These various observations and issues demonstrate the difficulties in the standardization of captive Asian elephant camps. Not only is there the need to identify and comply with national regulation (where applicable), but also to consider the type of facility and its management regime. Therefore, any standard requires flexibility. There are also conflicts of opinion about how to keep elephants in captivity, noting the differences between zoo and elephant camp management, and the ideals advocated by academics and NGOs vs. the practical knowledge of mahouts. Developing just one set of standards may not be enough.

In addition to standard setting, it was also important to learn from engagement with the elephant facilities, their management, and with camp staff and mahouts. Encouragingly, following the assessment, many of the camps took a great interest in the audit outcomes and recommendations, and were quick to make the required improvements. This identified that while some facilities have experts on staff, this was not the case for all facilities. Effective camp standardization may therefore need to involve supportive guidance, training and capacity-building.

Accreditation

The review of the pilot phase concluded that while a universal set of standards would certainly help to regulate elephant camps and improve standards, there was a need for a multi-faceted approach to accommodate the broad spectrum of captive elephant facilities and ensure a multi-stakeholder, collaborative approach including tour operators, trade associations, species experts, NGOs and academics. Furthermore, to facilitate the cross-border implementation of the standards, elephant camps would need an incentive to encourage their participation and compliance. While an offer of training and capacity-building may attract some facilities, the majority is unlikely to participate in the initiative unless there is a financial benefit in doing so.

In 2019, ECEAT partnered with ANIMONDIAL, an organization specializing in animal welfare in tourism. ANIMONDIAL consolidates 20 years of knowledge in applied animal welfare science and 'strives to overcome challenges faced by tourism to make a positive difference to animals, local communities, travellers and global destinations' (http://animondial.com) The partnership was established to further assist the efforts of ECEAT in the development and application of the Captive Asian Elephant Welfare Standards, engage multi-stakeholders and to develop a robust, multi-faceted Elephant Friendly accreditation programme.

The resulting elephant welfare and sustainability framework consists of four levels of standard, with four being the highest. The Captive Asian Elephant Welfare Standards occupy the second level, while the additional levels

accommodate progressively higher levels of requirement. The equivalent of level four is required to comply with the highest of standards in elephant welfare and care, mahout welfare, camp sustainability and operating an observation-only elephant experience. This approach aims to incorporate numerous standards, already created by multiple stakeholders, encourage stakeholder collaboration and influence the transition of elephant camps from one standard to the next. Implementation is delivered through self-assessment and onsite auditing against the respective assessment criteria, while a post-audit support programme will offer mentoring, guidance and training to facilitate improvements.

Overall, the Elephant Friendly accreditation programme provides the means to improve operational and animal welfare standards through assessment, capacity-building and incentives, providing both the tour operator and traveller with the ability to identify and select an appropriate captive Asian elephant camp that complies with specific animal welfare requirements. It is also an opportunity for the elephant camps to use the certification to attract more business.

Global Partnership

To realize this ambitious goal, ECEAT and ANIMONDIAL are working with destination management companies, academics, NGOs and industry stakeholders to standardize operational and animal husbandry requirements, align industry standards, and develop a support programme for both elephants and their mahouts. This includes collaboration with the humane elephant training initiative developed by 'H-ELP' – the Human Elephant Learning Programs Foundation, appropriate third-party auditor services, travel trade associations and in-destination representatives. Overall, this Elephant Friendly programme will be fully funded by European Union regional development funding and associate businesses, and, where possible, working jointly with national government agencies.

ECEAT and ANIMONDIAL believes that the combined standards and accreditation programme, while not satisfying all opinions, provides a clear vision that embodies 'communication, cooperation and compromise' to improve the captive Asian elephant camps across Asia (Head of Marketing UK, Tourism Authority of Thailand, 25 November 2019, meeting at WTM London). Subject to stakeholder cooperation, the Elephant Friendly programme will be operational in 2020.

When seeking meaningful change, it is not only essential to consider all evidence-based information, but further, to ensure the engagement of all relevant stakeholders. In this context, any management of, or interaction with, elephants must first consider all that we know about the species, their welfare requirements and the potential risks, but also, the cultural knowledge and significance. It may therefore not be enough to just consider 'the 'elephant's voice'; that of the mahout, and the cultures that have protected and managed the elephant for centuries must also be considered. Not doing

so is likely to jeopardize any hope of finding a solution for the hundreds of captive Asian elephant facilities across the continent.

Notes

[1] See photo 11 in the Elephant Portrait Gallery.
[2] See photo 15 in the Elephant Portrait Gallery.

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Postscript: COVID-19 and Elephant Tourism, a Preliminary Analysis

Eric Laws,[1] John Koldowski,[1] Xavier Font,[2] Noel Scott,[3] Taweepoke Angkawanish,[4] Nina Brask,[5] Daniel Turner,[6] Bongkosh Rittichainuwat,[7] Suphaporn Rattanaphinanchai[7] and John Roberts[8]

[1]*Leshan Normal University, Leshan, China*
[2]*University of Surrey, Guildford, United Kingdom*
[3]*University of the Sunshine Coast, Sippy Downs, Australia*
[4]*National Elephant Institute, Lampang, Thailand*
[5]*Zoologist, Copenhagen, Denmark*
[6]*ANIMONDIAL, Brighton, United Kingdom*
[7]*Siam University, Bangkok, Thailand*
[8]*Director of the Golden Triangle Asian Elephant Foundation and co-chairs of the Asian Captive Elephant Working Group*

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic began as we were completing this book. The classical definition of a pandemic is 'an epidemic occurring worldwide' (Kelly, 2011). In addition to all the other consequences for people, society, governments and businesses, this pandemic had major and rapid consequences for tourism, ending almost all activity and causing immense problems for elephant tourism. Just ahead of the book going to press CABI, our publisher, agreed to provide some additional pages for an early review of the evolving situation.

Background

COVID-19 is a disease that was first reported in Wuhan in December 2019 (Tian *et al.*, 2020). According to Richard Horton (editor in chief of *The Lancet*, a weekly peer-reviewed general medical journal founded in 1823), the genetic sequence for COVID-19 was determined by a group of Chinese scientists and

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provided to the World Health Organization (WHO) and the international medical scientific community on 12 January 2020. This genetic data showed that COVID-19 was more closely related to SARS than to influenza. This meant that the disease posed the risk of a global pandemic with about 1% morbidity, meaning that many millions of people might die from the virus. In the last week of January, *The Lancet* published five papers explaining the threat and recommending appropriate responses.

The rapid spread of the COVID-19 virus is facilitated because a person can transmit the disease but is asymptomatic for the first 4–7 days after infection. WHO issued a situation report in January 2020, listing 9,826 confirmed cases globally, calling it 'a public health emergency of international concern'. At that time, 19 countries outside of China were affected. On 11 March, WHO elevated the status to a pandemic, confirming over 118,000 cases in 114 countries. By 5 June 2020, WHO had confirmed more than 6.5 million cases of COVID-19 worldwide (Arseault, 2020, May 19).

Effects of COVID-19 on international tourism

Previous pandemics like SARS, swine flu, and avian influenza had reduced air travel demand for short periods only (Chung, 2015) and possibly for this reason the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) seriously underestimated the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism industry. On 6 March 2020, it forecast that COVID-19 would result in a 2–3% reduction in international travel (UNWTO, 2020, May). On 26 March 2020 this was adjusted to a 20–30% reduction (Gössling *et al*., 2020).

International visitor arrivals into South-east Asian destinations year-on-year contracted during the first three months of 2020. Six destinations showed a first quarter collective loss of 33.7% year-on-year, representing a decline of nine million fewer foreign visitors (Table 1).

Table 1. International visitor arrivals – selected South-east Asian destinations (January–March 2020).

	International arrivals (millions)	Change in international arrivals quarter 1, 2020/2019 (%)			
Destination	Qtr 1, 2019	Jan	Feb	Mar	*Jan–Mar*
Cambodia	1.878	–15.3	–35.8	–64.7	*–38.5*
Indonesia	3.758	5.9	–30.5	–64.1	*–30.6*
Lao PDR	1.062	5.9	2.5	–51.9	*–16.6*
Singapore	4.688	0.9	–108.3	–19.1	*–43.3*
Thailand	10.795	2.5	–42.8	–76.4	*–38.0*
Vietnam	4.500	32.8	–21.8	–68.1	*–18.1*
Total	26.681	7.1	–36.5	–72.8	*–33.7*

PATA Newsletter, 2020 June.

Table 2. Effects of COVID-19 on tourism to Thailand.

	Number of international arrivals		
Total 2019	39.8 million	-	
Monthly arrivals	2019	2020	Change 2020/2019
January	3,718,504	3,810,155	+91,651
February	3,603,654	2,061,990	1,541,664
March	3,473,088	819,429	–2,653,659
April	3,195,006	–	
May	2,726,808	*No tourists allowed to visit Thailand*	

Tourism Authority of Thailand (2020).

Visitor arrivals continued to decline over the following months; in both April and May, for example, there were no international arrivals into Thailand as the Thai government implemented a range of protective measures, including closure of airports to normal flights (Namwat *et al*., 2020), although many origin countries organized repatriation flights for their citizens stranded overseas (Table 2). Travel for business and some other reasons was permitted, and cargo flights continued.

Data from Skyscanner collected in April 2020 show that intention to travel by air during summer 2020 had dropped by up to 70% in Asia and 50% in Europe and the Americas (Gallego and Font, 2020). Most countries around the world also imposed restrictions on internal travel, closing hotels, restaurants, bars and tourist venues. Many countries implemented emergency lockdown regulations meaning that people were only allowed outside their residence for limited purposes such as shopping for food. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) has predicted tourism-related job losses, under a worst-case scenario of close to 200 million in 2020, the majority occurring in the Asia Pacific region (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2020).

Effects of COVID-19 on Elephant Tourism Camps

This book has shown that caring for elephants is very expensive, due to their enormous appetites (typically up to 250 kg per day at a cost of about US$30 or more). The business model of many camps is quite simple: they expect to meet these expenses from revenue, and few have a significant cash reserve. Furthermore, most camps do not have sufficient browsing to support their elephants, buying food in from local farmers day-by-day. There are many reports of elephants being taken by their owner mahouts to forests where they have a better chance of foraging, but the situation for captive elephants is critical. 'Tourists disappeared when the COVID-19 outbreak started. Everything shut down. Everybody was shocked but not as much as the elephants' owners', said Sangduen 'Lek' Chailert, Thailand's leading animal activist and president of the Save the Elephant Foundation (quoted in Promchertchoo, P, 2020, 24 May).

Apichet Duangdee, the manager of the Elephant Rescue Park, stated: 'We need 1000 baht a day ($30) for each elephant'. Freeing his eight mammals rescued from circuses and loggers into the forests is out of the question as they would likely be killed in territorial fights with wild elephants. He is planning to take out a 2 million THB ($61,000) loan in order to keep his elephants fed. 'I will not abandon them', adding that wages for the mahouts who care for the elephants have dropped by 70% (CAN, 2020, March 31).

With no income and limited natural foraging, many mahouts and their charges have been forced back into the countryside to fend for themselves. Even that, however, is no easy fix, as humans have been steadily encroaching on the normal habitat range of elephants for centuries. Some estimates suggest that 20% of the world's total population now lives in or near the range of Asia's elephants. Clearly, the pressure being placed by humans on the natural habitats of elephant habitats is enormous (ELEAID, 2020).

COVID-19 and Poaching

Maron (2020, April 13) reports that 10 of the 35 anti-poaching personnel who protect the 450-square mile Enduimet Wildlife Management Area are unemployed because of the budget shortfall from the collapse of Tanzania's wildlife tourism industry. Enduimet, adjacent to Kilimanjaro National Park, is an essential wildlife corridor for elephants, zebras, wildebeest and impalas. 'The prospect of increased poaching because of the coronavirus is a matter of great concern', says John Scanlon, special envoy for African Parks, a non-profit that manages 17 National Parks and protected areas across 11 African countries. He adds that such an increase hasn't been observed yet and that African Parks has also deployed workers into communities to educate people about COVID-19 and hand out sanitary supplies to help protect against its spread.

'How long anti-poaching activities can remain fully operational in South Africa will depend on whether they're funded by the government or private entities', says Damian Aspinall, chairman of the Aspinall Foundation. Government reserves with annual operating budgets aren't wholly dependent on tourism, but 'in most private reserves, anti-poaching is completely reliant on tourism and game sales' (Maron, 2020, April 13)

ANIMONDIAL has provided the following commentary

As the COVID-19 pandemic escalates and the world's citizens stay at home, tourism has crashed, which brings a future of uncertainty for many. None more so than the thousands of elephants that reside at the elephant tourism camps across Asia. Without inbound tourism, income has dried up, employees have lost their jobs and the elephants face an uncertain future at the hands of their owners.

Since the end of March 2020, the majority of Thailand's estimated 300 elephant camps have been closed to the public. The lack of income and the national restrictions on business operations have meant that many of the elephants have had to leave the camps and return home. This includes the elephant 'centrals' like Ban Taklang Elephant Village in east Thailand. Here the elephants' sustenance and shelter has become the responsibility of their original owners, who, before the pandemic, had survived off the rent of their elephants to the tourist camps. Now with no income, their future, that of their families and their elephants are becoming increasingly desperate.

Taweepoke Angkawanish, elephant veterinarian at the National Elephant Institute (NEI) in Lampang, Thailand, provides an insight into the uncertainty of elephant tourism during COVID-19 and the changed fortunes of Thailand's elephant tourist camps, the mahouts and the elephant owners. 'Without tourism, these elephants have a real risk that they will again be displaced, without a means to provide their daily care.' He specifically refers to the situation in the late 1980s, when tourism had returned value to the thousands of conditioned elephants, displaced from the timber trade. Back then, tourism had saved those elephants from destitution, but now, as the pandemic continues to stifle tourism to the region, the future welfare of Thailand's 4700 captive elephants is once again at risk.

Not only responsible for the care of the 111 elephants at the NEI, Taweepoke also provides free veterinary care for all the privately owned elephants across Thailand and in this way improves elephant welfare in Thailand significantly 'Our elephants at NEI are fine', relays Taweepoke, 'they are enjoying their days without the need to work'. However, he fears for the future welfare of the elephants elsewhere. The lack of work and incentive for the mahouts to exercise the elephants may mean that some animals may become obese. Taweepoke explains:

> Whilst I think it fair to say that those camps with fewer elephants can allow their animals to naturally forage and exercise, to survive this lockdown, I fear that the mainstream tourist camps with many elephants, will struggle. If tourism does not pick up soon, then I fear thousands of elephants, as well as their mahouts and families, will face uncertainty, and will require government support

Conclusion

COVID-19 continues to be a threat at the time of writing. Responding to it has challenged the standard thinking of governments and organizations around the world, causing the suspension of constitutional rights, curtailing normal social and economic behaviour, and qualifying as a disaster (Quarantelli, 2005). Many norms taken for granted prior to this pandemic are likely to change, not least because there is a continuing threat of further pandemics. Horton (2020) notes that governments must become more vigilant and provide stronger

leadership rather than relying on market mechanisms to solve problems, and new fields of knowledge will be required to manage future pandemics.

In this book our focus is on the welfare of captive elephants and the survival of the elephant species. Both are under increased threat due to the consequences of COVID-19 as outlined above. These include:

- The sudden total ending of tourism and its revenue flows.
- The consequent loss of income to support captive elephants, mahouts and the communities that are dependent on elephant tourism in remote areas where there is no viable alternative.
- The probability of increased poaching for food and saleable body parts at a time when adequate protection cannot be funded.
- The urgent and expensive need for recovery programmes to overcome the social consequences of COVID-19.
- The consequent probable lowering of elephant conservation and welfare as a priority.

At the end of July 2020 John Roberts (Director of the Golden Triangle Asian Elephant Foundation and co-chair of the Asian Captive Elephant Working Group) emailed in response to a query from the editors:

> The situation is not good for the majority of elephants and their mahouts; as the lockdown has eased, domestic tourism has provided some small relief but nowhere near enough to break even let alone recoup losses.
>
> There are no clear numbers as to where the elephants are, estimates of hundreds returned home above Chiangmai and at least 70 returned to Surin, nor about the businesses that looked after them - at least one leading welfare camp has become bankrupt with their elephants re-homed.
>
> The tourism industry has led the support: Tourism Authority of Thailand paying 9,500 baht per (properly registered) elephant, tourism organisations like the Thai Elephant Alliance & Southern Thai Elephant Foundation taking on the massive task of finding fodder and ourselves helping keep the Veterinary corps employed and able to support Government and University vets in their mission.
>
> Most elephants will be living on handouts for some months (possibly years) yet, which will be tough but we hope this opens the door for honest discussions about the future of elephant tourism and captivity in general.

In the conclusion to the main text of *The Elephant Tourism Business* we call for further research into elephant tourism. In the wake of COVID-19 this is now even more urgent, and it should be a priority to identify, agree, fund and share the findings of key international research projects to benefit elephants and the communities that are dependent on them.

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Conclusion

Xavier Font,[1] Noel Scott,[2] John Koldowski[3] and Eric Laws[3]

[1]*University of Surrey, Guildford, United Kingdom*
[2]*University of the Sunshine Coast, Sippy Downs, Queensland, Australia*
[3]*Leshan Normal University, Leshan, China*

This book is a response to calls from and for academics to become more engaged in animal tourism research (see Fennell, 2013) and, as such, it brings together current knowledge in the hope that it will consolidate elephant tourism research, stimulate and help prioritize future research, and inform future policies for elephant welfare and elephant tourism.

Multiple chapters in this book helped us to: (i) identify the welfare challenges of the elephant tourism industry through 'diagnostic framing'; (ii) identify solutions and strategies through 'prognostic framing'; and (iii) provide a rationale for action through 'motivational framing' (Snow and Benford, 1988). Through the chapters, we have learned more about the contested discourses on the effects of tourism on captive and wild elephants and the value placed by different stakeholders on those elephants, based on their own moral and pragmatic frames.

We now better understand that complex issues such as elephant management and welfare are subject to multi-layered meanings and interpretations of situations, resulting from the cultural, religious and economic importance of elephants in many societies and eras. At the risk of oversimplifying, we have also seen how the tensions between modernity in the Global North, where most tourists originate, and tradition in the Global South, where most elephants are found in the wild or captive in elephant camps, shape the expectations of elephant conservation and welfare.

A number of chapters describe the exploitative behaviours of some elephant camps and how some activists provide evidence of the deplorable wellbeing conditions of elephants, while others justify their captivity (e.g. Chapter 12). Between the romantic and the utilitarian, we can see that any agency acting for the elephant itself is often absent from decisions concerning welfare, and that nature (and elephants within it) is usually framed to suit human interests (Chapter 3).

In this Conclusion, we shall first summarize the current and prevailing business models of elephant tourism by outlining the lessons learned about the supply and demand for such tourism, before moving on to consider the

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various pressures to comply with, but also break away from, many existing business models.

Supply-Side Issues

Several chapters frame the origin of modern elephant tourism as the result of banning elephants from being part of the logging industry (see Chapter 4 in relation to Thailand). Such tourism is framed as providing a necessary income to feed the animals and their mahouts. Multiple chapters emphasize the importance of transparency in the rationale for, and the practice of, elephant captivity (e.g. Chapter 8). To achieve this, we need to study the financial flows associated with elephant tourism, noting that trade in elephants is relatively commonplace across parts of Asia (Chapter 12).

The cost of purchasing an elephant in Thailand, for example, is around US$56,000 (Chapter 1), while a breeding-age female elephant can be worth as much as $80,000 in India (Chapter 10). The cost of maintaining a captive elephant to a high welfare standard was calculated as being typically $50 per day or $18,000 per year (Chapters 1 and 21). In Thailand, it has been calculated that an elephant generates around $50,000 per year for the local economy, when all elements of the supply chain are considered but excluding multiplier effects (Chapter 1). As figures on the potential profit margin of owning an elephant are not readily available, a more in-depth study to include the economic reasons for the poor care of many elephants is an urgent priority. Elephant-riding has been the most profitable element of elephant tourism, to date (Chapter 2).

Several chapters in this book provide an often uncomfortable picture of elephants being used as replaceable commodities to be exploited for short-term gain: there is a market for purchase and sale of elephants, which at the worst level, are then housed and cared for at the lowest possible cost, both in terms of infrastructure investment and expertise of the handlers. This market has stimulated poaching from the wild (particularly of calves) and trade in elephants trained to perform popular but unnatural acts such as dancing. In addition, many of these elephants are subjected to long and arduous working hours in order to provide a short-duration experience to large volumes of visitors interacting with them, often for the first time. Many of these visitors are largely unaware of, or indifferent to, the cruelty entailed in most training methods.

What are considered by many as cruel methods may often be used when training elephants, giving their handlers not only dominance but also the ability to protect visitors if the elephants become unmanageable during a performance. During their field research in southern India, Gurusamy and Phillips (Chapter 19) found that 70% of the zoos and sanctuaries did not meet the optimum social requirements, and that they provided only 0.024% and 0.074%, respectively, of the minimum home range required by elephants.

The stress levels of elephants were found to be higher in zoos than in sanctuaries, due to them being chained and contained in small enclosures, limiting their ability to walk and socialize naturally (Chapter 19). Further

research is needed to understand the legal and economic realities of elephant ownership (Chapter 10); how these differ between countries also requires better documentation.

Elephants under stress can display aggressive behaviour, resulting in a low-value experience and generating consumer dissatisfaction. However, even under the worldview that elephants are treated as assets to be monetized (Chapter 10 and 12), the current business model is not optimized. The high initial cost of purchasing an elephant legally, but the potentially high earnings to be gained over its lifetime, suggest that more profitable business models are possible. For example, this book establishes the propensity of successful camps to innovate and extend their activities, both in response to pressures for improved elephant welfare, and to gain a competitive advantage.

Throughout this book we saw that there is a spectrum of elephant venues ranging from seeing elephants in the wilderness in National Parks, to seeing them in sanctuaries, tourist camps and zoos, to seeing them in civic spaces. The type of experience varies, and so does the level of welfare for the animal. There is no doubt that genuine sanctuaries offer a more ethical encounter value, but, currently, these are rare. Many (but not all) elephant camps are establishing standards based on elephant health and wellbeing, environmental sustainability and customer satisfaction (see, for example, Chapter 13). However, at present, it is the scarcity of high-welfare-standard elephant encounters that makes a niche market willing to pay a price premium (Chapter 1). The hope is that the circular system of higher income leading to higher subsequent welfare becomes the norm, as more sites accept this as a more beneficial business model. Such a system is extremely complex, as it links individual elephants with others (usually not intact herds), with mahouts, communities in elephant areas, and the local culture and ecology.

While captive Asian elephants mostly suffer from poor living conditions, non-captive ones in Africa are still threatened with being poached for their ivory tusks and hides. This, despite the intention of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), highlights the importance of conducting economic valuations of elephant sightings. Surveys measuring the willingness to pay for sightings of the 'Big Five' for 2011–2019 across four South African provinces show that the species which are hardest to spot in their natural habitats (the leopard), and those that are increasingly being poached, such as the rhino (Chapter 16), attract the highest willingness to pay. Thus, willingness to pay to see a species is therefore linked to scarcity, ease of spotting and awareness of poaching of that species.

While elephant poaching is a problem, it has not yet sufficiently affected the African elephant to the point of scarcity or the ability to observe them and so has not substantially increased willingness to pay by visitors to the area. Increased awareness of poaching threats, together with elephant sightings in a more natural setting, will improve the customer experience and help increase customer willingness to pay (Chapter 16).

In summary, we need business models that accommodate both the need to improve elephant welfare and the socioeconomic needs of the individuals

depending on these elephants (Chapter 20). Many Western tour operators have stopped selling elephant-riding and either replaced it with sanctuary visits or removed all elephant encounters from their programmes. Several authors and experts interviewed are clear that boycotting elephant tourism is not the answer (Chapters 2 and 18, for example). This can be seen as a missed opportunity for the tourism industry – by choosing to not engage, the negative unintended consequences for the elephants and the industry that depends on them may be worse than if these tour operators chose to engage and promote positive, viable change (Chapter 21). The challenge is determining which are the acceptable standards, and what is the change management process required to achieve them.

Demand-Side Issues

Several chapters in this book reflect on the fact that we are witnessing the neoliberalization of nature through the staging of wildlife–human encounters. There are clear tensions between fundraising to look after animals compared to interfering with their natural behaviour (Chapter 8). It is argued that the major challenges are caused by the reaction of people who don't know enough of what they're talking about, but they just love animals (Chapter 18), and the ability of NGOs to exploit such emotions (Chapter 21). It is worth reflecting on what moral frameworks allow the capture of wild elephants to be used as economic tools and how they might be reconciled with other philosophies that regard elephants as sentient creatures and an intrinsic part of globally threatened ecosystems.

Many tourists have a limited understanding of elephant welfare issues prior to visiting a site with captive elephants, despite claiming that the main reason to visit such sites was to gain knowledge about elephants (Chapter 6). Those visitors who did the most research about potential sites to visit were those most interested in animal welfare.

Often, visitors leave so-called elephant sanctuaries disappointed with what was supposed to be a 'once-in-a-lifetime' experience (Chapters 6 and 17). Several chapters reflect on the fact that Western tourists in particular are becoming less comfortable with unnatural elephant activities, such as riding them or watching them dance, paint, stand on one leg or play football; instead they prefer to feed them, walk with them or bathe them, assuming these to be more humane ways of interacting with the animals. In turn these visitors often reported higher levels of satisfaction in engaging in these activities (Chapter 6). Over half of the visitors to elephant venues decide to visit such an attraction before leaving home (Chapter 6), so the world wide web and social media offer opportunities to shape their expectations and choices (Chapter 17).

Although the assessment of visitor satisfaction in the experience economy needs to take into account ethno-cultural contexts (Chapter 11), multiple chapters in this book show how visitors from the West have increasingly high expectations of animal welfare, education and customer service (see,

for example, Chapter 20), making the professional design and management of visitor experiences increasingly important. The case study of the Elephant Transit Home at Udawalawe (Sri Lanka) demonstrates how it is often difficult to reconcile the multiple and variable demands of consumers (Chapter 11), indicating that elephant sanctuaries need to invest more resources to meet the increasing and changing demands of consumers if they want to fulfil their education and conservation objectives (Chapter 11). The moral tensions that explain visitor attitudes to and experiences of elephant sanctuaries can be explained in relation to (i) freedom–captivity; (ii) distance–interaction; and (iii) natural–staged (Chapter 8).

In summary, there are clear ethical questions arising from the use of an endangered animal species, such as elephants, for profit-making purposes (Schmidt-Burbach, 2018), and we also understand the difficulties of ensuring elephants are able to live in National Parks and the dangers they face there (Chapter 16). We shall now take an institutional theory approach to explore how organizations respond to tensions and pressures to both comply within the status quo and react to demands for change in the business of elephant tourism.

Pressures and Resistance to Change

Various chapters in this book emphasize a desire of multiple stakeholders, and resistance from others, for a change in the logics that underpin the business of elephant tourism. We consider here three forms of pressure to change. First, mimetic forces occur, in particular, when elephant tourism providers learn how to adopt practices that benefit both the organization and society at the same time. Second, normative forces are the result of the codification of values held by a number of stakeholders that make explicit societal expectations on industry members. Finally, coercive forces can result from social sanctions on low performers. We review both pressures to change and the resistance towards such pressures.

Mimetic pressures

Narratives are a common feature of tourist venues, used to frame problems and solutions and provide a rationale for decisions and actions, in ways that reinforce shared social values. The narratives told at visitor attractions influence visitor responses to elephants that 'humans have the right to dominate animals', which is the metanarrative of many captive elephant tourism camps (Chapter 15).

The dominating narrative of elephant attractions tells the story that it is acceptable for humans to use elephants for commercial purposes and tries to show elephants as behaving in human ways, while also encouraging humans to dress and imitate elephants, whereas a biological/scientific factual explanation of elephant behaviour is rarely given. Although there

is progress (e.g. circus performances by captive animals are now banned in many countries), the human use of elephants is normalized on historic grounds. The closeness of human–elephant relationships is justified on religious grounds across Asia, with both being presented as part of the local social identity. It is not therefore likely to be challenged. Fear of danger from proximity to elephants is also invoked in the narrative because it provides a strong justification for control of the elephants. The current institutional and popular logic continues to be that captive wild animals can be used for human entertainment (Fennell, 2013).

Social media coverage of the poor welfare of elephants in some camps acts as a jolt that reflects the increasing importance of animal welfare and conservation to the public (van Eeden *et al.*, 2017). Hence alternative, romantic narratives about animal welfare are fuelling demand to see elephants in more natural settings, allowing for observations of their normal behaviour while on safari, or from a distance, particularly when this is accompanied by interpretation from knowledgeable mahouts or a welfare charity (Chapters 6, 7 and 13). A conservation and ethical treatment of the elephants' storyline in the narrative is a way of differentiating a specific site from others with often lower standards of care and management (Chapter 15).

As a result, an increasing range of elephant experiences is offered; more ethical encounters have become a distinguishing product offer for a specific market segment. Mimetic forces occur when elephant tourism providers learn how to adopt practices (mimic) from others in the industry that benefit both the organization and society at the same time. These can include, for example, industry-wide events, awards or other forms of showcasing what is socially agreed as best practice, which show how to implement newly socially desirable standards. Several chapters in this book summarize how elephant tourism providers are mimicking the behaviour of other providers and responding to the pressures of different stakeholders.

We saw how NGO and customer pressure has nudged many traditional elephant camps to reposition themselves as 'elephant sanctuaries', 'elephant homes' or 'elephant parks' in order to maintain legitimacy for their operations (Chapter 9). However, the branding of elephant experiences as sustainable or ethical is a marketing tool, and as such it is open to misuse. The caring rhetoric of elephant sanctuaries, or rescue and rehabilitation centres, is often accompanied by only superficial changes in actual elephant welfare practices. This has not however increased the minimum animal welfare standards in the poorest of locations. For example, the number of elephant camps in northern Thailand has gone from 40 in 2015, to almost 80 at the end of 2016, mainly as a result of smaller camps, framed as ethical sanctuaries, emerging in response to changes in demand (Chapter 5).

Visitors self-select which sites to visit based on the type of activities offered (Chapters 5 and 7). Camps that do not want to change their practices are simply switching from Western to Asian tourists (Chapter 4). We have seen that safari-style ecotourism attracts higher-spending Western markets (Chapter 10), as the commodification of ethics itself produces market value (Chapter 9). The price paid per person may be higher, however, the business

model requires a lower density of tourists and a longer amount of time per visitor, which can potentially reduce profit margins. A growing concern for elephant welfare among some visitors has led to market segmentation and premium product development. At present, however, all that seems to have been achieved is an increase in the range of products and a fine-tuning of the promotion and pricing strategies as part of the supply–demand matching process and market clearing, in attempts to reduce visitor dissatisfaction.

This is well exemplified in the findings from Sri Lanka by Strödecke and Häusler (Chapter 7), who studied customer motivations and satisfaction with elephant viewing on safaris in two National Parks and in two government-run facilities offering hands-on experiences. Their results show how the four sites emphasize different unique selling propositions to differentiate their offerings from each other and appeal to customers with specific requirements. Similar findings were reported by Chotmanakul and Ongkhluap (Chapter 5), based on over 500 responses from 21 camps in north Thailand. In essence, the increased knowledge about elephant welfare has led to market structuring, where ethically minded visitors are a market segment (Chapter 9).

Mimicking means that it may only be necessary to give the appearance of meeting higher-level standards, while continuing to commercialize and commodify contrived experiences (Chapter 8). The actual welfare of elephants in many of these so-called sanctuaries may often not be much better than in traditional captive camps (Chapter 10), especially if there is no speciation and limited or negligible independent enforcement of standards.

Normative pressures

We saw that what is valued by one group may be seen as threatening by another. NGOs, through their use of social media, are increasingly becoming sufficiently coordinated to make their demands salient; however, much of the elephant tourism industry is too dispersed to be effectively targeted. Normative forces result from the codification of values held by a number of stakeholders that make explicit societal expectations on industry members.

There are growing calls for species-specific, science-based welfare standards for animals used in tourism (Fennell, 2013). This book provides a captive elephant welfare index, based on expert opinion, using a multiple parameter assessment that may prove useful in benchmarking camp performance (Chapter 19), besides industry and NGO-led standards (Chapters 10, 14, 20 and 21).

There are multiple efforts to set out elephant welfare standards. In this book we learn about the Elephant Friendly Initiative (Chapter 21) and the work of the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) with Travelife (Chapter 2), the Association of British Travel Agents' (ABTA) revised animal welfare guidelines (Chapter 14) and the model for ethical elephant camps championed by Mahouts Elephant Foundation (Chapter 10). What they all have in common is an effort to develop more ethical elephant business models. But they differ in the methods of training and keeping elephants. For

example, there are disagreements about the need to use chains and hooks to train and manage elephants (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 18 for diametrically opposed views).

Normative pressures lead to industry self-regulation, informed by the prevailing social norms and preferred by many governments, but potentially weakening governance mechanisms. Industry often chooses to frame environmental issues in such a way that it can resonate with the target audience and avoid confrontation (Büchs *et al*., 2015).

Because each actor's reputation is relative to the actions and expectations of other stakeholders, tourism associations can engage in a sustainability agenda to stall the ratcheting effect of competition. These legitimization efforts protect the status quo by providing the impression of having created best-practice standards. For example, the image of Thailand as an international destination can be negatively affected by the social media coverage of elephants' wellbeing (Chapter 17), which in turn generates the need to lightly regulate the business of elephant tourism to restore market confidence.

However, this book has shown that, despite current challenges to the business model of elephant tourism, the tourism industry controls the rhetoric of change and may choose to soften external requests for change and legitimize the actions of its members. Travel industry associations benefiting from elephant tourism revenue often choose instead to manage stakeholder perceptions, develop lobbying strategies and co-opt threatening stakeholders, with the result that considerably lower industry requirements can be introduced (Fennell, 2018; Font *et al*., 2019).

Self-regulation will only work if industry is accountable, and this will require being well audited (Chapters 18 and 21). We have not reached that stage, however. Both ABTA and PATA, pioneer associations in providing advice, guidance and tools, have no real power to regulate (Chapters 2 and 14). Their members voluntarily choose to use such advice, or not. It is worth remembering that these associations are among the pioneers and that some other industry associations do not even acknowledge the need for sustainability training of their members or the importance of animal welfare (Font *et al*., 2019). Hence, we might want to consider the potential coercive pressures to influence change.

Coercive pressures

Industry self-regulation is usually unlikely without an agreed codification of good practice, as well as the explicit threat of some sanctions. Coercive forces result from social sanctions on low performers, for example, in the form of (i) government legislation; and (ii) contractual changes in the supply chain of the elephant tourism industry, particularly in the form of shared and legally enforceable responsibility to visitors and employees.

Coercive pressures require the codification of elephant welfare standards in universally unambiguous practices. We have already mentioned the multiple attempts at creating guidelines and standards. Corporations are

predisposed to follow deontological ethics; that is, follow rules or principles (in our case elephant welfare guidelines and standards) that remove uncertainty from decision making (Fennell *et al*., 2008; Fennell, 2018). We need to remember that these rules are socially constructed and in a utilitarian society, so these standards simply reduce the suffering of these animals to currently socially acceptable levels (Fennell, 2012), and can change over time (often quite quickly).

For example, PATA argues that riding can be done responsibly and that the solution is not to ban all elephant-riding, or elephant–tourist interactions (Chapter 2). Some experts agree and suggest that elephant welfare goes far beyond riding or not riding, as it needs to include the ability of elephants to move, forage and socialize freely, and to have ethical training. Because you can train an elephant to be ridden in the most ethical way, the fact of elephant-riding is not a great benchmark of animal welfare (Chapter 18). These authors suggest that it is the unethical, violent training of elephants, together with the punishing conditions in which these animals are made to work, that has to stop. Contrastingly, many NGOs see elephant-riding as a clear red line and have pressured international tour operators and online distribution channels to stop selling this activity.

Multiple chapters spoke of the desire of the tourism industry to set viable, locally owned standards that provide certainty and allow the industry to flourish (for example, Chapters 5 and 20), but an agreement seems less than likely at present. Standards-setting is complex for any socially constructed concept, and the chapters in this book demonstrate how welfare standards result from physical, psychological and social criteria (Chapter 19). Every stakeholder seems to have a set of reasons for justifying why their approach is the right balance between the animal's wellbeing and their need to generate income to cover their upkeep. It is fairly difficult to achieve transparency in the process to achieve consensus on industrial morality and any subsequent behaviour change among members of an industry. The process of institutionalizing moral change is usually a black box, and science-based evidence (Chapter 19) is likely to be just one of the many forces that influence standards. For example, elephant protection laws must take the culture's metanarrative and its religious values into account for the law to be followed (Chapter 15).

Bindumadhav *et al*. (Chapter 12) showed how the multiple regulations to protect the welfare of captive and wild animals in India are systematically ignored by individuals, enterprises and religious institutions, and are not effectively enforced by the authorities. This dual scientific/social basis to determine elephant welfare standards creates uncertainty that is used by the elephant tourism industry to protect the status quo and influence policy (Fennell *et al*., 2008), while several case studies raise the unintended negative consequences of well-meaning policy decisions in relation to regulating the use of elephants in tourism (Chapter 21).

Some authors suggest that it may be necessary to increase demand pressures to drive up standards. Only a few years ago it was accepted that there was a low understanding of animal welfare by tourists (Moorhouse

et al., 2015), and that these same tourists would often exhibit post-experience dissonance in recalling the ethics of elephant tourism (Chapter 6), when they feel that their visit has contributed to the harm and suffering inflicted on elephants. However, such dissonance may not occur when tourists feel empowered to influence elephant wellbeing through citizenship engagement, complaints to camp managers, publicly expressed opinions and observations, and sometimes even activism.

It has been recently proven that it is possible for non-experienced observers to evaluate the welfare of semi-captive working elephants, following some specific guidance provided upfront (Webb *et al*., 2020). Priming tourists with information about the likely impacts of wildlife tourism attractions helps them differentiate between attractions and informs their choices in experimental settings (Moorhouse *et al*., 2017). It should be possible to develop hybrid methods to verify welfare standards that use tourists' reviews as early warning signals and regular monitoring of welfare standards.

Elephant owners may be predisposed to changes in practices when they see their current business model, and therefore their livelihood, under threat (Chapter 20). The ability to replace more demanding Western markets with less critical Asian markets means that most elephant attraction owners are not yet feeling such a threat (Chapter 4). In addition, other authors suggest that standards imposed by demand run the danger of creating more harm than good. Turner and Kusters (Chapter 21) report how the exit of Western tour operators from the elephant market has forced some elephant tourism operators to seek alternative, lower-paying markets, to reduce costs and standards, rather than increase them. In doing so, these tour operators became part of the problem, not the solution.

Summary

This book has encouraged stakeholders to position themselves publicly in relation to the sustainability of elephant tourism. We enjoin stakeholders to become more self-aware and socially responsive, asking questions such as 'What is the morality of the travel industry?' and 'What are appropriate forms of elephant–human encounters?' A more ethical 'encounter value' is needed for the business of elephant tourism, balancing the economic and welfare sustainability of elephant sanctuaries. Tourism lends itself to the clash of cultures in host–guest interactions that then precipitate the question of whose morality prevails and what the negative unintended consequences of doing so could be. Most chapters in this book speak of the conflict generated from Western values, resulting from a limited understanding of the realities in the countries where elephants are based, creating change in the way of life of individuals and animals.

Further research is needed to better understand how different stakeholders with vested interests in elephants can find a viable way to ensure the welfare of these animals and improve the quality of life of those people who depend on elephant tourism. First of all, further research is needed to agree

acceptable standards and a unified method of quality assurance that can then be introduced as a requirement to trade with online and traditional travel agents and tour operators.

A number of studies in this book provide cross-sectional data for one moment, one location and one stakeholder group. These provide useful baseline data to now conduct comparisons over time, across locations, across stakeholders and perhaps across species. Subsequent studies can use the same methodologies to facilitate data comparisons or can combine methods to provide further explanation for the data already collected. It would be useful for new studies to go beyond surveys and interviews and to collect data through methods that reduce self-deception bias, such as projective techniques.

Current studies also explain what the situation is, outline demands for change from different stakeholders, and how other stakeholders are responding to such demands. The co-creation of elephant tourism business models that result from a shared understanding and compromises between stakeholders is essential. Hence, further studies could use more participative data collection and analysis methods that encourage stakeholder groups to make sense of data provided by other groups and provide nuanced accounts of how stakeholders have wrestled with the process of change.

The Elephant Tourism Business has made it clear that a broad consideration of issues facing this industry is required. The unit of analysis for future research as a basis for policy making and strategic management could begin with individual captive elephants or wild herds, but it must also include the mahouts, their families, the elephant owners and camp managers, the ethnic groups living around and working in the camps, and the tourism industry. Future studies should consider more than one and preferably most of these stakeholders as part of their research design.

The editors of *The Elephant Tourism Business* hope that this volume contributes towards stakeholders becoming more self-reflective in relation to the morality and ethics of elephant tourism, and that these stakeholders seek to understand the viewpoints of other stakeholders with a vested interest in the welfare of elephants. We believe that this requires better dissemination of research findings through conferences and accessible publications, and the formation and funding of more international collaborative research groups to better underpin elephant conservation and welfare policy development and implementation internationally.

The genesis of *The Elephant Tourism Business* began with ETRIG, the informal but usefulElephant Tourism Research International Group. ETRIG enabled us to circulate some newsletters during the preparation ofthis book, and was also instrumental in the creation of some early publishedresearch by the Editors.

With the publication of this book we are relaunching ETRIG as a resource available to anyone conducting research into captive elephant welfare, the survival of elephants in the wild, and for people involved in the administration or management of elephants. We hope that ETRIG will provide a convenient and effective way for researchers to keep in touch with others concerned about the future of elephants.

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Eric – e.laws@runbox.com
Noel – nscott1@ usc.edu.au
Xavier – x.font@surrey.ac.uk
John – jktourism@hotmail.com

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The Elephant Tourism Business

Edited by **Eric Laws**, **Noel Scott**, **Xavier Font** and **John Koldowski**

Elephant tourism is a growing activity in many countries across Asia and Africa and is popular with tourists from all parts of the world. Elephants in the wild are at risk of extinction and exposed to poaching and habitat loss, while captive elephants too often face harsh training to entertain tourists and poor welfare conditions. Elephant tourism has grown rapidly, providing the only viable way for elephants and their owners to survive since the banning of logging. Old logging camps have been developed into sanctuaries for some elephants, but many other camps were established as entertainment centres, resulting in serious welfare issues for the elephants and their mahouts. The profits from elephant tourism in Asia have encouraged African operators to follow a similar business model.

This book draws attention to the need for a comprehensive and rigorous focus on local solutions to improve the welfare of captive elephants, their mahouts and local residents, and to enhance tourists' experiences of elephant tourism. It achieves this by:

- Critically reviewing recent research into elephant tourism.
- Providing contemporary analytical case studies of elephant tourism policy and practice.

The Elephant Tourism Business will contribute to a better understanding of how elephant tourism is organized, regulated and promoted, both in elephant areas and tourist origin countries. It identifies priorities for future research into elephant tourism and provides a unique, authoritative resource for researchers, elephant managers and administrators, and tourism managers.

The book will be of interest to academics and practitioners with backgrounds in conservation, the environment, tourism and veterinary sciences, and will appeal to tourists keen to experience elephants in person.

Front cover image credit: Vladi Korn