

Kai Aulio

Problems in Ecotourism. More Knowledge is Needed to Understand and Respect Wildlife

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Problems in Ecotourism

More Knowledge is Needed to Understand and Respect Wildlife

Kai Aulio

June 2017

PROBLEMS IN ECOTOURISM

Wildlife tourism is on the rise – More knowledge is needed to understand and respect animals

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Abbreviations:

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
GNP	Gross National Product
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

Introduction

Non-invasive utilization of wildlife is a major incentive for international tourism, but the increase in extraction of natural resources should show more respect to animal rights and welfare. In many destinations, a lion's share of travel decisions is based on the possibility to see wild animals. Problems in erosion and pollution of environment are better understood than the relationships between visiting tourists and the local wildlife. United Nations declared 2017 "The International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development", and the theme of annual World Environment Day (5 June) was dedicated to sustainable wildlife experiences by the theme "Connecting People to Nature".

In spite of unanimously accepted emphasis of respect of nature and decades-long education and studies, unpleasant fact is that there are far too many operations going on in so called ecotourism that do not respect nature or animal rights. The present outlook presents an excerpt from recent studies and news items regarding the close relationships between international tourism industry and managing and conserving nature – as well as problems in the relationship – in the Year of Sustainable Tourism.

The present overview briefly describes a few conflicts – and also successful examples – between wildlife and wildlife tourism, published recently, mainly in 2016 and 2017.

In the era of global economic depression – and unfortunately of global mental depression, too – international tourism seems to be one of the major drivers of man's activities toward better future. Such a conclusion can be drawn on the basis of ever-growing numbers of international arrivals in leisure-time travel. The latest statistics of *The United Nations World Tourism Organization* (UNWTO) show that the numbers of international tourist arrivals have grown steadily for six years in a row.

In 2015, the annual growth rate of international tourist arrivals was 4.4 percent. Some 1.2 billion trips were made (1 184 000 000 arrivals all together), i.e. 50 million international arrivals more than in 2014. And the trend is expected to continue. The UNWTO projects that the number of international arrivals will be some 4 % higher in 2016 than in the previous year (UNWTO, 2016).

The economic role of international tourism is huge, representing some 10 % of the global gross national product (GNP). The rise in the markets benefits both the already rich developed nations as well as the poor, emerging economies in the developing world. The statistics of the international tourism reveal that the wealth brought about by the international tourism benefit mostly the industrialized nations, Europe leading the way in the growth of tourism industry.

Leisure time travel is a corner stone of international travelling. In UNWTO's latest statistics, the number of trips (arrivals) for holiday, recreation and other forms of leisure time activities (i.e. the activities usually covered by the term tourism) rose to 632 million trips, thus accounting for 53 % of all international travelling.

Sustainability in all sectors of tourism has been the leading paradigm for the industry for decades. But in spite of unanimously accepted ambitions and objectives, there are severe shortage of knowledge of best practices in all levels of stakeholders. The importance and need for maintaining sustainability is one of the key issues in local and international tourism, and this approach is getting more and more important with the ever-increasing numbers of travels, and simultaneously with the continuously worsening state on natural habitats (Connell and Page, 2008).

Means are available to develop the tourism industry's actions towards sustainability, and a lion's share of destinations and wildlife attractions could enhance the ways in maintaining and managing the experiences of visitors – with a full respect to nature's necessities. As early as in 1970s, a comprehensive guidance was presented for creating and maintaining symbiosis for the preservation of nature and the utilization of natural resources for tourism (Budowski, 1976; 2008). The importance of responsible tourism in the maintenance of wildlife is well known and recognized, and several positive examples are described recently (ENS, Environment News Service, 2017). Comprehensive “toolbox” for managing and maintaining nature's living treasures and the role of tourism industry in safeguarding the biodiversity on the Earth was published by United Nations' *Convention on Biological Diversity* (CBD, 2007).

2017 declared The Year of Sustainable Tourism

Several aspects of tourism are dealt with in daily news, and the role of travellers in maintaining and/or destroying the values of natural habitats and biota are one of the most important – and at the same time, one of the most controversial issues. The principle of avoiding any unnecessary harms is certainly universally accepted, but the forms of nature-respecting, as well as ways to respect indigenous people are more complicated and difficult to achieve. The general goals are, however, unanimously accepted, the general guidance for achieving the best practices were strengthened at the most prestigious level. *The United Nations General Assembly* declared 2017 *The International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development*. The theme year will emphasize the role and possibilities of national and international tourism in building wealth for the natural biota and landscapes as well as human beings – in harmony and in ways that 17 universal *Sustainable Development Goals* are respected and forwarded (UNWTO, 2015a).

The key in achieving the goals in obtaining sustainability in tourism is the change in behavior of both the tourism industry and every individual participating any kinds of travelling. Far too often the values of nature and indigenous people are in conflict or competitors of resources. Confrontations are unnecessary, and narrow-minded interest seeking leads to both economic and immaterial losses for all parties. Respecting the natural values and the cultural traditions of local people can create forms of sustainable tourism where all parties gain advantage both at present, and in the future.

The International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development will promote tourism's role in the following five key areas, as summarized by Restanis (2016) website:

Primary target topics for The International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development.

Source: Restanis, 2015; Travel Daily News International, 30.12.2016

Inclusive and sustainable economic growth

Social inclusiveness, employment and poverty reduction

Resource efficiency, environmental protection, and climate change

Cultural values, diversity and heritage

Mutual understanding, peace and security

The importance of understanding and respecting nature's conditions and values was further emphasized by selecting the theme of annual *World Environment Day* (5 June). In 2017, the theme was *Connecting People to Nature*, urging people to get outdoors and into nature, to appreciate nature's beauty and to think about how we are part of nature and how intimately we depend on it. The theme challenges us to find fun and exciting ways to experience and cherish this vital relationship (United Nations, 2017).

In the present-day tourism, the decisions made by individual travellers or groups are mainly based on marketing, and this is the key to achieving sustainability. If the travel agencies and tour operators avoid destinations, where there are possibilities to harm natural biota or indigenous people, tours should not be organized. A few independent backpackers seldom cause huge problems, even if they invade into vulnerable habitats. The role of common understanding in selecting the targets for wildlife tourist attractions are presented and evaluated by Moorhouse *et al.* (2016).

Several aspects of sustainability

Among the hundreds of millions of people travelling yearly for leisure time holidays, growing number of tourists are seeking for thematic activities. Organized or self-planned travels for cultural treasures, sports, festivals or concerts, and even more for wildlife are a rising trend. Thus, the concept of *Ecotourism* is now used in marketing and managing activities for nature-admirers, organized all over the world. Under the umbrella of ecotourism, various activities and tours are organized, including hiking, canoeing, fishing, hunting and nature-photography safaris. The common feature for all the ecotourists' activities is the desire and respect for wildlife and wilderness.

The trend towards spending time in remote natural environment is understandable for the rapidly urbanized population, but the pressure caused towards the nature is becoming hard. The term sustainability is the key element in all the activities within ecotourism. The requirement of respecting the intrinsic values of nature are included in the ethical codes of

tourism, published by the UNWTO (*Article 3: Tourism, a factor of sustainable development*; UNWTO, 1999).

Sustainability should be defined in three dimensions: *Ecological*, *Economic*, and *Social* sustainability (Cook *et al.*, 1999). In textbook level, the latter two are well presented. In the economy, the facilities needed for the travel, accommodation, restaurant supplies etc. are emphasized – and thoroughly studied and argued. The issues covering social sustainability are just rising on the agenda. Respecting the habits and traditions of local populations is a necessary prerequisite for every ecotraveller, and the more remote the location, the more important it is to orientate to the local traditions. Using local (and not multinational, often provided by the travel agencies) services is both economic and social co-operation with the local community.

Perhaps the most important – and certainly the most difficult – of the three levels of sustainability in ecotourism (green tourism) is the ecological aspect. The consideration of the values of natural conditions is a key element in any issue of sustainable tourism. Nature watching and/or utilization in any means essentially require understanding the basic values and needs of the biota. Ecotourism is only one component of the wide concept of sustainable tourism, but even within the branch there are more than enough definitions and practices. In the absence of unanimously accepted terminology, there are lots of projects in the tourism industry marketed as ecotourism – even though the eco-component is not always properly considered or respected (Donohoe and Needham, 2010). Incoherent descriptions can sustain improper practices, even precarious activities marked for unsuspecting, gullible customers.

Tools to measure, define and evaluate the rate of sustainability in various sectors of tourism are available, but lack of adequate information still seems to be dire. In a comprehensive review of tourism-based scientific publications, Buckley (2012) presented the social and environmental impacts, responses and indicators of mainstream international tourism in five categories, i.e. population, peace, prosperity, pollution, and protection. Among some 5'000 published works, the sustainability sector is seriously under-represented. In the words by Buckley: “The tourism industry is not yet even close to sustainability”.

The wide variation in definitions of sustainability in the tourism industry makes it impossible to evaluate the quality of tours as well as the quality of individual tourist's or tourist group's behavior in destinations. When asked the tourists themselves, rather few visitors can assure that they have respected the nature's values. The proportion of positive responses could be as low as 0–44 percent (Jurvan and Dolnicar, 2016).

In evaluations of sustainability of tourist operations, the definitions and formations of questions can markedly influence the results – and hence the wrong setting out a problem can lead to serious misinterpretations. When the true sustainability of tourism is studied, the travellers should be directly observed, because in questionnaires most participants give answers that are expected and/or hoped (Jurvan and Dolnicar, 2016).

Limits of Nature

The important issue is, whether the nature can withstand outside visitors. There are far too many examples of the over-exploitation of wildlife by people who call themselves ecotourists. Erosion of the ground easily destroys the values, by which the tourists have chosen the destination. This happens in habitats, where the number of visitors exceeds the natural carrying capacity of soils or vegetation, and also where reckless visitors pollute the nature with waste. The hiking trails can be strengthened to sustain masses of visitors – although some of the “pristine virginity” of the wilderness is lost. Similarly, many tour organizers believe – or at least they are trying to convince the customers – that the fauna and flora can also be “hardened” to withstand the ever-increasing number of people viewing and photographing them.

To reach and maintain sustainability in tourism destinations, appropriate behavior of the visitors is a vital prerequisite. National parks and other protected areas are often considered as habitats established to wildlife conservation. These sites are, however, also destinations for masses, and several intentions and expectations have to be considered. Visitors’ preferences and wishes largely determine, whether or not the destination fulfils pre-established expectations. Knowing the hopes and motives of visitors is thus vital in managing both the sites’ infrastructure and the subject matter of organized nature tours/excursions.

Values of pristine nature are highly appreciated by the nature-oriented tourists, even though the main purpose of visit were physical exercise in hiking streaks. In a questionnaire of visitors of natural parks and other protected areas in Portugal, Marques *et al.* (2017) revealed three principal background motives for travel: outdoor recreation participation, expectancy-value, and environmental attitudes. For many visitors, being part of a group is highly valued, even in admiring special wildlife targets. On the other hand, even when visiting parks for adventurous exercises, the aesthetic values of nature and landscapes are important motivators to travel into nature reserves.

Success in organizing and participating sustainable tourism largely depends on the basic knowledge on the requirements to fulfil the demands of all the interest parties. Questionnaires by Oviedo-García *et al.* (2017) at the *Natural Park Saltos de la Damajagua* in the Dominican Republic confirmed that knowledge provided to visitors largely determined the level of satisfaction of the travellers. The need of accurate and relevant knowledge of the destination’s supply and needs are highly valued by travellers who head their trips into ecotourism destinations.

Close relationships between basic background knowledge and satisfaction of customers (tourists) in experience-seeking nature tourism were described by Kruger and Saayman (2017) while analysing the expectations and experiences of visitors at a wild salmon run in Canada. The typology of nature viewers was categorized in four groups – selective experience seekers, tranquil experience seekers, comprehensive experience seekers, and casual experience seekers. Recognizing the potential visitors’ experience profiles in advance makes it possible to target specific background knowledge for each visitor or tourist group

– thus ensuring a maximal satisfaction and probably also proper behavior at the nature attraction (Kruger and Saayman, 2017).

Information and education are keys in reaching sustainability

Information about the natural conditions at any ecotourist attraction is usually provided by tour operators or site managers. Lack of formal information supply does not necessarily cause problems or misbehaving. In a popular whale watching site in Uruguay, Corral *et al.* (2017) noted that only 15 % of visitors had gained information about the animals and nature from official parties. In the questionnaire, practically every visitor at this remote site agreed that information about wildlife is essential. But persons attaining remote wildlife sites – where no organized services are available – are well-educated, conscious people, who know how to behave in nature. During an observation period of 902 hours, the probability that visitors crossed a fence bordering the permitted site was as low as 0.002. The results indicate that people taking part of wilderness watching are responsible and they do respect the natural beauty and biota, even when there is no control by authorities (Corral *et al.*, 2017).

Basic information about the characteristics, expectations and needs of a successful visit at any ecotourism or wildlife tourism destination should be supplied by tour operators, but most tourist who choose ecotravel are keen to independently search data and practical guidance. And there are, fortunately, much-needed and highly valuable professional data available. As an example of the right kind of basic and inspiring background information about wildlife tourism targets are given by Ian Wood's (2012) book *Swimming with Dolphins, Tracking Gorillas. How to have the world's best wildlife encounters*. In the book, experienced traveller, writer and photographer Wood gives detailed advice about where and when a wildlife tourist can achieve the best experience – and importantly, how to behave with – the world's most appealing wildlife.

A responsible traveller takes a moment before a planned wildlife-tour to secure that the conditions at the destination meet the requirements of modern sustainable tourism. In the age of unlimited supply of information, proper destinations and tours are easily found. Of the services available, for example anyone aiming to take an elephant ride or planning to watch a show performed by elephants, just a snapshot of TreadRight Foundation's webguide could change the travel manuscript (TreadRight Foundation, 2017).

People want to see animals – Do the animals want to see people

Desire to enjoy unspoiled nature is a growing trend in ecotourism. Depending on the destination, varying share of tourists tell that the reason for travelling is desire to see nature, especially wild animals. Such a motive is the principal reason to travel to Africa or Australia for 40–60 % of tourists, and in very special destinations such as the Galápagos Islands, the share is certainly at or nearly 100 %. We can trust that the wish of a tourist is genuine, but the opinion of the target is not that sure. So, in the tourist industry – both organized and private – we have to ask the important question: *Do animals want to see people, as people want to see animals?*

The question of animal welfare is more important than most people are ready to admit. There are millions of animals continuously used by tourism industry – often captivated and forced to live in unnatural and harsh conditions. Exploitation of originally wild animals used in direct displays or entertainers in zoos and circuses, used as carriers of people and goods, hunted and fished in the wild, and also various forms of sports including an animal party can be included in exploitation (Fennell, 2013). The list of various forms of human-animal relationships within tourism demonstrates the huge task in guaranteeing animal rights – and unfortunately, far too often the knowledge and capabilities of tour operators, managers and field guides and other personnel involved are inadequate.

If the wild animals are the reason to travel, isn't it absurd to disturb or even expel the animals in the presence of alien organism (in this case the human being)? The standard answer given by the tourist industry is that the fauna certainly gets used to people – through *habituation* processes. Habituation means that the wild organisms gradually get used to the presence of an audience, and thus the presence of people would not disturb the animals (Shelton and Higham, 2007). To some degree habituation certainly happens, but far too often wild animals have to step aside or flee, and in the worst-case scenario the presence of tourists prevents the fauna from normal species-specific living.

Swimming or snorkeling or diving with marine mammals or fish has become one of the most regular forms ecotourism. The term *eco* is, unfortunately, often misleading because the human activities are not always in balance with the needs of the natural biota. Problems caused by close human interactions are understood, and some of the most respectful tour organizers have limited the number of travellers/participants in such destinations. But for some, the emphasis is focused solely on the human party, and the number of people swimming or diving with marine animals is too high. In Hawaii, tours based on snorkeling or diving with the spectacular manta rays are popular, and up to 30 boats and more than 300 persons can participate during one day. Such a “rush hour traffic” inevitably give rise to conflicts.

The study by Needham *et al.* (2017) found that the majority of people diving or snorkeling with manta rays experience the close encounters and clashes with fellow-divers as problematic. As many as 53% to 92 % of participants reported conflicts between members of the group. Problems mentioned included bumping into people, neglecting the near-by fellow swimmer/diver, and blinding with underwater flashlights. In interviews, the tourists confirmed the problems.

The problems were so obvious that the majority of participants supported limiting the number of operations and advice that participants should be educated on how to behave in group (Needham *et al.*, 2017). No instances of problems caused to the manta rays were mentioned. Other studies elsewhere clearly show that too close a relationship between tourists and marine animals can be detrimental for biota.

Swimming with dolphins often leads to dangerous habituation

One of the most conspicuously advertised forms of wildlife tourism is the possibility to swim with dolphins. These marine mammals are spectacular, often curious to see human

swimmers, and dolphins easily habituate, i.e. get used to the close presence of people. Tours are usually tailored to maximize the hopes and wishes of the customer – ecotourist – but far too often neglecting the needs of the dolphin party of the session. Unfortunately, co-swimming with humans can lead to detrimental or even fatal consequences for dolphins. In dolphin tours, the marine mammals are often fed by tour operators or the tourists. Feeding should be avoided or banned, because this leads to habituation of dolphins. In the course of habituation process the dolphins become fearless, and easily adopt habits to approach all vessels. Too close an encounter can result in collisions that are fatal to dolphins.

Wrong kind of friendship in the form of feeding can change the behavior of dolphins. After getting used to receive delicacy from the tourists, dolphins can become aggressive, demanding food from every people approaching. In extreme situations, aggressive dolphins have wounded or even killed people (Christiansen *et al.*, 2016).

Habituation of dolphins was confirmed in the long-term follow up study by Christensen *et al.* (2016) at the Sarasota Bay, Florida. During the observation and documentation period of 45 years, a total of 32'000 encounters between dolphins and people have been recorded, and the habituation is obvious.

In addition to the risk to be crushed by vessel propellers, the detrimental habit of dolphin feeding causes direct damages to the marine mammals. Many kinds of illness have been confirmed in dolphins, caused by improper or even spoiled food provisioned for animals (Christensen *et al.*, 2016).

Striking breaks of proper behavior were reported from Argentina, where tourists and other beach-goers dragged young dolphins ashore to take selfies with the marine mammal. Taken out from water, and not pulling the dolphin back into the ocean, the people were responsible for the death of dolphins. At least two of such cases have been reported from beaches near Buenos Aires, Argentina (Mann, 2017). These acts are striking examples of lack of respect to animal welfare and animal rights.

Even more dangerous cooperation between visiting tourists and marine mammals was witnessed in The Bahamas. At Big Major Cay in Exuma, a herd of swimming pigs has been a famous and very popular tourist attraction for 30 years already. In 2017, seven of these swimmers died, and a government vet showed that wrong kind of nutrition was the reason. It has been shown that visiting tourists fed the swimming pigs with beer and even strong rum, and the death of mammals was caused by alcohol. This kind of tourist behavior is irresponsible, and both individual guests and tour operators have broken the ultimate rules of behavior and respect of animal rights (TravelMole, 1.3.2017).

Animals are individuals – with individual needs and fears

Knowledge on the species-specific characteristics of the target organisms is important, when close encounters between wildlife and visiting tourists are arranged. There cannot be any uniform and detailed standards and guidelines concerning the behavior in the vicinity of living creatures because every species has specific ways in behaving in the presence of human intruders. And the reactions can be highly variable within an animal species, too.

In the detailed study of the reactions of immature Green marine turtles (*Chelonia mydas*), the study led by Lucas P. Griffin of the University of the Massachusetts Amherst (USA) showed that there are two distinctive types of turtles. The bold ones withstand the presence of snorkelers better than the vivid individuals. As a rule of thumb, the researchers noted that snorkelers should keep the distance with the green turtles at three meters or more.

Human interference can be detrimental to turtles, whether the animals are bold or timid. Tolerance to the presence of nearby humans can lead to habituation, and loss of fear can increase the risk of predation posed by sharks. On the other hand, evasion against harmless humans start escape reactions that unnecessary waste energy (Griffin *et al.*, 2017).

Human activities can frighten wildlife, even if people do not come in close contact with animals in their natural living conditions. Peksa and Ciach (2017) give an example of evading or escaping of large mammals in remote mountain ranges in the vicinity of ski-lifts and ski pistes. In the Carpathian Mountains in Poland, population characteristics and behavior traits of individuals of large mammals, the Tatra chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra tatrica*) changed markedly after a ski-lift capacity in adjacent area was increased. After the number of people carried by the lift was increased by 50 %, the number of individuals in a herd was reduced, and the distance between the chamois and ski-lifts and between animals and ski-lift stations were increased by twofold to threefold. The adverse effects of mountain tourism were restricted to the lift operations, since near traditional hiking trails the distance between the chamois and people walking in the terrain remained unaffected (Peksa and Ciach, 2017).

Even a few hikers in remote protected wilderness area can disturb natural biota. The reactions to the presence of people in various bird species were studied in the Oulanka National Park, NE Finland by Kangas *et al.* (2010). In comparison of results of line transect analyses in various sectors of a protected park, the species composition of birds was different according to the vicinity of hiking trails and other established activities. The total numbers of avifauna were not markedly affected by visitors, but species composition was different near hiking trails and in virgin natural areas.

Nesting habits were crucial in determining the reactions of birds. The taxa nesting in open-cup nests on the ground showed the strongest negative response to visitors, whereas the bird species nesting in trees were tolerant to the presence of people. For cavity-nesting birds, the presence and moving of hikers and other visitors had negligible impacts. The study confirmed that recreation-induced disturbance has negative effects of wild birds even in remote areas, where only a limited number of people are visiting, and these effects should be considered in management of protected areas (Kangas *et al.*, 2010).

The co-existence of natural biota and tourists is possible, of course. If the tourists know the living conditions and requirements of wild animals, the visitors can adjust their tours according – and respecting – the nature. Positive examples of well-organized ecotourism are described, where local people make the arrangements for ecotourism. In ideal cases, the natural resources can be utilized in harmony with local residents and the visitors. Harvest-

ing the resources – *the common pool of resources* – in a sustainable way implies very high level of responsibility (cf. the review by Holden, 2009).

The common resources not only consist of harvesting commercial goods but also the existence and non-invasive utilization of a living party such as the wild animals. Good results – but not without difficulties – are described for example by Papen (2005) from a village *An-mire* in Namibia. In spite of good intentions and proper organizations, the realization of ecotravelling by the nature's terms still depends too much on concepts of commercial mass tourism (Papen, 2005).

When evaluating the basic problems in ecotourism and the industry's conflicts with wildlife, most examples are taken from Africa, Amazonian rainforest in South America or Great Barrier Reef in Australia. In those destinations, the masses of tourists are at the maximum, and the values of nature are seen as exceptional and invaluable. Same kinds of issues are, however, met all over our planet. Good examples of relationships between tourists and wildlife are described by Shelton and Higham (2007) from New Zealand, i.e. same kind of natural conditions and biota as in the Nordic countries. Problems and solutions are equal everywhere. Problems can be avoided, but this implies knowledge of the requirements of wildlife in far more detail than is nowadays available in mass tourism industry.

The Last Change Tourism

The role of pristine wildlife is further characterized by the fact that anthropogenic environmental destruction causes habitat losses and biodiversity degradation, or even extinction in the worst-case scenarios. Catching the possibility to see and witness biological riches has created a very special branch of travelling, *The Last Change Tourism* (Love, 2017).

Along the Great Barrier Reef in Australia climate change, pollution and erosion have destroyed the most biodiverse ecosystems on the Planet Earth so severely that international tourists are heading Down Under to see the nature's miracles before they are permanently lost (Piggot-McKellar and McNamara, 2016).

The alarming state and even more worrisome forecasts for the future of our planet is clearly reflected in attitudes and plans of conscious and wealthy tourists. In US, a marked share of people aims to visit some of the destinations that are doomed to disappear or suffer from irreversible losses. In a study by a leading tourist organization MMGY Global, a total of 36 % of interviewed citizens told they are going to take part in "last change travels" to see some of the most vulnerable habitats (Rokou, 2017).

The worries and aims to travel to those destinations is strongest with the Millennials, i.e. young adults (members of the Generation Y). In these group, 51 % of the interviewed adults have plans to travel to a disappearing destination. Their parents' age cohort, the Generation X also admits the current problems, and 36 % have plans to last change travels. Examples of vulnerable destinations include The Great Barrier Reef in Australia, The Maldives in the Indian Ocean, The Glacier National Park in Montana in USA, and Venice in Italy. Willingness and aims to visit a vulnerable destination rise with increasing annual in-

come and are markedly stronger in population with university or college education than in less educated population (Love, 2017; Rokou, 2017).

The visitor is urged to respect the wildlife

Tourist industry is waking up to the popularity of animal attractions – and the subsequent exploitation and abuse of wildlife. One of the globally most widely used web-based travel agency, *TripAdvisor*, has expressed a strong support for animal rights by refusing to support destinations violating animal rights. Hundreds of attractions using captive wild animals or endangered species (e.g. elephant riding, tiger hugging, swimming with dolphins) are listed as non-compliant, and the agency no longer takes bookings to those destinations. The new policy is based and backed by several international animal rights and consumer organizations (Kelly, 2016).

The decision to support sustainable tourism, with respect to animal rights, was briefly acclaimed and endorsed by several leading governmental and commercial parties in the international tourist industry and administration (Kelly, 2016). Among the organizations endorsing the new strategy were e.g.: The Association of Zoos and Aquariums, ABTA – The Travel Association, Global Wildlife Conservation, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), Oxford University's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit (WildCRU), Sustainable Travel International, The TreadRight Foundation, Think Elephants International, Asian Elephant Support, Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) and World Animal Protection (WAP).

Public pressure and customer demands have already affected. In 2016, one of the leading tour organizers, Thomas Cook presented new guidelines for operators to enhance knowledge and improve management practices in ways to respect animal welfare and animal rights. Starting in 2017, specialists with the Global Spirit organization carry out inspection in company's travel destinations. The new animal welfare policy is based on the Abta Global Welfare Guidance for Animals in Tourism.

Unannounced inspections evaluate the conditions in destination or tourist attraction, and if shortages or inconsistencies are recognized, the company stops selling trips to those destinations. Local operators have then three months time to fix the business, and if improvements are not realized, the international operator stops co-operation in tour marketing and sale (TTG Magazine, 13.12.2016).

Nature Tourism: Billion dollar/euro business

Nature watching – especially a possibility to see wild animals – is one of corner stones of national and international tourism. The values of nature tourism are huge, with an annual expenditure of over 600 billion dollars/euros. Of the destinations specified to ecotourism and nature/wildlife tourism, Africa is the most dependent on the values of unspoiled landscapes and preservation of original fauna and flora (Balmford *et al.*, 2015). A comprehen-

sive summarization of the economics of global wildlife tourism in the early 2000s were given by Tisdell and Wilson (2004).

Majority of nature watching tourists come from Europe and North America, and – on the other hand – the importance of cash brought by the visitors into the economy of destinations is greatest in the poorest regions, especially in the remote destinations in Africa (Balmford *et al.*, 2015).

Economic value of a tourist visit at Protected Areas. USD / trip (Source: Balmford <i>et al.</i>, 2015)
Africa 698
Asia / Australasia 85
Europe 23
Latin America 311
North America 103

In spite of the huge economic inputs, the true value of tourism is seriously underestimated. Local governments – and local people in their everyday life – misuse natural treasures seriously. As a consequence, the utilization of the most important asset of tourism – i.e. the wild animals – has got out of control. Today, poaching (illegal killing) of wild animals (such as elephant and rhinoceros) is rampant even in the guarded national parks.

Mutual interests in nature’s and people’s economies

There are innumerable reasons to protect natural assets. Calculations about the global economic gains brought by the Great Barrier Reef emphasize the importance of slowing down the process of climate change. The visual proofs of the negative consequences of principally anthropogenic sea water warming appear as coral bleaching, the status that is getting worse and worse. In the recent report by the Climate Council of Australia, the global costs of bleaching in the Great Barrier Reef were calculated as a staggering sum of one trillion dollars. Tourism is one – and certainly the most striking – sufferer in the economic terms in the present development seen at the reefs.

The report calculates that the global economic assets at the Great Barrier Reef reach 7 billion dollars a year, and the reef ecosystem supports 69’000 Australians employed in tourism-related businesses. If the degradation of the reefs will continue, the report estimates that one million tourist visits are lost annually, leading to loss of 10’000 jobs and one billion dollars losses in the tourism sector (Climate Council of Australia, 2017).

The Great Barrier Reef is the largest, most valued, most visited, and by far the most studied of the coral reef ecosystems in the world's oceans. The number and extent of coral reefs may surprise many. There are coral reefs in more than 100 countries or territories, and majority of these ecosystems are somehow dealing with tourism. The total value of coral reefs generate is worth of a huge 36 billion US dollars every year, and some 30 % of world's reefs are targets and support tourist-based activities (Spalding *et al.*, 2017).

The number of visitors at coastal sites dominated by coral reefs annually is more than 70 million domestic and international guests, and the risks that the fragile nature is negatively affected by huge crowds are real. For years already the tourist industry has invested markedly to develop sustainable ways in utilizing the natural riches, but inevitably, the fragile reefs are suffering from overexploitation.

Several leading tour operators and other parties have applied principles of corporate social responsibility (CSR), and indisputable improvement is seen e.g. in the accommodation and transportation sectors. Only a few enterprises have proper programs and management practices to respect the most essential value of reefs and tourist destinations, i.e. the pristine nature. The priceless biodiversity of coastal reefs is unfortunately often neglected in organized, as well as independent tourism (Spalding *et al.*, 2017).

Poaching: Huge losses for wildlife and national economies

In the multi-billion euros' global tourism, various forms of ecotourism become more and more popular. The possibility to see wild animals is perhaps the most important incentive for nature lovers to travel to "unspoiled" regions. And in the nature, several issues concerning the fauna and flora are involved. As Markwell (2015) writes in his tourism textbook, "*animals contribute to tourism in multiple ways: as attractions in their own right – alive or dead, wild or captive; as forms of transportation; symbolically as destination icons; as travel companions; and as components of regional cuisine*". Hunting tourism is a huge business, concentrated with well-paying travellers.

Organized hunting safaris are acceptable, and often also useful for the maintenance of natural biodiversity. But in hunting, there is one aspect, seriously neglected in tourism industry's guidebooks and manuals. Illegal killing of wild animals (*poaching*) is one of the most extensive criminal activities, and the infrastructure built for commercial tourism unfortunately also provide opportunities for poachers.

The extension, ecological consequences, as well as economic and social aspects of poaching are widely studied and published. Summarizations of these complicated *Nature – Wildlife crime – Tourism relationships* are given e.g. in the textbooks by Higginbottom (2004) and by Markwell (2015).

In several popular destinations, the success and expansion of wildlife watching tourism has, unfortunately, increased poaching and other forms of crime (UNWTO, 2015b). This risk has to be included in projects directed to wildlife tourism.

Nature tourism can open doors for criminal activities

Even though the importance of accurate and detailed knowledge about wildlife is essential in planning and managing nature tourism, the detailed data on rarities and special attractions can be fatally dangerous. In scientific literature, the practice of describing locations of new species of animals and plants has proved to be a bad decision. With the openly available details of the presence and habitats of the most interesting species has led to criminal activities. Reading scientific journals, more and more often openly available in the internet, poachers and criminals have found targets, sometimes priceless biological treasures (Stuart *et al.*, 2006; Lindenmayer and Scheele, 2017).

The same threat applies to guides for wildlife tours and nature watching and photographing safaris. With the detailed information – often combined with ready-made transport facilities and other infrastructure, the risk of illegal exploitation has increased. The risks are obvious, although proof of criminal activities is hard to get. But the description and detailed maps of endangered or rare predatory birds inhabiting and nesting in Britain are given in several travel books, e.g. by Page and Dowling (2002). And every summer, we have several news about killings and robbery of endangered birds in the area.

The risks of mass tourism to biota are well known and extensively studied, but controversies arise all the time about the ways the natural treasures can or should be utilized for recreation and experience-based travelling. Numerous examples of poorly planned and managed tours and operations are alarming, but the conflicts are not inevitable. Nature conservation and tourism industry can have mutual interests, and ways/tools in sustainable co-operations are available. Pirotta and Lusseau (2015) present comprehensive comparisons between various means of conservation-enhancing – and simultaneously also economically plausible – ways in wildlife tourism. Different combinations of tax and subsidy policies are available, and even maximizing the economic gains for the tour operators can result in positive and sustainable solutions for the wildlife (Pirotta and Lusseau, 2015).

World Heritage seriously threatened by criminals

Wildlife crime exploits both the intrinsic values of nature and the reputation and economy of countries. Today, the poaching-induced financial losses of nations and the tourism industry exceed by 25 million US dollars per year the costs that were needed to limit or exclude wild animal poaching (Naidoo *et al.*, 2016).

The scale and extent of illegal activities exploit global wildlife treasures are huge. In the recent summarization, WWF (*World Wide Fund for Nature*) shows that nearly half of the Natural World Heritage sites suffers from poaching and other forms of harvesting of natural resources (WWF Global, 2017).

The best hot spots of world's natural treasures are protected and maintained under the United Nations' *Natural World Heritage* -programme. The key element of these sites and areas is occurrence of rare – in most cases endangered – taxa of animals and plants. The most critical species are fully protected through the *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora* (CITES). But, in spite of legal protection and

control and surveillance, poaching is a huge problem, and the multi-billion dollar's illegal business seems to flourish and even getting stronger due to continuous demand of wildlife rarities.

According to the WWF-report, 93 % of the Natural World Heritage sites support recreation and tourism, and 91 % provide jobs, and in addition, 66 % of these sites are vital for water supply for both the natural biota and people (WWF Global, 2017). Securing the future of world's natural treasures essentially needs engaging local people in the management and conservation efforts, and such a co-operations certainly gain advantage to all parties (Scanlon, 2017).

Respect to animal rights is the key in Responsible Tourism

Tourist industry is gradually waking up to the popularity of animal attractions – and the subsequent exploitation and abuse of wildlife. One of the globally most widely used web-based travel agency, *TripAdvisor*, has recently expressed a strong support for animal rights by refusing to support bookings into destinations violating animal rights.

Hundreds of attractions using captive wild animals or endangered species (e.g. elephant riding, tiger hugging, swimming with dolphins) are listed as non-compliant, and the agency no longer takes bookings to those destinations.

The new policy, respecting animal rights, is based and backed by several international wildlife and consumer organizations (TravelTrends, 12.10.2016).

The role and effects of tourists on natural values are not only dependent on travel organizers' and individual tourists' efforts. Maintaining the values of natural heritage depends primarily on the decisions each country involved are ready to take. The role of developing world is of paramount importance. As described by the comprehensive review by Lindsey *et al.* (2017) of the current status of megafauna (carnivores weighting more than 15 kilograms and herbivores weighting more than 100 kilograms) in 152 countries, the efforts for conservation and active management were higher in poor than in wealthy nations.

Ranked by the *Megafauna Conservation Index*, the authors classified countries as above-average performers or underperformers. Geographic location or wealth alone do not point the status of a country in the list. Both poor and rich countries are found in both categories. Some generalizations can be made, however. To the respectful list of above-average performers were classified 90 % of countries in North and Central America and 70 % of countries in Africa. On the not-so-flattering list of the most badly underperformers there are 52 % of countries in Asia and 21 % of countries in Europe (Lindsey *et al.*, 2017).

On the top in the ranking based on the Megafauna Conservation Index, there are four countries from the developing world, i.e. Botswana (#1), Namibia (#2), Tanzania (#3) and Zimbabwe (#5) and one from Asia – Bhutan (#4), before the best industrial country, Norway on the place number six.

Investments towards nature conservation promote and secure the well-being and existence of biota, but at the same time, the efforts bring income for the countries, too. In the analysis

by Lindsey *et al.* (2017), the economic values of wildlife and nature conservation to countries were proportional to the conservation efforts. As a superior example, the Republic of Botswana on Southern Africa appears to be the number one performer in combining the several gains of wildlife conservation and nature-tourism. Nevertheless, the success comes with a cost to the natural wildlife. In a number of organized wildlife safaris and other tourist attractions, trained elephants are used to serve the maximal satisfaction for paying customers, and in these actions, the welfare of animals can be overlooked (Duffy, 2014).

Organized tourism industry with carefully managed attractions can govern and change the nature in ways emphasizing just human needs and desires (Duffy, 2014). If balance is not found and maintained between the tourists' desires and the welfare of animals, all parties finally suffer. And eventually, ill-managed mass tourism can ruin the vitality of both the wildlife and the wildlife tourism.

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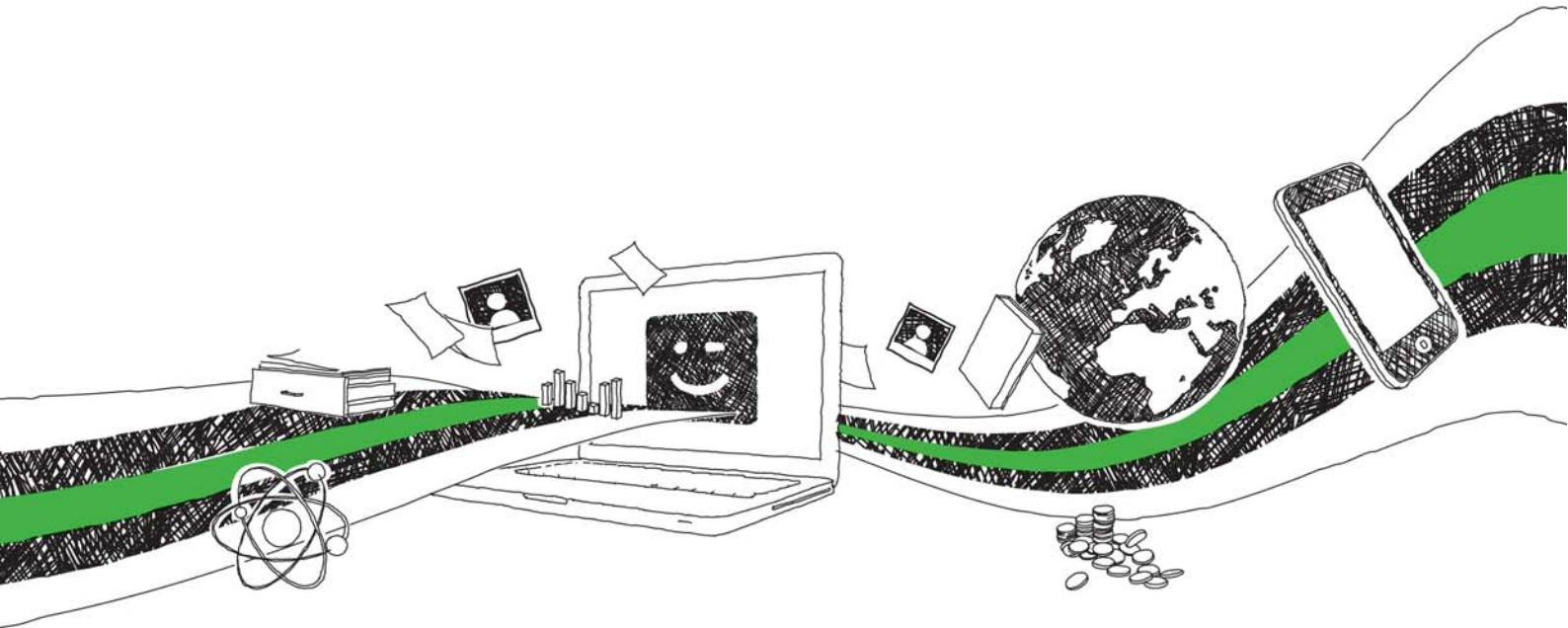
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