ANIMALS CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE

Humanitarian efforts and responsible tourism opportunities

Nicholas Wise

Introduction

War and conflict bring about significant change to the local environment, and this has an impact on animals and biodiversity. Hanson et al. (2009) conducted a comprehensive study of warzones around the globe and found that 80% of conflicts occur in areas rich in biodiversity. Because war, conflict, and civil unrest is a battle over resources, there is often no mercy for what lies in the path by those trying to assume territory. Human life is a tragedy or war, with death tolls commonly conveyed to onlookers in the media and through research reports; but what can be distant from the headlines, narratives, and reporting of war is the destruction of nature and the death of wildlife (Dudley, Ginsberg, Plumptre, Hart, & Campos, 2002). This chapter is concerned with discussing and presenting examples of animals and nature that were caught in the crossfire and the practical responses that ensued following a time of conflict whereby conservation and tourism play a role in future preservation. Much published academic research focuses on how conflict, tragedy, and security issues affect tourism destinations (e.g., Butler & Suntikul, 2013; Henderson, 2000; Winter, 2008; Wise, 2019). Some research has considered the role of ecotourism in war-torn destinations (e.g., Azimi, 2012; McNeillage, 1996) and wildlife decline (e.g., Daskin & Pringle, 2018), but very few sources have considered the impact of war on animals (indirectly) in the tourism literature (e.g., Shackley, 1995). Countries designate nature reserves so they can showcase unique wildlife, but conflict disrupts both the management of these sites and the existing ecological value that attracts visitors (Ospina, 2006). This can have a disruption on tourism for years to come because negative associations such a war (which produced a negative destination image) can deter visitors.

Animals play an important role in their ecosystems and natural settings. When we consider tourism and ecotourism, animals can be a niche attraction—and are thus important to the promotion of particular destinations (Bulbeck, 2005). People have psychological, emotional, or even imaginative innate connections with wild animals, or biophilia (see Curtin, 2005; Fennell, 2012; Wilson, 1984). When animals are threatened, people seek ways to respond and protect them, may these animals be unique to a particular place, an endangered species, or a household pet. While the disturbance of war can distract people from ongoing conservation, but when
stories of animals under threat arise, people embark on humanitarian efforts to restore a sense of protection and normality to animals, may they be in the wild, in zoos/nature centres, or domesticated. However, we must not also rule out that tourism can also be a threat to animals in the wild, even though the examples in this chapter look at tourism opportunities as a response to create awareness opportunities for locals. Tourism requires development and infrastructures to access remote areas, and this can, and does, impact local habitats (see Perkins & Grace, 2009). When people seek animals in the wild, this can alter or disrupt their biological clocks as many wild animals are nocturnal. Gorillas, for instance, are primates closely related to humans, and because people can pass diseases directly to them, being in close proximity can threaten the health of gorillas. Sometimes people do not act respectively towards animals, and this concern leads to a change in behaviour (see Chakraborty, 2019; Mlozi & Pesämaa, 2019). Bulbeck (2005) informs and encourages us to critically consider the impact of habitat loss and human encroachment, but considers this alongside the rapid increases of nature and ecotourism development that brings people into direct contact with animals.

This chapter is concerned with addressing how animals are impacted (differently) by war, conflict, and active disputes over the territory in which they reside and then looking at what local or international responses have been to address the impact on animals. Insight from research from a range of disciplines across the natural and social sciences is considered, as well as media reporting when providing examples of animals caught in the crossfire later in this chapter. Jones (2015) argues we overlook animal rights and social justice issues, but animals succumb to violence during times of conflict, just as people do. Examples in this chapter include the loss of giraffe and elephant herds during Mozambique’s Civil War; post-conflict efforts to protect endangered gorillas in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and neighbouring countries in the Virunga Mountains area; people rescuing zoo animals in Aleppo, Syria; and how war deters poaching, allowing wildlife to thrive in Kashmir, but the opposite was seen in Afghanistan. Before discussing these examples, this chapter will consider literature on the impact of war and conflict on tourism and ensuing humanitarian conservation that is an important component of contemporary ecotourism.

**War and conflict, ecotourism and conservation**

War and conflict is the result of contested power relations, which involve violent and aggressive disputes over geography (Agnew, 2009). While war is often a dispute over territory, conflicts will ultimately disrupt any ongoing conservation efforts that might be ongoing in that given territory (Toft, 2014). Wildlife caught in the crossfire are not equipped to deal with drastic change to their living environments. Thus, either fall victim as casualties of war, they must find a way to disperse or relocate to unfamiliar environments where they face other pressures of a new landscape that they may not belong to (or know how to adapt to), or become threatened by other predators because they are entering another animal’s territory. In this sense, both humans and animals are territorial.

Governments play a central role in protecting natural environments that contain animals and wildlife. Many countries can learn lessons from countries such as Costa Rica, which is observed as a benchmark for ecotourism development (Miller, 2012) and there is a history of humanitarian and non-governmental involvement in promote ecotourism to preserve wildlife for future generations and to benefit future tourism opportunities (see Butcher, 2007). However, in places around the world where damaging disputes over territory are occurring, or where competition to acquire land and resources leads to war and violence, the attempt to conserve is a challenge. Thus in disputed territories, conservation can be contested and political, especially
where longstanding quarrels and complex power relations in protected areas exist (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996; Mathis & Rose, 2016).

Times of active war, or directly following the aftermath of tragedy, affected regions usually have a demand for humanitarian need/aid (Cochrane & Cooke, 2016). In some places, a new humanitarian economy evolves to protect people and the environment in an attempt to de-escalate stresses (UNEP, 2017). Humanitarian efforts are also about raising awareness—often with the help of the media or non-governmental organisations. In addition, raising funds to protect people, animals, and the environment in an initiative alongside implementing safety and security measures help protect people and sustain natural biodiversity (Madianou, 2013). However, despite said opposition, Lopez, Bhungalia, and Newhouse (2015) also highlight that humanitarianism is a response to violence, as people seek ways to protect, preserve, or return normalcy to those affected—to aid people and/or animals and help preserve their local natural environment. A key challenge, however, is the disruption of conservation efforts during times of war given access and circumstances; but a re-emergence of humanitarian relief efforts immediately following times of war is an attempt to restore a natural setting. In some cases, there are attempts to promote tourism as a means to generate income in areas as a way of helping to preserve and protect unique wildlife (Ballantyne, Packer, & Hughes, 2009). To build a tourism industry in war-torn areas, destination managers need to ensure the destination is safe, conservationists need to be and feel safe, and that tourism and conservation efforts can take place. Animals such as gorillas (an endangered species) attract visitors who pay high fees to visit and experience these unique animals in the wild. DRC and Afghanistan that have unique wildlife, and ongoing conflict and violence remains an issue, significantly limiting conservation and tourism efforts (see Ospina, 2006). Visitor fees contribute to relief efforts to protect and conserve animal populations so that threats against them are minimal and so communities see regular income generation, which is happening in Uganda and Rwanda where there exist gorilla populations (Maekawa, Lanjouw, Rutagarama, & Sharp, 2013). A regular flow of income from an emerging ecotourism economy can allow local communities to become more aware of how conservation efforts can result in local economic sustainability to improve livelihoods. Tourism and the visitor economy can also help educate local people about the significance and value that unique wildlife have in a particular locale (Gadd, 2005). However, within such a framework, there is a need for business solutions that align with and support conservation efforts (see Andonova & Carbonnier, 2014).

Humanitarianism aligned with wildlife conservation is not a new concept, and some of the modern and contemporary thought and approaches align with perspectives going back to the early 1900s. Mighetto (1988) notes three highlighted points of wildlife conservation from the perspective of former United States president Theodore Roosevelt: ‘the true sportsman’, ‘the nature lover’, and ‘the humanitarian’. For decades the literature aligned with conservation and outdoor recreation, but more recently as attempts to conserve focus on saving wildlife from the threat of war, the focus on humanitarianism is gaining presence (see Mlozi & Pesämaa, 2019). It is also possible to argue that humanitarianism efforts align with the global rise of tourism, especially the demand among visitors to see and experience animals in their natural settings and habitats opposed to seeing exotic animal species in zoos or other enclosed nature parks (Safina, 2018).

The topic of animal ethics is explored in the tourism literature ethical consumption standpoints, whereby animals are used for entertainment and lack any sort of naturalness (Fennell, 2012). Cochrane and Cooke (2016), focusing on animal rights, ask how “intervention in a state by external agents to prevent, halt or minimise violations of basic animal rights (‘humane intervention’) can be justified” (p. 106). It is more widely accepted that we can justify...
intervention efforts by militaries, human rights groups, or charities to help people, but as Cochrane and Cooke (2016) argue when it comes to acting and intervening for animals the justification and cause is not only much more difficult but even impossible. This is especially true in remote areas. Intervention is also a challenge because of additional stress (forced interactions with animals) and horrors (based on the trust animals have with humans) put on animals during war and conflict. Cochrane and Cooke (2016) note “all states have the responsibility to massively transform their relationship with non-human animals, and to build international institutions to oversee the proper protection of their most basic rights” (p. 106). In some places, building institutions is a challenge depending on financial resources. While institutions are dedicated societies to protect animals, what can follow are ecotourism opportunities to complement animal protection policies and build a new local economy—such as what is happening in gorilla sanctuaries in Uganda and Rwanda given the protective measures to ensure the animals service and thrive.

A critical note concerning wildlife tourism is that animals are simply a resource, or exploited commodities (McNeilage, 1996). There do exist ethical issues here, especially surrounding the commodification of animals in the wild, but others argue tourism endeavours are an attempt to create awareness to help protect and conserve wildlife in areas threatened by conflict and territorial dispute. The argument is allowing tourists to view animals in their natural habitats is more ethical than capturing and allocating wildlife to zoos and kept in captivity (Safina, 2018). While scholars have focused on how zoos affect animal behaviour (Hosey, 1997), zoos remain popular visitor attractions for those who may not have the resources to go to remote corners of the Earth. Moreover, there is a demand among nature based or environmental enthusiasts to see and experience wildlife in their natural settings. Again, the challenge with this is many of these natural settings are not only in very remote parts of the world, but some are in conflict-ridden areas. Frost (2011) argues that while zoos are controversial, they are an attempt to protect animals, and depending on this location educate about the need to conserve species. Animal populations in their natural can only be sustained so long they are kept safe and away from harm (this includes the impact of war on natural environment and poaching). For endangered species living in active areas of conflict, they risk extinction because humanitarian assistance is not always possible, often impossible. This was a major concern for the wild gorilla population in the DRC. Like any other resource, once it is depleted, or extinct, the resource no longer has economic value and thus different disputes over territory may emerge. These debates help us think about the critical challenges of tourism, especially in places suffering from war and conflict.

To enhance understandings going forward, there is a need for interdisciplinary cooperation to address challenges. For instance, Carbonnier (2016) argues that economists need to play a more central role to help scholars and local residents understand, reflect and address on humanitarian challenges. Jones (2015, p. 467) adds “the literature on social justice, and social justice movements themselves, routinely ignore nonhuman animals as legitimate subjects of social justice.” Such a focus can allow future researchers to help local people and animals impacted by war to inform future conservation efforts. This way the protection of animals, wildlife and local community is based on mutual understandings and awareness of tragedy opposed to just a response to tragedy. Focusing on local communities living in fragile environments with unique wildlife need to understand how to maintain tourism, so that sustainable solutions can be realised environmentally, socially, and economically—for both the purpose of humanitarianism and ecotourism. The next section will address the impact of war and conflict on wildlife, and will look at examples and humanitarian efforts, tourism opportunities, and responses to aid and assist animals caught in the crossfire.
Animals caught in the crossfire: Examples and responses

To highlight the issues and impacts of conflict on nature and animals, this section will discuss case examples to address the impact on animals during times of war and conflict. These examples here build on the points highlighted above and include discussions of humanitarian efforts to spare animals deemed ‘innocent victims of war’ (see Marijnen & Duffy, 2018). The first two examples are in Africa, and emphasise the conclusion by Marijnen and Duffy (2018) that “more than 70% of Africa’s national parks have been affected by war in recent decades, and wildlife has suffered as a result.”

For several decades, mountain gorillas in DRC faced threats due to ongoing war, with accounts of gorillas shot and killed by rebel fighters. Hatcher (2012) reported that a quarter of the world’s then 800 gorillas living in the wild at the time resided in Virunga National Park (in eastern DRC). Virunga National Park saw rebels seize control of the area in 2007, resulting in conservationists fleeing the park. Without conservationists and park rangers, gorillas “have been caught in the cross fire of pitched gun battles and have sometimes been attacked directly by rebels seeking to steal and sell infant gorillas” (Walsh, 2013). There were reports of 10 gorillas killed during the early years of the conflict and some even fleeing the area (Sanders, 2008). While rebel groups may not have targeted gorillas directly, rebel occupation of this territory halted conservation efforts and tourism here ceased (Sanders, 2008).

Reports of 40,000 people displaced were noted by Hatcher (2012) and 140 conservationists were killed (Rosen, 2014) in DRC, but the number of gorillas displaced and other wildlife were not calculated. While parks are ‘safe’ sanctuaries, gorillas still face the threat of poaching. Another important focus here is how locals perceive gorillas, given the threat of poaching. Poachers see gorillas as immediate profit, so a response in Uganda and Rwanda was to employ former poachers to run conservation/wildlife tours because they are familiar with the forest and can navigate through the thick vegetation (Feltner, 2009). There are also efforts to educate local residents in the surrounding communities about the value of gorillas to the tourism economy. Because they are an endangered species, tourists desire to see them in the wild, and protecting gorillas is a chance for local communities to realise sustained economic impacts from tourism (Haines, 2018). For instance, an initiative of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park in Uganda is to promote awareness of the impact of human conflict and poaching on wildlife, and to teach locals the importance of wildlife so that they can gain from a sustained tourism economy. The African Wildlife Foundation (2020) have adopted a partnership initiative in Uganda and Rwanda working with governments, private operators and local communities, so that tourism can thrive and gorillas can be sustained in their natural environment, and maintain efforts to keep gorillas safe in DRC. Conservation methods include “on the ground through ranger-based monitoring, transboundary collaboration, community and tourism development, anti-poaching activities, and habitat conservation” (African Wildlife Foundation, 2020).

For many countries in Africa, wildlife is important to the economy (see Price, 2017). In DRC, the occupation of territory, active conflict, and poaching has taken a toll on the gorilla population, in Mozambique the civil war that ravaged the country from 1977 to 1992 resulted in the significant loss of giraffe and elephant herds. Potenza (2018) reported that one park lost 90% of its wildlife during the civil war in the country. The direct killing of animals was a means of survival for many during the 15-year civil war due to widespread food shortages. Some would hunt wildlife for food and for others poaching was an attempt to make money (selling ivory). Shivni (2018), reports that in Mozambique it remains “unclear whether gunfire or bombs hurt any animals during this time” and that “indirect causes include disruption from
humans fleeing violence and seeking shelter in animal habitats, food shortages or fewer opportunities to reproduce”. Knock-on effects from unintentional compromises is what Daskin and Pringle (2018) highlight as a main cause for decline, especially when animal reproduction cycles and mating seasons are directly affected, as this impacts migration patterns as well. What is key is the post-war response efforts, and the commitment to conservation. Following the civil war in Mozambique, the conservation of Gorongosa National Park became a primary focus. Here, “former soldiers on opposite sides of the conflict were put to work together as rangers to protect the country’s wildlife” (Potenza, 2018). Such a response was an attempt to build and work towards mutual understandings, whereby preserving Mozambique’s bountiful natural resources and wildlife could unite people once in opposition. Thus, conservation efforts and building an ecotourism economy became a focus to distracting people from war tensions and societal opposition and put emphasis on rebuilding its society, natural environment, and economy to attract visitors (see Dondeyne, Kaarhus, & Allison, 2012).

In the examples noted to this point from Africa, a key threat to animals in war-torn areas has been poaching and people hunting for a means of survival. War also leads to the displacement or abandonment of animals in zoos and household pets (Guynup, 2017; Pleitgen, 2014). For example, Gouillou (2017) highlights that the ongoing conflicts in Syria and Palestine focus heavily on human death tragedy as well as the destruction of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, with little insight on how these conflicts are taking a toll on animal populations, as the author deems animals: forgotten war victims. Without ongoing conservationists working in active warzones, staff are unable to care for animals in zoos—the case in Aleppo and Gaza. Direct hits on a Gaza zoo during conflict between Israel and Hamas led to limited capacity for care staff and zookeepers—resulting in no water and food shortages (Pleitgen, 2014). Traumatised and weak animals had limited/no ability to flee, but even if zoo animals could flee they would lack survival skills in an unfamiliar (and likely unwelcome) environment. It was uncertain if the zoo attacks were direct or were collateral damage, but given the human death toll and displacement in this area, the focus on animals kept in captivity was not a priority when it came to receiving resources (Pleitgen, 2014). In Aleppo, Amir Khalil (who has experience saving animals from warzones) organised an effort to save 13 surviving animals from Magic World (Guynup, 2017). This effort resulted in the relocation of these surviving animals to a zoo in neighbouring Jordan. The challenge here was humanitarian intervention, and still this required diplomatic talks to allow people to not only collect the animals, but then to transport them overland through an active warzone. For household pets or zoo animals, the impact of war is different, but the result is also tragic. For wild animals, disruptions to their natural environment may force them to alter more traditional paths or migration routes, if only temporarily. As addressed in the examples noted in this chapter, many animals impacted by war and active conflict have little chance of recovery without humanitarian intervention and strict conservation policies/efforts, as this applies to animals in the wild, in zoos and household pets. However, for household pets and zoo animals, these animals are dependent on humans for survival, and without care, their survival chances are minimal. Animals that do survive face trauma due to abandonment and starvation (Lynne, 2019).

Reports from Kashmir show a different situation concerning the impact of war on wildlife. The conflict in Kashmir between India and Pakistan had a very different impact on certain animals, as the war brought about a time of safety for leopards, snow leopards, bears, and the hangul (closely related to the reindeer, native only to Kashmir). Because locals had to surrender their firearms, this stopped people from wandering the forests—thus deterring poaching (see Joshi, 2006). Despite conflict, having a positive impact on the snow leopard population in Kashmir, in nearby Afghanistan the impact on this same species was very different. Lynne
(2019) reports “an estimated 10 million landmines have been scattered throughout Afghanistan threatening the elusive snow leopard. Afghan soldiers also hunt goats and sheep for food in the remote mountainous areas of the country, reducing the snow leopard’s access to prey”. The negative impact on snow leopards in Afghanistan is twofold, with these animals killed by landmines or starving because their natural food supplies diminished from hunting.

In some warzones there has been speculation that animals were transporting supplies, as noted “during the Vietnam war, the United States routinely bombed Asian elephants as they were believed to be used to transport supplies for the opposition” (Lynne, 2019). For such places with a history of mines and casualties, an approach similar to Cambodia whereby efforts are about educating visitors of the impact of mines on people (see Winter, 2008), and in places such as Afghanistan in the future education and conservation efforts can highlight the wider impact on animal populations and the upsetting of a natural balance.

Conclusions and future research

As outlined in the many examples above, ecotourism and nature-based tourism can play a central role when it comes to post-war conservation efforts. Such tourism opportunities aim to protect wildlife, and to sustain local/regional economies so local communities in these destinations can generate income. The emphasis needs to be the long-term value of nature and wildlife opposed to short term survival, which is the mentality of poachers that we see in the example of how DRC, Uganda, and Rwanda are embracing the gorillas in the wild for sustained tourism futures in the Virunga Mountains. However, we must not surpass the issue of commodification noted earlier in this chapter. In Mozambique, the civil war was seen as the most tragic example of wildlife animals caught in the turmoil of conflict, whereas the very opposite was seen in Kashmir where wildlife were able to find protection because of conflict. In Aleppo, humanitarians risked their lives to save stranded animals during a time of active war.

According to Potenza (2018), “every country, and every conflict, is different”, and this represents a challenge to assessing animals caught in the crossfire. Conducting research in war- and conflict-ridden areas is difficult due to safety concerns and limited access to these areas; in reality, researchers cannot begin to assess such the impact of animals in warzones until years after. Recent work assesses the impact of war on destinations by employing content analysis (e.g., Wise, 2019) or conducting thorough archival research (e.g., Daskin & Pringle, 2018). Field-based research proves a challenge for researchers given the difficulty to access sites and destinations due to safety restrictions, not to mention challenges with gaining ethical approval and funds to travel to destinations experiencing active conflict, or recovering from it. Additionally, when war or conflict consume a country or destination, cease-fires are not always immediate, as a resurgence is possible. The challenge then, is acquiring funding to carry out conservation efforts and investment in subsequent ecotourism opportunities (including infrastructure to access areas, tourism resources, training staff, and paying employees). War or conflict sees funds diverted away from social or natural agendas, and post-conflict, economic situations may be dire so trying to divert funds to conservation might not always be (initially) feasible. In many cases, conservation efforts will require awareness and investment from the outside with the assistance of humanitarian groups who have the ability to raise funds externally to support efforts to save wildlife. This has been a trend going back decades, for instance, the African Wildlife Foundation (2000) noted:

Throughout the civil conflicts, IGCP has helped pay stipends to park staff members, replace equipment lost or stolen during the hostilities, restore damaged facilities, and
train guards in gorilla-tracking techniques. Rangers from the three countries have been taught how to collect invaluable data on the mountain gorillas. They use global positioning systems and other methods to chart the ranging habits of gorilla groups. The collected information helps park wardens manage protection efforts.

Each of these activities require adequate funding and human resourcing to build facilities and monitor wildlife, which goes beyond the immediate needs and priorities that war-torn countries face, and which is often needed to repair and restore basic infrastructures essential to rebuilding a national economy.

Protecting animals following a time of conflict and building a new ecotourism economy is about creating an awareness to attract tourists and educating locals about conservation. Conflict, as mentioned, is a dispute over territorial control, but these territories contain populations of people recovering and also animals and wildlife seeking normality in their natural living environment. Liu, Li, and Pechacek (2013) stress the needs for a set of guidelines for managing wildlife ecotourism, but what is missing is the complexity associated with disputes over territory where animals are unfortunately caught in the crossfire. War devastates people, places, and wildlife, and “animals that do survive can rebuild their populations, so conservation efforts in war-torn areas are incredibly important” (Potenza, 2018). Importantly, this takes coordination efforts of people to restore normality to animal sanctuaries and natural living environments. Also important is educating local communities about the interplay between conservation and responsible tourism, and conservation efforts in warzones have been successful (such as in Mozambique). For animals in zoos and household pets that are abandoned, this remains a key concern, due to their limited ability to adapt.

The impact of animals caught in the crossfire is an underdeveloped area of research in the field of ecotourism and tourism development in general. Going forward, future work should endeavour to better understand both the protection animals and efforts to educate local communities—as these points together offer useful insight on the overlaps of sustainable community planning and natural resource protection. Thus, integrating such ‘dark’, ‘tragic’, or ‘violent’ tourism histories alongside ecotourism initiatives is important to inform visitors of the challenges of nature conservation, and strategies for overcoming conflict-related issues, given the physical, social, and psychological impacts this has on people, animals, conservation efforts, social development, and destination image.

References


