WILL WORK FOR FOOD
Positioning animals in ecotourism

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Introduction
Discourse about the benefits and harm of ecotourism remains polarised, particularly when it involves non-human animals. Ecotourism should at least be ecologically based, but the ideal is a form of tourism that is ecologically responsible and does the right thing—morally, ethically, sustainably—for all stakeholders. Proponents argue that ecotourism should adopt and promote environmentally responsible practices, offer economic benefits to local communities, and support environmental conservation initiatives. Embraced with gusto in the 1990s, ecotourism has become such a popular marketing term that almost any form of tourism has been labelled in this idealised way. Indeed, tourism involving animals, thus infiltrating the tourist experience with something that may be perceived as akin to being ‘natural’, seems to automatically fulfill the ecologically based criteria. Yet, while many ventures claim the ecotourism label, most do not, perhaps cannot, fulfil its (unrealistic?) ideologies. This is the reality in which animals used in ecotourism find themselves.

By animals, I am referring to non-human animal species; thus, encompassing all living beings except humans and plants. However, because many tourists have a bias towards species they consider more charismatic, ecotourism is inherently speciesist (Kerley, Geach, & Vial, 2003). Most of the examples in this chapter focus on the animals most popular in ecotourism though there is of course scope for all involvement of all species. Vertebrates have long been more popular than invertebrates, for example, though tourism centred on invertebrates such as glow worms and butterflies does exist (Valentine & Birtles, 2004) and Lemelin (2015) writes about the mainstreaming of entomotourism.

A wide range of literature on the use of animals in ecotourism is presented here to provide an understanding of the current state of the field. The question of why animals are an important aspect of some forms of ecotourism is explored, before examining how animals are put to use in this context. Possible benefits and harm are discussed, before turning to some potential scenarios for the future.

Why animals are used in ecotourism
The history of using animals as the prime focus of tourism experiences is long. Birdwatching trips and safaris to observe African mammals were taking place in the 1800s (Adler, 1989) but...
well before then animals were transported across the globe to be displayed in zoos and perform for humans. Queen Hatshepsut of Egypt’s extensive fifteenth century BC palace menagerie is often described as being the first zoo (Mason, 2000) and the African elephant ‘Jumbo’, shipped from Ethiopia to London in 1865, one of the most famous examples of an animal used in tourism (Hancocks, 2003).

Not only is the history long, but the number of animals involved is large. With an estimated three million animals kept in zoos and aquariums (Fennell, 2013), the number of individuals used annually across all aspects of the ecotourism industry is likely to reach tens of millions. Both the number of individuals and diversity of species keeps growing, to the extent that intensification of the modern tourism industry has facilitated access and proximity to a vast range of species across the globe (Winter, 2020, p. 1).

Animals are used in ecotourism primarily for the entertainment of people. They are held captive for the purposes of display, used as porters to carry humans and our belongings, considered quarry to be hunted, and as objects used in competition and sport (Fennell, 2013). In all cases, their role is to serve a purpose for humans. This is the simple answer to the question of why animal-based ecotourism exists. Valuing animals extrinsically, or instrumentally, for what they can do for us, and separating ‘us’ and ‘them’ in this dichotomy, enables this situation to exist and persist. The animals provide a human audience with entertainment whilst simultaneously providing tourism operators with financial benefit.

Tourism is a human concept and a form of human-centred hedonism (Burns, 2015; Lück & Porter, 2018). It is anthropocentric: devised by and for human. The intention of most tourism experiences is to enable humans to escape from daily activities: the opportunity to do something different. Animal-based ecotourism shares that intention, offering access to species different from the ones most people are familiar with in their everyday lives. Or, if the animals are familiar, then it is a chance to see them do something different; for example, when a working dog rounds up sheep for a display. In this way, animal-based ecotourism is embedded in anthropocentric assumptions about human exceptionalism, prioritising human needs and desires over those of all other animals (Ivanov, 2019). The objective is human enjoyment and, as I will discuss, often comes at the cost of animal suffering (Winter, 2020, p. 17).

How animals are used in ecotourism

Much of the literature considering animals in ecotourism focuses on wildlife, which is an interesting curiosity in itself. For example, of the 18 chapters in Markwell’s (2015) edited book on Animals in Tourism, the only chapter on domesticated animals is about travelling with them rather than them being the object of the tourism experience (Gretzel & Hardy, 2015). One reason for the popularity of wildlife suggested by Young and Carr (2018) is because domestic animals which are part of the mundane, every-day life, lack the attraction of exotic, strange, or uncommon animals. However, the uneven appeal is perhaps also due to the nature of the label of ecotourism, which is embedded with aims of conservation and preservation—subjects associated more readily with wild animals than domestic ones. It is also perhaps due to the often synonymous treatment of ‘ecotourism’ and ‘nature-based tourism’ (e.g., Hidinger, 1996, p. 49), with nature implying tourism with undomesticated animals. A rare exception recognising the role of domestic animals in ecotourism is the book Domestic animals, humans and leisure: Rights, welfare, and wellbeing by Young and Carr (2018).

Ecotourism involving animals can be targeted (direct), in which being entertained by animals is the central experience such as in a zoo or wildlife sanctuary. It can also be non-targeted (indirect), in which the animals are secondary to the main experience or even accidental such as
Ecotourism involving animals occurs within captive or non-captive settings, with Cohen (2019) further dividing these for wildlife into a continuum of four categories: fully natural, semi-natural, semi-contrived, and fully contrived. These different motivational and spatial settings are important because they can have vastly differing consequences for the animals in terms of the way they are used. In targeted and captive settings, the animals are more likely to experience artificial, monotonous environments that restrict their movement and ability to engage in natural behaviours and thus may be harmful to their welfare. In non-targeted and non-captive settings, the animals may be able to engage in more natural, and thus healthier, behaviours.

Ecotourism involving animals may be considered non-consumptive or consumptive, depending on how the animals are used. In non-consumptive activities, the animals may be used for observational encounters in non-captive settings, such as bird watching in a national park. They may also be used for interactive presentations in captive settings, such as dolphin shows at a marine park, where they are displayed and often also touched by tourists as part of the entertainment. In contrast, consumptive activity types are generally considered as those in which the end product for the animals is their deliberate death at the hands of the tourists. Hunting and fishing, for example, are consumptive animal tourism activities. The distinction, however, is not always clear cut. Even where death is not deliberate, it can still be the outcome for the animal. For example, some ecotourism depends on the use of vehicles to access natural areas and, consequently, wildlife inhabiting destinations with large visitation number per year are susceptible to being struck by vehicles (Tablado & D’Amico, 2017). Similarly, studies increasingly show that disturbance from ecotourism activities can affect survival rates of species (e.g., Müllner, Linsenmair, and Wikelski’s (2004) study of hoatzin chicks in Amazonian rainforest lakes, and D’Cruze et al. (2018) study of wild animals across Latin America). Further, some authors argue that in the context of ecotourism animals are constructed as commodities for consumption, perhaps not always physically but at least metaphorically in the sense of them being an object that has market value and the experience humans have with them can be bought and sold (Burns, 2015). The line drawn then, that consumptive tourism is only that resulting in deliberate death, seems narrow and it could be inferred that all forms of ecotourism involving animals are consumptive. Nevertheless, the simplistic perception of difference between deliberate versus non-deliberate death and the labels associated with them remains dominant in the literature.

The list of how animals are engaged in ecotourism for, and by, humans is long. Activities range from those that are more natural (for the animal), such as watching seals from the shore in Iceland (Burns, 2015), that enable the animals to continue with uninterrupted natural behaviour, to very artificial encounters, such as orangutans boxing in Thailand (Sellar, 2018), where animals are forced to perform unnatural behaviours to entertain the human audience. Jones (2013), for example, describes an ecotourism attraction in Florida that illegally fed wild alligators to entertain customers. Practices like this encourage unnatural behaviour in wild animals. They learn to approach humans for food, increasing their likelihood of being reported as a nuisance and killed by wildlife control officers. These different engagements result in differing effects on the wellbeing of the animals involved.

**Animals as workers in the ecotourism industry**

Animals expend physical and emotional labour as they work for humans in ecotourism. Dashper (2019, p. 29) argues that conceptualising animals as workers within tourism importantly highlights their contributions to the tourism product. As workers, animals are engaged in a wide
range of activities. Animals are used as transport for both people and equipment; for example, yaks in Nepal (Ning, Oli, Gilani, Joshi, & Bisht, 2016), mules in Morocco (Cousquer & Allison, 2012), camels in Botswana (Seiful, Angassa, & Boitumelo, 2019), horses in Iceland (Helgadóttir & Dashper, 2016), sled dogs in Canada (Fennell & Sheppard, 2011), and elephants in Thailand (Flower, Burns, & Jones, 2021).

Animals work in a range of activities that can be labelled as sport. Being entertained by animals racing against each other is typically based on the labour of horses (Winter & Frew, 2018), greyhounds (Markwell, Firth, & Hing, 2017), and camels (Seiful et al., 2019) but in ecotourism contexts can extend to less expected species such as toads and crabs (Birts, 2017). In the context of sport tourism, animals can be something we gamble on or something we kill. Hunting and fishing return to the category of sport, thus demonstrating that the use of animals in this context can be both consumptive and non-consumptive. Bullfighting, another sport, causes the death of approximately 250,000 bulls annually (Humane Society International, 2020). Meanwhile, alligator wrestling does not purposefully aim to kill the animal (Frank, 2012).

Animals work for humans as trained performers in staged encounters. Circuses involving live animals, a prime example in this category, are not the only venues in which this type of work occurs. At the Samui Monkey Theater in Thailand, chained macaques play musical instruments (Discovery Thailand, 2020). At Sea World in Australia, dolphins are ridden and seals ‘kiss’ staff (Village Roadshow Theme Parks, 2020). At Sheep World in New Zealand, dogs round up sheep (Sheep World, 2020). At the Kayabukiya Tavern in Japan, monkeys are ‘employed’ as waiters (Financial Express, 2017).

There are contexts in which animals look less like workers in the ecotourism industry. These are usually non-captive, less managed settings such as whale watching. However, even here the animals are sources of entertainment for us. Although the performance is less likely to be forced, the animals may be coerced into close contact.

A primary objective for many ecotourists is to have a close encounter with the animal (Tully & Carr, 2020). Animals not caged and specifically trained for this purpose may be enticed by feeding, also referred to as provisioning. There are many examples of this around the world, involving many different species. In some cases, the feeding may be systematic and controlled; for example, with wild birds at O’Reilly’s Rainforest Retreat in Australia (O’Reilly’s, 2020) and with wild macaques in monkey parks in Japan (Knight, 2010). However, feeding may also be unregulated and uncontrolled which can lead to instances of human-animal conflict (e.g., Burns & Howard, 2003). We feed animals as part of a tourism experience. We also eat them.

Eating animals as part of the ecotourism experience may be connected with the use for sport, where the animal killed through hunting or fishing activities is then eaten. However, in most cases eating animal flesh could easily be dismissed as unrelated to ecotourism; for example, if the tourist is consuming meat products in a restaurant, the same as they would at home. Sometimes though the eating is more obviously part of an ecotourism experience, with tourists motivated by a desire to taste the flesh of animals they may not normally have the opportunity to eat (e.g., Burns, Öqvist, Angerbjörn, & Granquist, 2018; Mkono, 2015).

In all of the contexts described in this section, perhaps with the exception of being eaten, the ecotourism is obviously based on the physical labour of the animals. While the physicality might be obvious, more hidden is a type of labour that is emotional (Burns & Benz-Schwarzburg, 2021). While the concept of emotional labour has long been part of an anthropocentric discourse (e.g., Hochschild, 1983/2012), extending the concept to animal workers has come to attention more recently. Dashper’s (2019) analysis of trail-riding tourism
provides an example of this by recognising the horses as engaged in emotional labour in the service of humans. Burns and Benz-Schwarzburg (2021) note that the requirement of emotional labour from animals is often a crucial component of animal performances. Animals are trained to display behaviour that can be interpreted as expressing a particular emotion; for example, when a sea lion kisses a keeper the audience sees affection. This in turn affects human emotion about the experience. In this way, the animals become staff members trained to display fake emotions for the purpose of enhancing the ecotourism experience for humans (Burns & Benz-Schwarzburg, 2021).

Treatment of animals in ecotourism

Tully and Carr (2020) describe tourism as a facilitator of animal oppression because it interacts with animals through an unequal power relationship dominated by economics and control that establishes animals as objects for our use. This links with the earlier discussion about consumptive tourism and the plethora of literature on animals as tourism objects and commodities (e.g., Burns, 2015; Cohen & Cohen, 2019; Tully & Carr, 2020). Establishing them as such denies them agency and allows for their use in entertainment (Burns, 2015; Burns & Benz-Schwarzburg, 2021; Notzke, 2019). In this context, their sentience is also often denied or ignored (Burns & Benz-Schwarzburg, 2021).

What tourists may not realise, or choose not to realise, is that many ecotourism encounters are made possible because of the power relationship based on abuse, manipulation, cruelty, and control over the animal. The closer the encounter, the more evident this becomes; for example, when we ride an elephant (Schmidt-Burbach, 2017) or pat a tiger (Cohen, 2012, 2013). This type of tourism can create the illusion that high-level predators are akin to toys or pets. Through training of animals and language used with tourists, the illusion is created that the animals are docile, domesticated, and tame (Winter, 2020, p. 18), but this is rarely the case. Instead, particularly for once wild animals, they are often “systematically abused to conform their behaviour to the needs of their human handlers” (Winter, 2020, p. 12) and the desires of the tourists. Winders (2017) describes the language often used in these contexts as part of a ‘humane-washing scheme’. Lack of regulation of marketing material means that some ecotourism operators can use names like ‘haven’, ‘refuge’, and ‘sanctuary’ to attract welfare-minded tourists even though the terms themselves are often meaningless (Winders 2017).

The list of how animals are mistreated in the context of ecotourism is lengthy and has already been alluded to. For the purposes of ecotourism animals are hunted and captured in the wild, permanently confined, used as transport, cruelly trained, intentionally killed, and eaten. Training may include the animals being drugged, and control through painful practices. For example, elephants in some ecotourism ventures in Thailand are trained using bull hooks that pierce their skin (Bansiddhi et al., 2018), and bears that perform in Russia’s Petersburg Circus are restrained in a standing position, tethered by their necks to a wall, to strengthen their legs (Daly, 2019).

We know that animals suffer by being forced to live in places and under conditions that do not meet their innate needs. They also suffer by being forced to perform unnatural behaviours which cause them harm. Cetaceans confined in small tanks, for example, suffer sensory deprivation (Winter, 2020). Elephants forced to perform handstands suffer pain and long-term physical problems (Barnes, 2006).

Cohen (2013) describes tigers chained on short leads, left in the hot sun, kept in small cages, drugged, and beaten. This treatment occurs so the tigers can be handled by tourists. Gürsoy (2020) describes horses exposed to dehydration, heavy loads, and lack of food that sometimes
results in serious accidents and even death. This treatment occurs so the horses can profitably pull tourists in carriages. Bauer (2017) describes lambs being malnourished, subjected to rough handling, not bonding with their mothers, suffering from hypothermia, and in need of urgent veterinary care. This occurs so they can be used as props for tourists’ photographs. These are all examples of animal abuse and exploitation in captive ecotourism settings.

**Justifying the treatment of animals in ecotourism**

Situations like those described above persist because they are tolerated by tourists. Mistreatment of animals may be tolerated because the tourists do not know it exists. It can be hidden in the discourse used for tourists; for example, in the labelling of venues as described previously and in words like ‘training’ used without explanation of how that training takes place and what it entails. Cruelty may be tolerated when the tourists are uncertain about the impacts of their activities, and thus choose to ignore them. This is linked with the earlier contention that ecotourism is essentially a hedonistic human-focused industry. Some tourists may not care about the quality of life that ecotourism ventures offer for the animals. Others may care but choose not to match their actions with this care in the context of their desire for escapism. As a form of cognitive dissonance, this scenario is referred to frequently in the ecotourism literature (e.g., Burns et al., 2018; Curtin & Wilkes, 2007; Font, Bonilla-Priego, & Katenbacher, 2019; Moorhouse, D’Cruze, & Macdonald, 2017).

A further alternative is that tourists may justify their actions as a type of care in which they find reasons to legitimise their desires—to be entertained by animals. This can manifest in several ways that focus on the believed benefits for the animals, and for the people. The justification may be financial: believing the money spent at an animal-based attraction contributes to conservation of the species. Justification can also be based on the captive animal being ‘sacrificial’ for the purpose of education. The captive individual enables people to learn about the species and thus, ideally, fosters a desire to protect it. Therefore, although life might not be ideal for a singular animal, its captivity is warranted to benefit the species as a whole. The Tiger Trek at Taronga Zoo in Australia embodies this education ideal. This immersive exhibit takes visitors on a simulated flight to Sumatra where they disembark to view tigers in an enclosure that appears very natural. On exit, visitors are prompted to make shopping choices based on sustainable palm oil consumption to help conserve tiger habitat (Kelly, 2018).

Yet another, and there are plenty more, justification for tourists to prioritise their own desires can be found in the belief that the animal has a better life as part of the tourist attraction than it would outside it. This is supported by data showing that some animals live longer in captivity and are less stressed because they avoid the fear of being predated upon and not knowing when they will obtain their next meal (Longley, 2011).

Justification can also be explicitly based on benefits to humans, and the connection between human wellbeing and human–animal interactions in the context of tourism is a well-studied phenomenon (e.g., Webb & Drummond, 2001; Weiler, Ham, & Smith, 2011; Yerbury & Boyd, 2018; Yerbury & Weiler, 2020). Curtin (2009), for example, found that encounters with wildlife can positively influence psychological well-being in humans and ‘animal-assisted therapy’, such as swimming with dolphins, has long been used to treat a range of human illnesses (Williamson, 2008). Thus, the ‘feel-good’ aspect embodied in an encounter can have positive outcomes for humans perceived to outweigh any negative outcomes for the animals.

In addition to being accepted by some tourists, cruelty to animals in the context of ecotourism may also persist due to lack of regulation and policy to prevent it. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation’s (UNWTO) Global Code of Ethics, for example,
positions itself strongly in terms of human rights and benefits but recognition of animals here, as in much other relevant legislation, is ignored (Burns, 2015; Fennell, 2014). The more focused Code of Ethics and Animal Welfare adopted by the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA, 2003) covers animals in captive ecotourism. However, no global body regulates wildlife tourism attractions (Moorhouse et al., 2017) and thus responsibility for legal control usually lies at national and local levels. Some countries enforce strict regulations concerning the treatment of animals in tourism, for example, the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines – [for] Exhibited Animals (Harding & Rivers, 2014); however, others are less strict. The problem is exacerbated because control is often left to codes of conduct (for example with seal [Öqvist, Granquist, Burns, & Angerbjörn, 2017] and whale watching [Garrod & Fennell, 2004]), which are not legally enforceable and lack conformity. Within the remit of tourism policy, Sheppard and Fennell (2019, p. 141) found focus remains on enhancing human welfare and rights through tourism development despite recent consideration of a broader and deeper range of impacts that includes concern for animals. Thus, changes may be ahead, but they are slow in coming. Globally encompassing regulations may not necessarily be the best answer as there is need to take into account local contexts and opportunities for compliance. However, without clear regulation, policy and the ability to enforce these, protection of both animals and people during ecotourism encounters can be compromised.

Cruelty implies intent to cause harm, is largely confined to captive settings and has existed since the beginning of animal-based ecotourism. Evidence is now increasing of negative consequences of ecotourism for animals in non-captive settings. Müllner et al.’s (2004) study of hoatzin chicks in Amazonian rainforest revealed exposure to ecotourism reduced survival and affected stress responses. Stress responses and heightened anxiety were also found amongst Barbary Macaques by Maréchal et al. (2011). More recently, D’Cruze et al.’s (2018, p. 1563) study of close interactions (feeding, swimming and petting) between humans and wild animals across Latin America identified a range of consequences including altered feeding patterns and reproductive behaviour, increased stress and other physiological responses, injury, disease, and death. Not all species are affected equally, however.

Hidinger’s (1996) study in Tikal National Park, Guatemala, found that in areas where more tourism was present, some species increased in density, some decreased, and others seemed unaffected. From ecological studies we know that some species adapt better than others to more humanised environments (Chace & Walsh, 2006). Eastern water dragons thrive along the heavily touristed riverbank in Brisbane, Australia, for example, while population numbers of eastern bearded dragons around Brisbane have declined (Garden, McAlpine, Possingham, & Jones, 2007). These studies demonstrate that consequences are species specific.

While ecotourists may not know the details of their impacts on animals, the spread of global knowledge through internet sources means that information is not hard to find should one endeavour to look. It may, however, be easy to ignore. As mentioned earlier, a growing body of literature evokes cognitive dissonance as the answer to why tourists willing engage in activities that they know harm animals (e.g., Curtin & Wilkes, 2007, swimming with dolphins; Burns et al., 2018, eating whale meat; Lück & Porter, 2018, feeding sea birds; Ziegler et al., 2018, feeding whale sharks).

Despite the negative examples of animal abuse and exploitation described previously, ecotourism should be based on positive ideals. Conservation ideology is often at the heart of ecotourism, and this is particularly relevant for many forms of animal-based ecotourism. Ecotourism experiences may foster in humans a greater appreciation of animals. Encountering live animals through ecotourism experiences can increase awareness of species and their
conservation status. In turn, this may promote pro-environmental attitudes (Powell & Ham, 2008) and create incentives to help conserve habitat and protect animals. This conservation argument is a key element in the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums’ strategy for the future (Barongi, Fisken, Parker, & Gusset, 2015). However, even if the ecotourism ventures using animals originate from good intentions, they can still have negative consequences for individual animals. As discussed in the examples, they can be counterproductive to the goals of ecotourism, threaten the survival of non-captive species, and cause animals mental and physical harm.

A two-way relationship

In the two-way, although unevenly power-based, relationship between humans and animals in ecotourism it is important to also consider possible benefit and harm to humans. Benefits, primarily in terms of human satisfaction and wellbeing, used as justification for the use and treatment of animals in ecotourism, were discussed previously. However, harm can also come to humans in the context of animal-based ecotourism.

Humans have been killed by animals in the context of ecotourism, in both captive and non-captive settings. For example, a child was killed by a dingo on Fraser Island in a non-captive non-targeted encounter in 2001 (Burns & Howard, 2003). A trainer was killed by an orca at SeaWorld in Orlando in 2010 and a child killed by painted dogs in the Pittsburgh Zoo in 2012 (Coyne, 2019); both in a captive, targeted encounters. Regardless of the setting, such events are rare, far rarer than the animal dying as a consequence of the encounter.

Animals can transfer diseases to humans through direct encounters, such as being bitten by a diseased monkey or eating game meat. Reverse zoonoses (zooanthroponoses) also occur and can threaten the health of animals, with pathogen transmission from humans to great apes (Dunay et al., 2018) and mountain gorillas (Hanes, Kalema-Zikusoka, Svensson, & Hill, 2018) becoming a concern for their conservation. Thus, we can have a situation where ecotourists may wish to assist conservation of animals such as mountain gorillas and pay for tours to see them believing this will assist them when in fact the tourists’ presence may be a threat to the animal.

Current directions in animal-based ecotourism

Is it possible to achieve the dual benefits of entertaining humans and protecting animals under the label of ecotourism? Given the ideals of ecotourism, this should be possible. Currently, however, it would seem that in much animal-based ecotourism “The objective is tourist enjoyment, but the effect is animal suffering” (Winter, 2020, p. 16). Suffering is a long way from protection, and increased entertainment for humans often comes at the expense of conservation and welfare for the animals (Burns & Benz-Schwarzburg, 2021). It would seem, however, that the “innumerable examples of abuse and cruel treatment” (Winter, 2020, p. 2) are becoming less acceptable. This is evident through widespread publicity (e.g., Daly, 2019) and pressure from social media influencing tourists to vote with their feet and avoid ecotourism venues with poor welfare reputations. In addition, tourism researchers are increasingly raising issues that demand we address the treatment of animals in all forms of tourism from an ethical standpoint (e.g., Burns, 2017; Burns & Benz-Schwarzburg, 2021; Fennell, 2011). Increased concern for the way we use animals in tourism can lead to improvements in their protection and welfare. At the very least, we should strive to bring entertainment and protection together in a more balanced way that better reflects the ideals of ecotourism.
Respect for animals as sentient beings having intrinsic value could be a start to achieving a more balanced relationship (Burns & Benz-Schwarzburg, 2021). Changes in our relationships with all animals, not just in the arena of ecotourism, towards recognition and consideration of intrinsic value, are clearly gaining momentum. Animals gained legal recognition as sentient beings in New Zealand in 2015 (New Zealand Parliament, 2015) and the Norwegian Animal Welfare Act states that animals have intrinsic value independent of their usable value for humans, despite this being difficult to legally enforce (Blattner, 2019).

Evidence is also mounting of shifts toward greater recognition of how to improve the welfare of animals in ecotourism. The evolution of tourism policies to include concern for the welfare of animals, even though economics and human welfare remain dominant (Sheppard & Fennell, 2019), is an example. We also see captive tourism operations such as zoos being rebranded as centres for education and conservation, and semi-captive settings as ‘sanctuaries’: though we need to be wary of praise here as rebranding without a change in practice is not a solution (Carr & Broom, 2018; Shani, 2012). An increasing number of operations, however, seem to be altering the ecotourism activities they offer to be more considerate of animal welfare. This is demonstrated by the 2019 opening of an elephant sanctuary in Thailand where tourists are not permitted to interact directly with the elephants (World Animal Protection, 2019). The Maesa Elephant Camp, also in Thailand, used the months it was forced to close due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 to remove activities where elephants were chained, ridden, and controlled by a hook (Maesa Elephant Camp, 2020). Save the Bilby Fund in Australia used the same period of time to close its Charleville breeding facility to tourists, thus enabling the nocturnal animals to not be disturbed during the day (Save the Bilby Fund, 2020).

Coupled with rebranding and changing activities, the captivity of at least some species of animals for the purposes of ecotourism is in decline. Marine mammals are perhaps the most obvious of these, with many countries discontinuing displays of them. A Senate Public Bill was passed in Canada in 2019, for example, banning the captivity of whales and dolphins (Parliament of Canada, 2019). In parallel, ecotourism experiences that involve decreased use of real animals are on the rise. Circus Roncalli recently experimented with holographic images of animals to replace real ones (Burns & Benz-Schwarzburg, 2021). Robotic dolphins are being developed to substitute for captive ones (ABC, 2020). Moving even further into virtual reality there is Planet Zoo (Planet Zoo, 2020), an online game which, although it could be argued continues the themes of anthropocentrism and of power and domination over animals for the benefit of humans, offers hedonism and escapism without harming any real animals as the gamer creates the experience they want. Does an argument need to be mounted for these type of experiences still being ecotourism, or are they in fact the ultimate in ecotourism? By not using real animals, the goal of entertainment for humans while still protecting the welfare of animals is achieved.

What is clear is that how we engage with animals in ecotourism contexts is changing. Changes are occurring in not just the type of activities undertaken by tourists and offered by venues, but also in the way we think about our relationships with animals: how we conceptualise these relationships and then act on notions of right and wrong. At their extreme, this leads to the complete removal of encounters with real animals.

**Conclusion**

Animals are used in across a wide continuum of types of ecotourism activities. At one end we have activities such as birdwatching which are likely to have minimal impact on the animals,
especially if conducted on a small scale. However, small-scale encounters could have large impacts on certain species, and expansion of research in this area is increasingly providing us with more information about those potential impacts. At the opposite end of the continuum are activities where captive animals are forced to work for human entertainment. These activities have a very large impact on individual animals, but perhaps less on the total population of a species. Feeding and confinement of animals allows humans to have close proximity to them, but often at considerable cost to the individual animal. That cost, labour, and welfare is increasingly being recognised and questioned. Throughout animal-based ecotourism activities we can see an anthropocentric dominance that denies the moral consideration of animals (Winter, 2020, p. 17), but this seems to be changing.

Global regulation is needed for some ventures such as wildlife attractions and zoos (Moorhouse et al., 2017), but to maximise effectiveness the local context requires consideration. The lack of regulation and policy regarding the use of animals in ecotourism urgently needs addressing. Global legislation is not necessarily the best answer because the local context, the needs of particular species, and the opportunity for compliance all need to be taken into account. Current legislation and guidelines require expansion, development, and implementation to adequately protect both animals and people engaged in ecotourism. Winter (2020, p. 19) describes an “anthropocentric wall of defence built upon economic imperatives” that drives the use of animals in tourism and provides a barrier to improving conditions for them. The argument that educating tourists can lead to changes in their attitudes, and in turn lead to positive outcomes for animals, has long been discussed. Malchrowicz-Mośko, Munsters, and Korzeniewska-Nowakowska (2020, p. 21), for example, assert that “Sustainable solutions for controversial animal tourism have to be found by raising tourists’ awareness by means of information and education”. While there appears to be merit in pursuing this approach, the evidence presented above that some tourists know and care, but choose to ignore, suggests that this alone is not enough. Peer pressure through social media is emerging as one way the barrier is breaking down and clearly has potential for greater use.

Above all else, we should not assume that because animals are involved in a tourism activity it fits definitions of ecotourism and confirms to an ideal type of tourism that offers benefits for all its stakeholders. Across the spectrum of ecotourism, some activities are definitely worse than others in terms of animal welfare and we should be mindful of, and questioning of, all.

The history of animal use in ecotourism is long and entails animals working for the pleasure of humans. Treatment of animal workers has not always been kind and has certainly never been equitable. Consideration of animal welfare and tourism responsibility, however, is changing. The outlook for the future, based on current trends of recognition of animal welfare and decreasing use of—particularly captive—animals, promises to be very different.

References
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