

Chapter 4

Ecotourism and the Commodification of Wildlife: Animal Welfare and the Ethics of Zoos

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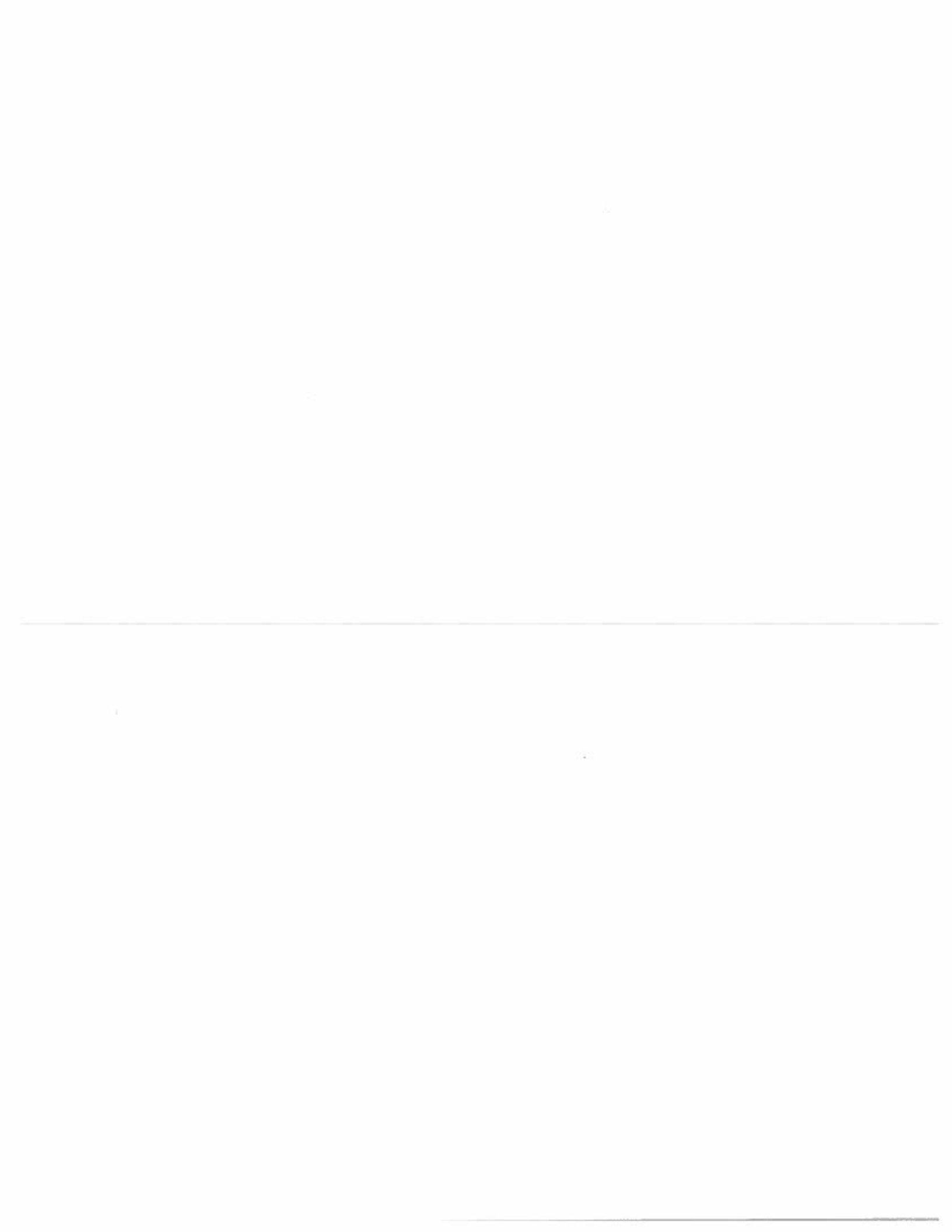
Introduction

Current directions in ecotourism reflect an increasing tendency towards the commodification of nature. The quest for profit from nature-based activities, particularly tourism, has spawned an industry lacking an ethic of care for nature and, specifically, the animals used in this new ecotourism regime. Economic rationalist approaches often place economic incentive before the intrinsic and intangible values of nature. This often results in the inappropriate development or use of natural resources and changes the capacity of the resource to meet the expectations of users. Trends in the provision of ecotourism experiences, such as larger numbers of people using nature and more commercially orientated groups, coupled with competition for higher economic returns, see a need for the consideration of the rights of animals and the practices that have evolved as a result of this new ecotourism regime.

The practice of displaying animals in captivity is often defended as a necessary form of education for the general public, and one avenue towards increasing public awareness of the need for conservation. This argument has been supported by the global ecotourism industry to justify zoos and aquariums as an educational and conservation tool, as well as the increasing visitation of tourists to protected areas to view animals in their natural habitats. However, the validity of this role is questionable given the loss of freedom for these animals and the excessive exploitation of protected areas for tourism. This chapter provides an examination of the ethical issues surrounding the capture and use of animals for tourism, entertainment and education with a focus on the subsequent treatment of these animals.

Ecotourism: Sustainability, Ethics and the Role of Animals

In order to critique the claim that captive animal viewing in zoos and aquariums serves educational and conservation purposes, a brief



overview of sustainability and ecotourism must first be reviewed in order to understand the context in which zoos and aquariums are defended. Sustainability (and ecotourism as a form of sustainable tourism) is a vague, contested concept, easily manipulated to support and enhance the power of industry interests and those who stand to gain (Mowforth & Munt, 2008). Neoliberal economic policy has served to influence ecotourism and related protected area policies in ways that afford little room for intangible values, either natural or cultural (Staiff *et al.*, 2002). Moreover, with ecotourism promoting protected areas to the marketplace, there is now an expectation that they should be required to yield financial return. Central to this regime are the animals that these areas are often established to protect (Figgis, 2000).

The inevitable outcome of ecotourism in most protected areas is the need to provide animals for observation and interpretation (Wearing & Neil, 1999). A new type of tourist has emerged that requires a higher degree of interaction with nature: 'people who require environmentally compatible recreational opportunities... where nature rather than humanity predominates' (Kerr, 1991: 248). These ecotourists are interested in visiting wilderness, national parks and tropical forests, and in viewing birds, mammals, trees and wildflowers. One of the most notable differences that has emerged is in expenditure, where veteran ecotourists are estimated to be willing to spend more than general tourists for the experience. These ecotourists 'on average, would spend 8.5% more for services and products provided by environmentally responsible suppliers' (Wight, 1994: 41). Wearing and Neil (1999) suggest that the ecotourist is more concerned with development and fulfilment, which includes self-education. This circumstance has created the opportunity for an increase in the provision of education and interpretation in nature and wildlife-based activities for a customer that is likely to pay a rate higher than that for traditional tourism experiences.

Through the commodification of wildlife, considerations of the impact of tourists on the environment, including the welfare of wildlife, have been displaced in lieu of potential profits. Genuine concern exists regarding the health and survival of wildlife in high volume tourist areas (Anathaswamy, 2004). The short-term impacts of ecotourism report negative behaviour changes in wildlife, including the disruption of breeding patterns, dependency on humans for food, high infant mortality rates and death (Anathaswamy, 2004; Cunningham-Smith *et al.*, 2006; Hughes & Carlsen, 2008b; Mau, 2008). The positive impacts of ecotourism are disputed among academics. They include 'awareness of, and empathy for wildlife and the natural areas in which they live' (Hughes & Carlsen, 2008b: 148), economic benefits for developing nations, the protection of natural environments and feeding wildlife in urban environments, which may aid the survival of local animal

populations forced from their habitat due to encroaching development (Anathaswamy, 2004; Hughes & Carlsen, 2008b). Lemelin (2006) conversely maintains that there is no evidence supporting claims of respect and empathy for wildlife, nor educational benefits.

A motivating factor of the ecotourist is to seek natural habitats and explore unchartered territory. Their pursuit to see increasingly rare and exotic wildlife may be more damaging to the natural environment than mass tourism, due to increased travel distances and urban impacts on remote areas (Lemelin, 2006; Wall, 1997). It has been suggested that offering alternatives and satisfying the wants of the ecotourist could be achieved through forms of captive animal viewing (Tremblay, 2008).

Captive animals raise questions of ethics and rights. The rights of individual animals have been contested and debated for centuries. Commonly viewed as 'things' to be used for food, clothing, transport, entertainment, experiments and sport (DeGrazia, 2002; Mullin, 1999; Newkirk, 1999; Singer, 1977), dominated and exploited by humans and considered less than the human race, their needs and wants are reduced to minimal significance (Singer, 1977). Humans discriminate against animals in the same way they would discriminate against a person because of their gender, cultural heritage or sexual orientation (DeGrazia, 2002; Mullin, 1999; Newkirk, 1999; Singer, 1977). Singer (1977: 12) referred to this as 'speciesist', and argued that there is no reason to 'refuse to extend the basic principle of equality of consideration to members of other species'.

Different views towards human beings relationship with nature and animals can be encapsulated in different environmental ethics perspectives, including conservation ethics, the ethics of the environment and anthropocentric ethics. Conservation ethics maintains that the environment and its resources should be conserved and maintained for future generations. Conserving the environment is a by-product of ensuring that humankind will thrive and have the same access to natural resources in the future. The ethics of the environment is a view whereby the environment is given the same respect and moral considerations afforded to humans. Finally, anthropocentric ethics is the view that acknowledges humans as the only beings worthy of moral considerations (Holden, 2003). The latter view dominates the tourism industry, where the individual rights and needs of animals are rarely considered through the consumption and production process of ecotourism.

Animals as Commodities: What has Ecotourism done to Influence the Zoo and Marine Park?

The practice of collecting and exhibiting wild animals has its origins in Ancient Egypt. Private collections, or menageries, were reserved for the

rich and powerful. They were symbols of wealth and power, and entertainment for their owners (Bulbeck, 2005; DeGrazia, 2002; Newkirk, 1999). Exotic animals, in particular from the plains of Africa, were symbols of the power, wealth and expansion of the British Empire. They were souvenirs of travels abroad in a time when only the wealthy had the means to travel, and reaffirmed status and prestige (Mullin, 1999).

The zoo of the 20th century was argued to have emerged as a medium through which the population could be educated in morals and ideals. Zoos claimed that their existence was to protect species through conservation efforts, education and research, however, zoos have been the subjects of much criticism and many believe that the modern zoo stood for economic benefits and the 'endorsement of modern colonial power' (Bulbeck, 2005: 17). Zoos today closely align their organisations with conservation and education, and reinforce and justify their existence through their contributions. Conservation and education places great emphasis on species preservation in both wild and captive populations, and in the process disregards individual animal welfare and the rights of individual animals (Millar & Houston, 2008a, 2008b).

In this era of technology, education as a primary argument for justifying captive animals is becoming obsolete. Museums could provide equal, if not greater educational opportunities, while providing visitors with close animal encounters (Moss, 1961). Holograms, documentaries and films dedicated to wildlife have critics arguing that the zoo as a primary educational platform is unfounded and conveys the wrong message about the relationship between humans and animals, where animals are considered inferior and under the control of humans (Jamieson, 1985; Moss, 1961; Mullin, 1999).

The quality of life in captivity differs across the estimated 10,000 zoos worldwide (DeGrazia, 2002; Newkirk, 1999), from featureless cages in Romania (Born Free Foundation, 2008) to exhibits that closely resemble the natural habitat in the USA (Unknown, 2008c). Animals in zoos are the feature attraction, and therefore valuable assets. It is common for organisations to view their animals as commodities; stock to be traded, loaned, sold, or even killed and disposed of, depending on changing market trends and consumer tastes (Newkirk, 1999).

Animals are 'managed' and live in enclosures designed for easy cleaning, explaining the presence of concrete in 'natural' environments. Animals, typically wary of humans, are lured to areas for public viewing by techniques such as heated sand (Bulbeck, 2005; Cain & Meritt, 1998). A change to animal enclosures gives the perception of improvement – replacing iron bars with glass forgoes animals free-flowing air. Animals such as monkeys lose the mental stimulation and activity that swinging on bars could have provided to alleviate boredom (Bulbeck, 2005; Cain & Meritt, 1998). Other cosmetic changes include improvements to an

animal's enclosure that they are unable to use or enjoy. The greenery surrounding the gorillas exhibit at Taronga Zoo in Sydney, Australia, is separated from the gorillas by an electric fence in order to protect it. 'Backstage' images differ greatly from the enclosures portrayed to the public, and many animals retreat to empty cages devoid of stimuli (Bulbeck, 2005).

The level of stimuli and activity that the foremost enclosure could offer is not enough for many of the animals, and does not compare to a life in the wild. Crowcroft (1978) noted the limits of the zoo enclosure, and acknowledged that gorillas, in particular, experience constant boredom, bound by the limits any enclosure could offer. He justified keeping an animal that could never be truly happy by stating that it was better to have a bored gorilla, than to have no gorillas (Crowcroft, 1978).

The size, intelligence and activity level of particular animals presents a valid rationale that certain animals are not suited to captivity. The tiger lives a solitary life and roams over his/her large territory searching for food and may cover anywhere from 16 to 32 km every day. No zoo enclosure could replicate this (Moss, 1961). Similarly, the polar bear is also an animal that walks large distances every day in search of food and water, distinctly different to their life in captivity. Polar bears have developed behavioural problems and die younger than their wild counterparts (Engelbrecht & Smith, 2004; Smith, 2003). Gus, the polar bear from Central Park Zoo in New York, made headlines when his depression forced staff to administer Prozac – the first zoo animal in history to receive antidepressants (Newkirk, 1999). In 2003, zoologists at Oxford University concluded that large, roaming, nomadic predators, such as tigers and polar bears, exhibit high stress and neurotic symptoms when kept in captivity, and it is estimated that 'captive polar bears spend 25% of their day pacing' (Clubb & Mason, 2003). Elephants are considered to be extremely intelligent beings, and researchers have recently discovered that they can recognise themselves in mirrors, a level of self-awareness previously thought to be possessed only by humans, apes and dolphins (Szabo, 2006). Elephants have been observed helping sick family members, are keen problem solvers – building tools to reach higher branches – and researchers have witnessed elephants in Africa displaying signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Researchers believe the PTSD stems from a long and violent history of family breakdowns through culling, poaching and a loss of habitat. PTSD-related behaviours include abnormal startle response, depression, unpredictable asocial behaviour and hyper aggression (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2005). These findings highlight the importance of family and herd stability, and reflect negatively on the capture of elephants for zoos, where parents and older relatives may have been killed in order to capture young animals (Newkirk, 1999), and on current zoo conditions where some elephants live alone, or in small groups of two or three animals.

Wild elephants are constantly moving, active and may walk tens of miles each day (Help Elephants, 2008). Without constant movement and exercise, elephants face health problems ranging from foot and joint disease, to 'arthritis, digestive disorders and neurotic behaviors resulting from severe confinement' (Help Elephants, 2008). The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) minimum outdoor space requirement for a single adult is 1800 sq. ft, and an extra 900 sq. ft must be added for each additional animal; 1800 sq. ft is the equivalent of six parking spaces (AZA, 2003).

Distressed zoo visitors have witnessed animals exhibiting behaviours such as head bobbing and restless pacing (Bulbeck, 2005). These behaviours, along with walking in circles, rocking back and forth, self-mutilation and sucking the bars of their cages are referred to as 'psychosis' or 'zoochosis' (Newkirk, 1999). This last behaviour has also been witnessed in pigs on factory farms confined to cages so small that they are unable to turn around (Newkirk, 1999). The Born Free Foundation is an advocate for wildlife, and has investigated over 100 zoos across North America, Europe and the UK. Their findings concluded that zoo animals exhibit these signs of abnormal behaviours due to a lack of stimulation and boredom. These behaviours, according to Phil Murphy, Head of Clinical Psychology for Mental Handicap in Norfolk England, 'can still be found in institutions caring for our most severely mentally disturbed patients' (Newkirk, 1999: 66). Investigations conducted by PETA across the USA found several species of bears exhibiting stereotypical behaviour. Frustrated animals were observed pacing, walking in tight circles and swaying or rolling their heads (PETA, 2009).

Neglect, cruelty and death that occur behind the scenes are rarely reported. Recent reports of abuse have plagued Melbourne Zoo, where accusations of animal abuse and neglect were led by the RSPCA, zoo experts and zoo staff. One allegation involves Dokkoon, a 13-year-old elephant allegedly stabbed 'more than a dozen times with a sharp metal spike.... The elephants seemed obviously distressed, standing back to back, vocalising and defecating' (Millar & Houston, 2008a). The incident was witnessed and reported by a staff member, who described the actions of the trainer in question as 'inappropriate and excessive'. The response from the Acting Zoo Chief Executive, Matt Vincent, was that actions taken by the trainer were warranted given the 'potential risk to staff'. The elephants are also kept under control by electric cattle prods (Millar & Houston, 2008a).

An Alternative to Zoos? Wildlife Release Programmes

The Species Survival Plan (SSP) Programme is a cooperative plan between North American zoos and aquaria to 'help ensure the survival

of selected wildlife species' (SSP, 2008). The SSP for each particular species includes breeding management 'in order to maintain a healthy and self-sustaining population that is both genetically diverse and demographically stable' (SSP, 2008). SSPs also facilitate and 'participate in a variety of other cooperative conservation activities, such as research, public education, reintroduction and field projects' (SSP, 2008). AZA (2008) do not believe that the reintroduction of species to natural ecosystems is the solution to ensuring the survival of endangered species. AZA is a group that represents the largest and wealthiest zoos and aquaria, including marine parks, in North America. The reluctance on their part to commit to release programmes questions their motivations and priorities.

Captive African lions are being successfully rehabilitated in Antelope Park, Zimbabwe. The aim of the African Lion Environmental Research Trust (ALERT, 2009) is to successfully release captive-born lions into the wild through a four-stage process. There are currently 71 lions in the programme, and 24 waiting for release into Stage 2 where:

the lions are given the opportunity to develop a natural pride social system in a minimum 500 acre enclosure. They have plenty of game to hunt, and their progress is monitored closely, however all human contact is removed. Lions remain in stage two until such time that the pride is stable and self-sustaining. (ALERT, 2009)

ALERT may also introduce rehabilitation programmes for other African predators, including the cheetah, leopard, African wild dog, jackal, hyena, serval and caracal (ALERT, 2009). This programme, which has experienced significant success, could be developed for species outside Africa. Volunteer programmes, where participants volunteer their time and pay a fee (US\$3590 for 1 month), help to fund the rehabilitation programme and buy food for the lions (African Impact, 2008). This rehabilitation programme is not a government, zoo, SSP or conservation initiative. It was founded in 2005 by Andrew Conolly, who purchased Antelope Park in 1987. Included with the purchase of the park were six captive lions and cubs. The idea and plan to rehabilitate lions developed from observing the cubs' natural instincts and behaviours while exercising them on walks. Conolly believed that if the cubs natural instincts could be harnessed, release would be possible (ALERT, 2009).

Under the 'Guidelines for Consideration' on the AZA webpage concerning the reintroduction of captive animals, the first mentioned is 'sufficient funding' (AZA, 2008). The business model established by ALERT could be the foundation from which other rehabilitation programmes could be established, where volunteer participation – both locals and tourists – is subject to a fee, which is invested directly into the programme. This method of funding could prove to be extremely

successful given the unique experience offered, and the rise in popularity of volunteer tourism.

Marine Parks and Aquaria: Justification for Captive Viewing

Marine parks and aquaria are criticised for keeping captive animals, particularly cetaceans such as dolphins and orcas. Researchers question the capabilities to cater to the needs of such large and complex animals (Engelbrecht & Smith, 2004; Hoyt, 1992; Williams, 2001). Academics in favour of captive animal viewing, stress the positive impacts, such as the alleviation of stress and natural degradation to the environment and wildlife (Ryan & Seward, 2004; Tremblay, 2008).

Ryan and Seward (2004) classify captive animal viewing as ecotourism. However, classifying captive animal viewing as ecotourism negates the contribution of ecotourism to genuine sustainable tourism through the mistreatment of these captive animals. Living conditions vary among marine parks, and while regulations and standards exist, the stringency of regulation depends on the country or state (Carwardine, 2001; Hoyt, 1992; Smith, 2003; Williams, 2001). Countries have prescribed minimum pool sizes and critics argue that standards were set to coincide with the size of existing pools in marine parks (Carwardine, 2001; Hoyt, 1992; Smith, 2003; Williams, 2001).

Captivity affects every aspect of an orca's life. Tight family units are separated; tank sizes are inadequate and filled with chlorinated water; animals are required to perform shows daily; and animals experience loss of freedom, high infant mortality rates and the premature death of adults. Autopsies performed have found a multitude of diseases, and stress has been labelled a possible contributing factor in 38 of 74 deaths (Carwardine, 2001; Engelbrecht & Smith, 2004; Hoyt, 1992; Williams, 2001).

Regulations now govern the capture of orcas in most waters, and increasing public disapproval of wild captures has forced marine parks and aquaria to focus on captive breeding programmes to preserve their captive numbers (Carwardine, 2001; Hoyt, 1992; Smith, 2003; Williams, 2001). Captive breeding programmes are criticised as they perpetuate and sustain captive populations. Organisations exhibiting orcas maintain that captive viewing contributes to education and conservation (Carwardine, 2001; Hoyt, 1992; Smith, 2003; Williams, 2001), however, their motives are considered economically driven, as Sea World parks receive around US\$400-500 million per year from visitor revenue with as much as 70% of their income derived directly from visitors interested in orcas (Williams, 2001).

Research conducted in aquaria in the UK questioned the strategy of education through signage, and found that 83% of visitors did not read the signs at live exhibits apart from the animal's name, and 95% of visitors failed to read the entire sign. The report concluded that visitor motivations influenced the level of interest at exhibits. Less than 45% of the aquaria offered educational talks or special events, less than 45% offered educational packs and 23% did not have a website. The study found evidence of incorrect signage at exhibits, and staff citing incorrect information. The study concluded with recommendations that the public could be better educated through documentaries (Casamitjana, 2004). Marine parks are considered to contribute the least to education. Critics question the educational value of watching whales and dolphins in choreographed acrobatic performances (Engelbrecht & Smith, 2004).

The threat of extinction through hunting, poaching and loss of habitat has pushed conservation to the forefront of environmental issues (DeGrazia, 2002). Conservation is a legal requirement of all aquaria in the UK; however, aquaria play a role in promoting the keeping of exotic fish as pets, and indirectly contribute to the destruction of coral reefs and over fishing. Aquaria in Europe send mixed signals regarding conservation and the importance of protecting wildlife, as visitors can purchase souvenirs of corals, shells, dried starfish and seahorses in gift shops. Conservation claims by aquaria are misleading, as only 1.8% of individuals displayed in UK aquaria are threatened (Casamitjana, 2004). The Humbolt penguin is the only animal part of the European Endangered Species Programme, and none have been released (Carrell, 2004).

Species survival is impeded by live captures. Sandbar sharks mature slowly – a 17-year-old immature female has been recorded – and the wild population is rapidly declining (Casamitjana, 2004). Whale sharks are listed as an endangered species, however, aquariums in Japan and the USA continue to exhibit and replace stock with live captures (Cohen, 2008; Goodman, 2007). Okinawa Churanmi Aquarium in Japan displayed a total of 16 whale sharks over a period of 18 years. Survival in captivity ranged from 3 days to 6 years, compared with life projections of up to 100 years for whale sharks in the wild. Of the 16 whale sharks, 13 died in captivity and 7 were injured during transit and survived less than 2 months (Casamitjana, 2004; Goodman, 2007). Georgia Aquarium in the USA lost two male whale sharks within months. Marine biologists suggest that the number of captive deaths indicate that the species is not suited to captive life (Goodman, 2007).

Little evidence supports the contribution of marine parks to the survival of whales, dolphins and seals. The contribution to *in situ* projects is miniscule, with Sea World funding US\$4 million on conservation and stranding efforts (Kestin, 2004). The industry has heavily lobbied the International Whaling Commission to preclude whales and dolphins

from their 'jurisdiction'. The inclusion of whales and dolphins would give them international protection under the International Whaling Commission, preventing future live captures (PETA, 2006).

Whale Watching

The overnight growth of the whale watching industry has 'industrialised the ocean' (Corkeron, 2004: 848). Short-term impacts, such as increased boat noise and traffic, are affecting whales, while the long-term consequences remain unknown (Corkeron, 2004; Jelinski *et al.*, 2002; Milius, 2004). Whale watching has been classified as a form of non-consumptive ecotourism, however, whales have been witnessed changing their behaviours in the presence of tourist boats (Corkeron, 2004; Jelinski *et al.*, 2002).

The international whale watching industry is valued at over US\$1 billion (Hoyt, 2001), and attracts over nine million people annually. Orca populations, especially off British Columbia and Washington State, are targets of tourist boats (Jelinski *et al.*, 2002), and as potential economic profit entices the involvement of pro-whaling countries, such as Japan, Norway, Iceland and Russia (Gillespie, 2003), whale watching is now being viewed by some as 'an acceptable form of benign exploitation' (Gillespie, 2003: 408).

Short-term impacts involve continuous increasing levels of boat noise and boat traffic (Corkeron, 2004; Jelinski *et al.*, 2002; Milius, 2004; Morton & Symonds, 2002). Milius (2004) claims that increased boat noise has resulted in killer whales calling up to 15% longer to communicate with fellow pod members, and scientists are unable to determine the long-term consequences. One possible theory is that the longer calls are equivalent to humans adjusting their voices to be heard (Milius, 2004). Morton and Symonds (2002) report that the whales may experience loss of their 'directional hearing capabilities' (Morton & Symonds, 2002: 73), and Corkeron (2004) indicates research demonstrating that noise is the contributing factor of behavioural changes evident in killer whales. Ebersole (2003) reports on a pod of killer whales in Prince William Sound, whose population has declined rapidly over the past 10 years, attributed to noise pollution from increased boat traffic, which is thought to have disturbed their hunting patterns.

The long-term consequences may be as serious as lower activity and reproduction levels, affecting pod survival (Jelinski *et al.*, 2002). Commercial vessels follow and track the whales, which in some cases lead to whales altering their movements (Jelinski *et al.*, 2002). Off Washington State, the number of vessels trailing only three pods of whales has risen from none to 70, in just over 20 years, and research indicates that each pod may be trailed by an average of 22 vessels on any

given day. Pods in Canada still recovering from live captures, have now been listed by the government as 'threatened' and of 'special concern' (Morton & Symonds, 2002: 71).

Conclusion

Ecotourism necessarily requires the commodification of wildlife and its habitat – it creates a market value from the observation of animals. It sits between the absolutes of conservation and commercial sale, where the direct human 'gaze' of wildlife is central to the experience with all the possibilities for disruption that such viewing brings (Ryan & Saward, 2004). But, given its alignment to alternative tourism (Wearing & Neil, 1998), it should also provide a mechanism to improve the plight of animals that are central to its function. This chapter would suggest that alternative tourism has a long way to go before it is able to claim any form of value adding to the existence of animals. Also, any claim to have included an ethic that could be aligned to Singer's (1977) appears to be a long way off. Of particular importance is the notion of improving the welfare of animals through their recognition via the education of the tourist through interaction with them – with the ecotourist and animals as active participants in the construction and meaning making of the experiences there is the possibility of the movement of the animal to a more central role in the overall agenda of ecotourism, including some form of ethics based around animals. This may allow movement away from their marginalisation and sole linkage to economic imperatives. We would suggest that with ecotourism, the global commodification of animals is almost complete. As the economic benefits of ecotourism have increased and the recognition of animals as central to this, given anthropocentric Judeo-Christian traditions, nature is inescapably commodified, especially since 'every state of nature must be socially reproduced' (Eder, 1996: 24). Further, with the advent of consumerism 'commodifying almost all aspects of social life' (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998: 26), the commodification of nature is in itself highly contested and so are the rights of animals within this contest.

It is contended here that for ecotourism to philosophically align itself to environmental ethics and to present itself as an alternative form of tourism (Wearing & Neil, 1998), it must incorporate some intention to include in its agenda the rights of animals (included in this is the welfare of animals). Research suggests that the welfare of animals has become an issue due to the need to sustain them for commercial exploitation within the ecotourism experience, but the notion of rights for animals in ecotourism appears to be a distant hope. We would contend that for a movement towards the rights of animals within the ecotourism experience, decommodification principles and practices must be introduced

into the global ecotourism industry. If ecotourism cannot offer an alternative path (Wearing & Neil, 1998) towards the rights of animals it loses the right to distinguish itself from the mainstream ideas of tourism and becomes just another market niche in that industry. We are concerned with outlining the complexity of the role of animals in ecotourism, suggesting that in neoliberal regimes, such as Australia, the USA, Canada and England, there is a need to ensure a conscious agenda of decommodifying the role of animals in the ecotourism experience.

It is clear that we live in a world of limited natural and environmental resources and that human kind must restrain the exploitation of the resources that have become so characteristic of the collective needs of developed countries. There is a conflict between the individual needs of people to protect the environment and the market's needs for production of profit. As such, organisations operating under the banner of ecotourism may need to accept and ensure a closer focus on the rights of animals in order to validly differentiate themselves from a tourism industry otherwise dominated by the exploitative attitudes of free market principles.

