

The Nature of Celebrity and the Celebrity of Nature:  
Digital Adaptation and Wildlife Survival in the Age of the Anthropocene

By

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## **INTRODUCTION – Adaptation in the Time of Distraction**

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*If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children, I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantments of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength.<sup>1</sup>*

-- Rachel Carson, *A Sense of Wonder* (1956)

### **A Not Ready For Prime-Time Player?**

PRESENTER: “And the Academy Award for Best Actor goes to . . .” (camera cuts between several nervously smiling nominees as a roll on the kettle drum resounds across the auditorium) “. . . Rin Tin Tin!” (cue the swelling fanfare and music).

This scene never happened. But it almost could have. According to Susan Orlean, after votes were tallied for the first Academy Award competition in 1929, the prize for best acting in motion pictures was supposed to go not to a well-known human star like John Gilbert or Charlie Chaplin or even Emil Jennings (the ultimate winner for the films *The Last Command* and *The Way of All Flesh*) but to a German Shepherd dog. The Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, desperate to establish a serious veneer for its brand new award ceremony, decided to change the rules so only human actors could collect a competitive prize.<sup>2</sup>

Yet the choice of Rin Tin Tin was not some fluke or playful frivolity on the part of Academy voters. By the late 1920s, Rin Tin Tin was the biggest star in Hollywood films. Audiences worldwide adored the adventures of the superstar dog, with his films being especially popular in Germany as well as the United States. His name appeared above the title in his pictures (an honor none of his human co-stars shared), he was paid eight times as much as his

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<sup>1</sup> Rachel Carson, *The Sense of Wonder* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), Reprint Edition, 54.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Orlean, *Rin Tin Tin: The Life and Legend* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 88.

human co-stars, and he received thousands of fan letters every week. So popular were his films they managed to save the young Warner Brothers studio from bankruptcy following the release of his first starring picture, *Where the North Begins*, in 1923. He had major endorsement deals with Ken-L-Ration, Ken-L-Biskit, and Pup-E-Crumbles, which, along with his film contracts, earned him more than \$5 million over eight years (the equivalent of ~\$67 million today). Gossip magazines even composed “interviews” with his “wife,” Nanette, another German Shepherd who like so many show business spouses was struggling to “combine motherhood with a career.”<sup>3</sup>

By 1932, however, Rin Tin Tin had died, having completely washed up in films after winning the Oscar vote, ending his life reduced to performing on the vaudeville circuit. Starring roles in films had become fewer and fewer until eventually Warner Brothers released him from his contract in 1929, ironically the same year he would have won the Academy Award. And his sudden fall from grace had been precipitated by a specific event: the advent of talking pictures.

In talking pictures, Rin Tin Tin’s performances no longer were on equal footing with those of his human co-stars. In silent films, audiences’ imaginations had to intuit the thoughts, motivations, and words of every character – human or animal – with help from the occasional title card (which themselves could easily be interchanged in different languages, making silent films relatively easy to distribute worldwide). But in talking pictures, people had the advantage of direct access to audiences through speech, leaving Rin Tin Tin diminished in stature compared to his human co-stars and seemingly more like any other non-cinematic dog. For both Rin Tin Tin and other animal screen stars of the era, main roles quickly faded away, with animals largely disappearing as characters (aside from the occasional comic sidekick) in every cinematic genre but animation, the one place they could easily have a voice on par with human characters.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 81, 82, 88, 93.



Rin Tin Tin's story is an especially potent illustration of two forces that have affected non-human animals' place in modern American society. The first is the challenge for animals (or more accurately for those people who wish to promote them) to adapt to the conventions of form that vary with each new communication medium. Whether silent films or "talkies," magazine features or Facebook status updates, each form of communication has its own norms and narrative and graphic constraints that make stories and characters either easier or more difficult to incorporate – a challenge of what one might call *digital adaptation*. Thus, while it is true that, to paraphrase anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, animals have always been useful for people to think with, the content of that thinking has shifted with the form of the medium with which we think and communicate.<sup>4</sup>

This need to adapt to different forms of media has become critical because of the second issue raised by Rin Tin Tin's story: a relatively recent and fundamental shift in the primary role that animals play in modern society to that of being virtual characters. Animals have always been a significant part of every human society, as seen as early as the Chauvet cave paintings of animals dating back more than 30,000 years ago. Physically, animals have served as food, transport, clothing, predators, pets, and pests.<sup>5</sup> Metaphorically, they have served as religious

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<sup>4</sup> Claude Levi-Strauss, *Totemism*, trans. Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 89. For further discussion of the ways in which the forms of communication affect the content and affect our ways of thinking about content, see Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> For a more complete literature review of human-animal relationships, see: Matt Cartmill, *A View to a Death in the Morning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Paul Shepard, *The Others: How Animals Made Us Human* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1995); Jonathan Burt, *Animals in film* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002); Erica Fudge, *Animal* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002); M.V. Anderson and A. J. Henderson, "Pernicious portrayals: the impact of children's attachment to animals of fiction on animals of fact," *Society & Animals* 13(4) (2005): 297-314; Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); and Josh Levin, "Smokey Bear Nation," *Slate*, March 20, 2007. Accessed December 1, 2008. <http://www.slate.com/id/2161522>.

symbols, totems, and allegories for humanity. In short, as Elizabeth Hirschman puts it, throughout history animals have helped people create “community, tradition, and shared meaning.”<sup>6</sup> But, as Akira Lippit has noted, increasingly physical animals have disappeared from our daily life, even (and perhaps not coincidentally) as they have appeared more frequently in virtual form.<sup>7</sup> And in our modern era of mass media, increasingly both individual animals like Rin Tin Tin and entire species of animals serve in this virtual world primarily as *characters*, both spectacular and intimate. They have become “personalities” commodified into distinctive traits and stories that serve the insatiable demand of modern mass media for new narratives – to fill what Aldous Huxley termed “man’s almost infinite appetite for distractions.”<sup>8</sup> Whether in newspapers, radio, film, television, or now the Internet, animals increasingly appear as sources of amusement and spectacle. And animals have also become a *tabula rasa* upon which people can impose their fantasies and through which they can work out their social issues and anxieties.

In short, we have made animals into the ideal of modern *celebrity*. Whether as heroes in action-adventure films like Rin Tin Tin’s, visions of shock and terror like sharks in *When Animals Attack* television specials, or as “memes” in Internet video clips of cats playing piano, certain animals have become media stars. And this stardom profoundly alters their long-term fates – focusing attention upon certain individuals and species, but leaving many other non-celebrity animals increasingly out in the cold.

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<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Hirschman, “Consumers and Their Animal Companions,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 20(4) (1994): 630. See also Stephen Kellert, “Attitudes, knowledge and behaviour toward wildlife among the industrial super-powers,” in *Animals and human society: Changing perspectives*, eds. Aubrey Manning and James Serpell (London: Routledge, 1994), 166-87; Gordon M. Burghardt and Harold A. Herzog, Jr., “Commentary: Beyond Conspecifics: Is Brer Rabbit Our Brother?,” *BioScience* 30(11) (1980): 163-168.

<sup>7</sup> Akira Lippit, *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); see also Burt, *Animals in film*.

<sup>8</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 44.

Moreover, as Rin Tin Tin's story demonstrates, this stardom can be fleeting. Animals that have been stars in previously dominant forms of media do not always adapt to make the transition to celebrity in newer media. This makes the future course of animal celebrities and our relationships to them especially uncertain, as we are currently in another period of transition to new dominant forms of media: a diverse online world of greater connectivity through self-selected platforms that people engage with for greater amounts of time than any medium ever before, but a world more fragmented than the broadcast media that dominated the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ironically, this fragmented media environment may actually reify the power of celebrity even more, since only celebrities (whether human or animal) may be able to transcend the overwhelming noise of stories, data, and distraction permeating our cultural discourse and mediaverse to garner more than just niche levels of public attention.

At the same time that we are entering this new, distracting, and interconnected digital mediaverse, we are also now living in what atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen and ecologist Eugene Stoermer have dubbed the *Anthropocene*, an era likened to previous geological epochs of significant climatological and physical disruptions to the earth's environment. The difference is that mass environmental change today results from human activity, rather than volcanic eruptions, meteor impacts, or cosmological shifts in planetary orbit or solar output.<sup>9</sup> Like it or not, we live increasingly in an environment of our own creation.

And more and more whom we share our Anthropocene environment with is becoming a question of choice – for many species, our relative interest in them determines whether we are even aware of and/or try to halt their pending extinction. Thus, the stakes of success in celebrity animal culture are not trivial. Animals that can adapt to serve the narrative and graphic spectacle

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<sup>9</sup> Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, "The Anthropocene," *Global change newsletter* 41 (2000): 17-18.

needs of multiple media forms to become stars are likely to remain a part of our virtual worlds, increasing (but not guaranteeing) the possibility they will also remain in our physical worlds. Animals whose qualities are not suited to new media forms are at risk of disappearing altogether from both our virtual and physical worlds. This means that in the Anthropocene, in addition to challenges to endangered species' survival that conservationists traditionally have identified – habitat loss, over-hunting, pollution, introduction of invasive species, and climate change – we must now also add *digital adaptation*.

Of course, this is not to suggest that non-human animals have such agency in their relationships with us that they actively seek to adapt to our stories.<sup>10</sup> Rather like any celebrity, non-human animals also have human “agents” telling stories on their behalf (not to mention fans demanding certain stories of the celebrity they have come to know and expect). And just like agents for human celebrities, motivations behind people's promotion of animals vary widely and quite often reflect the agents' interests and needs more than those of their animal clients.<sup>11</sup> Many animal storytellers act merely from a desire to sell either the physical animal or the idea of the animal as an economic product. But others tell animal stories out of concern for the long-term conservation and survival of particular species. And yet both operate in the same media ecosystem – subject to the same narrative constraints. Thus, especially for those of us in that latter group interested in wildlife conservation, I would argue we must learn to adapt our

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<sup>10</sup> Although anyone who has ever had a dog knows that they do adopt “cute” behaviors upon recognizing what we choose to reward and can sometimes manipulate us into rewarding them when they want attention. Thus our relationships with non-human animals are more dialectic than we sometimes assume: other animals quite often do have some level of agency in affecting our relationships with them.

<sup>11</sup> For a more comprehensive overview of the many motivations that drive people's interests in animals and the ways that those interests differ by class, race, location, educational background, gender, etc., see Stephen Kellert, *Kinship to Mastery* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1997).

production of animal celebrity to the changing narrative and graphic demands of new media if we wish to keep these animals as living presences in the Anthropocene.

Beyond the stakes for animals themselves, I would also argue that the survival of other animals through celebrity storytelling about them matters even more to humans. For us, the stories we tell about animals affect the stories we live with animals and alter our expectations for our encounters with other living, physical beings. Moreover, our relationships with animals impact our understanding of the world around us and of humans' place in it. Dominant Euroamerican narratives about nature have evolved considerably in the last three centuries – from the American landscape being a supposedly un-peopled “wilderness” that was a space of desolation and terrifying awe to be conquered to more romantic notions of “pastoral” nature as salutary and idyllic during the 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantic period to more modern notions of nature as an entertaining spectacle.<sup>12</sup> But throughout all these changing views, I would argue nature has remained a province of wonder and surprise (whether good or bad). Americans may have had differing views about how much we wished to control these natural surprises, but we have never been able to deny their capacity to humble us and arrest us in ways that cut through the distractions of our cultural narratives and man-made preoccupations.

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<sup>12</sup> For discussions of the changing American ideas of nature see: David Louter, *Windshield Wilderness: Cars, Roads, and Nature in Washington's National Parks* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); Carolyn Merchant, *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2003); William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William J. Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996); Susan Davis, *Spectacular Nature: Corporate Culture and the Sea World Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

But if the new twin eras of celebrity-dominated media and the Anthropocene have the potential to give us significant influence over which other animals stay a part of our world, then we also risk losing a significant capacity for nature to surprise and humble us. We risk losing the ability to find connections to narratives larger than those of our own devising – instead becoming prisoners of our own imaginations, for better or worse, disconnected from a comprehensive understanding of larger natural systems within which we remain embedded. To me, this risk remains among the most compelling reasons of all to care about questions of animal (and really all biodiversity) conservation and thus to understand the significance of celebrity and digital adaptation in shaping the potential present and future of conservation.

So these are my stakes for undertaking this dissertation project. It is a project that begins to explore this brave new world of animal celebrity in the digital Anthropocene and its consequences for humans and animals alike. It looks at the stories we produce about animal characters, as well as the ways in which we consume those commodified characters and narratives. It tries to consider how different groups subsequently live those narratives with animals, both in the virtual and physical world. And it tries to consider the changing demands that emerging media make on the forms and characters of animal narratives and spectacle.

To begin with, in starting any project for me it is always helpful to interrogate my own prejudices. In particular, one personal encounter with non-human animals both illustrates many of my own questions of interest about animals and also explains how I arrived at this project.

### **Roots and Shoots**

BLACK . . . ONION . . . THERE. GIMME! GIMME . . . ONION . . . THERE. BLACK .  
 . . BLACK.

SORRY, TATU. I CAN'T. ROGER SAYS NO.

BLACK . . . BLACK . . . THERE.

So it wasn't a profound conversation, but at that moment I didn't care. I was talking with a chimpanzee! Specifically, I was engaged in a signed conversation with Tatu, a precocious then-24 year-old with a vocabulary of over 300 modified American Sign Language (ASL) signs. I was standing on the berm around the mesh fence of her large outdoor climbing enclosure, which had a vegetable garden growing along its edge. The garden had been installed to provide Tatu and her adopted family of chimpanzees with plant growth and colors to interest them but also to serve as a physical buffer reminding people to maintain a minimum distance from the fence unless authorized. Tatu, being a wily veteran, knew I, a rookie intern, was not allowed to cross into the garden, but perhaps she hoped I might be a patsy who could be tricked into breaking the rules. After all, there was a "BLACK" onion growing there – black being Tatu's slang term for anything really great, like her birthday or a Christmas tree!

As a summer apprentice in 1999 at the Chimpanzee and Human Communication Institute (CHCI) in Ellensburg, Washington then run by Roger and Debbie Fouts, I was joining the pioneering ape sign language research study started in 1966 by Drs. Allen and Trixie Gardner at the University of Nevada-Reno. The Gardners had taught more than 200 modified ASL signs to Washoe, a young female chimpanzee. A former graduate student of the Gardners, Roger Fouts had taken over the program and eventually found a permanent home in Ellensburg at Central Washington University for the, at the time, five chimpanzees actively involved in communication and cognition research – Washoe, Tatu, Moja, Dar, and Loulis.<sup>13</sup> The center had

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<sup>13</sup> Sadly, now only two remain, Tatu and Loulis, both of whom have been transferred to a facility in Canada for retired captive chimpanzees. Moja passed away in 2002 at the age of 30, Washoe passed away in 2007 at the age of 41, and Dar passed away in 2012 at the age of 36.

a small year-round crew of master's and Ph.D. students and we summer apprentices were there to help conduct research and care for the chimpanzees' needs.

By the time I arrived, ape language research was in severe limbo. The young field had originally attracted in the 1970s considerable popular media attention, as it generated a sense of wonder at non-human animals' capabilities and perhaps reduced people's feelings of "abyssal rupture" from the other species with which we share our planet.<sup>14</sup> Prior to the 1970s, most animal behavior research had been dominated by the turgid traditionalism of a "black box" approach to animal minds – modeled after the research of behaviorist B.F. Skinner, who argued that what animals think was unknowable and therefore all that could be studied is their response to stimuli.<sup>15</sup> And, of course, long before Skinner's work, scholars had been enthralled with Rene Descartes' view of the world, which judged animals as non-thinking automatons lower in the Aristotelian Great Chain of Being than rational human beings.<sup>16</sup> These views had largely dictated the intellectual studies the academy had allowed scholars to pursue about animals, fearful perhaps that any alteration of the accepted narrative would result in a radical discombobulation of people's place in the world, as radical as Charles Darwin's theory of evolution had created.

By the 1970s, however, acceptance of animals as having minds – even if different from humans in many respects – was beginning to increase. This acceptance in scientific circles was thanks in no small part to the work of the ethologists and field naturalists – scholars like German naturalist Konrad Lorenz and his observations of how geese respond to certain sensory triggers

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<sup>14</sup> Philosopher Jacques Derrida is responsible for coining the term "abyssal rupture." See: Jacques Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)," trans. David Willis, *Critical Inquiry* 28 (2002): 399.

<sup>15</sup> For more on Skinner's work, see his classic: B.F. Skinner, *Science and Human Behavior* (New York: Free Press, 1965).

<sup>16</sup> Rene Descartes, "From the Letters of 1646 and 1649," in *The Animals Reader: The Essential Classic and Contemporary Writings*, eds. Linda Kalof and Amy Fitzgerald (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007), 59-62.



with “fixed action patterns” of behaviors; Jane Goodall’s observations of chimpanzees at the Gombe Preserve in Tanzania, where she famously asserted that other animals have forms of culture (transmitting knowledge and behavior through intergenerational teaching and observation, rather than genetically); and Donald Griffin and his work on bats (discovering they could echolocate to hunt food) and other species like bees that use a complex variety of signals to navigate and communicate.<sup>17</sup> This research coincided with the burgeoning animal rights movement that was hitting its stride with publication of Peter Singer’s seminal classic *Animal Liberation* in 1975, suggesting that other animals suffered and, therefore, that many practices of captivity, laboratory experimentation, and factory farming were ethically indefensible.<sup>18</sup>

Into this world emerged ape language research. In addition to Washoe and the work of the Gardners and Fouts, the other major studies included Francine “Penny” Patterson and her work with the gorilla Koko in California – made famous in the children’s book *Koko’s Kitten* – and Sue Savage-Rumbaugh and the bonobo Kanzi at Georgia State University, the one project that did not use modified ASL but instead taught a symbolic language using novel pictograms.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, even after the field of ethology and studies of animal minds gained widespread traction, academic suspicion and jealousy continue to affect its practice. When I was a freshman at Princeton University, the course catalog contained a prohibition (which I’ve never seen repeated anywhere else) that anyone who had taken the ethology class I had taken was not allowed to take the behaviorist class in the Psychology Department, apparently because we would be too ‘contaminated’ by heretical ideas like animal minds to accept behaviorist teachings.

For the conclusions of these researchers, see: Konrad Lorenz, *Here am I – Where are You?: the Behavior of the Greylag Goose*, trans. Robert D. Martin (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991); Jane Goodall, *In the Shadow of Man* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), revised edition; Donald Griffin, *Animal Thinking* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

<sup>18</sup> Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: A new ethic for our treatment of animals* (New York: Random House, 1975).

<sup>19</sup> *Bonobos* are sometimes called “pygmy chimpanzees” and are apes that are similar-looking to chimpanzees but smaller and more rare. Social structures of the two species are mirror images of each other. Whereas chimpanzees are patriarchal and frequently settle conflict through displays or direct violence, bonobos are matriarchal and settle most disputes through sexual relations.

Insights from these studies – showing that apes were capable of learning and communicating signs, symbols, and concepts and that they had abilities like empathy and the capacity to lie – challenged several ideas within the academy about what constitutes human exceptionalism and widely captivated the interest of the general public. Following on the heels of prominent advances in wild ape research – with Louis Leakey’s projects with Jane Goodall (chimpanzees), Dian Fossey (gorillas), Biruté Galdikas (orangutans) all garnering major public interest in magazines like *National Geographic* and *Time* and multiple television specials – Washoe, Koko, and Kanzi all emerged to become individual animal celebrities.

Yet all of this momentum in animal language and cognition studies screeched to a halt in the early 1980s. Herbert Terrace of Columbia University concluded – following his study of a chimpanzee named “Nim Chimpsky” – that apes were not really using language because (he claimed) they only repeated signs learned from their trainers and were not synthetically combining them in new forms, naming new things, or using them in a human-like grammar – elements that had been laid out by the linguist Noam Chomsky as the critical components of what actually constitutes language.<sup>20</sup> Opponents, including the Fouts and Gardners, fiercely challenged Terrace’s methodology, assumptions, and conclusions and offered persuasive rebuttals to some of Terrace’s critiques. But for scientific skeptics steeped in Cartesian notions of mind-body duality that dominated much of the Academy’s discourse, Terrace’s work was

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For summaries of the work of these other projects, see: Sue Savage-Rumbaugh, *Kanzi: The Ape at the Brink of the Human Mind* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1994); Francine Patterson, *The Education of Koko* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1982). For a more recent investigative analysis criticizing the work of the entire field, see: Jane C. Hu, “What Do Talking Apes Really Tell Us?,” *Slate*, August 20, 2014, accessed on August 21, 2014. [http://www.slate.com/articles/health\\_and\\_science/science/2014/08/koko\\_kanzi\\_and\\_ape\\_language\\_research\\_criticism\\_of\\_working\\_conditions\\_and.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/science/2014/08/koko_kanzi_and_ape_language_research_criticism_of_working_conditions_and.html).

<sup>20</sup> Herbert S. Terrace, et al., “Can an Ape Create a Sentence?,” *Science* 206(4421) (1979): 891-902.

enough to regain an upper hand in the academy in influencing funding decisions and institutional support for ape language research.

The drying up of funding after Terrace's study meant ape language researchers had to construct new justifications for their labs and competed for a shrinking pool of financial support. But in this, many researchers were aided by the popular celebrity of the animals in their labs – animals members of the public often felt they knew as individuals and personalities from past media attention. Thus, many of these researchers chose to expand rather than shrank their research focus – trying to use their work not only to redefine language and human exceptionalism but also to produce dominant cultural narratives about apes generally. They were aided by a media eager to capitalize on these animal characters to produce myriad television specials for *Nature*, *NOVA*, the BBC, etc. But this meant that having turned Washoe and other apes into exemplars of near-humanity, they now were simultaneously trying to make them into exemplars of our wild simian relatives as well, on par with the wild chimpanzees in Gombe that Jane Goodall was also turning into celebrities using the same media channels of books, magazines, and television along with her global Roots and Shoots educational program.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, when I arrived at CHCI I found a lab pushed in two directions. On the one hand, Roger and Debbie had become more involved with work by groups like the Great Ape Society, who were trying to gain greater legal rights of personhood for captive apes in the hopes of protecting them from medical testing and inhumane conditions in laboratories.<sup>22</sup> This focus

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<sup>21</sup> For more on Roots and Shoots, see: <https://www.rootsandshoots.org/>. Accessed on October 8, 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Perhaps the most heartbreaking story on this front concerns the case of Booe, a chimpanzee with whom Roger had worked in his sign language program but did not have legal rights to keep. When the director of another laboratory sold Booe to a medical testing facility, Roger had had no recourse to stop the transfer. Years later, the television news program *20/20* contacted Roger after finding Booe in a testing facility. Uncertain about how Booe would react but knowing he

celebrated the chimpanzees as unique individuals, using their individual celebrity to create an emotional connection with the public while lobbying for substantive policy changes for the treatment of all chimpanzees. On the other hand, Roger and Debbie pushed their lab to conduct observational studies of the captive chimps to draw conclusions about “chimpanzee behavior” generally, thereby tapping into academic institutional funding that was available for animal behavior studies focused more on chimpanzees as a species.

While I understood the reasoning for trying to procure funding in this latter direction, in practice I wondered about the validity of this research, since these chimpanzees had all been raised since infancy in a human environment and several talked about themselves as being human. True, they retained many mannerisms and responses typical of wild chimpanzees – such as pant hooting in greeting each other and forming complex social hierarchies (although even here, unlike wild chimpanzee patriarchies, CHCI’s chimps formed into a matriarchy with Washoe as unquestionably the dominant chimpanzee). But really, could you generalize about wild chimpanzee behavior from observing an individual like Washoe who signed SHOE when greeting a person, expecting you would respond by holding up your feet for her inspection?<sup>23</sup>

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couldn’t refuse, Roger agreed to visit Booee at the facility. Roger didn’t know if Booee would remember him, but upon seeing him Booee immediately started pant-hooting (the traditional chimpanzee greeting call) and began signing to Roger, despite having no one else – human or chimpanzee – to sign to for the past 13 years, let alone even touch him, as he had been deliberately infected with Hepatitis C for medical research purposes. Booee even remembered that Roger always carried raisins for Booee, signing ROGER . . . GIVE . . . ME . . . FOOD. Roger Fouts, *Next of Kin: What Chimpanzees Have Taught Me About Who We Are* (New York: William Morrow, 1997).

<sup>23</sup> All the chimpanzees had their own idiosyncrasies in terms of what interested them. Tatu enjoyed paging through *Harry and David’s* catalogs, looking at pictures of meats and cheeses. Dar liked looking at knees. Loulis got sexually aroused observing people who wore hats. In Washoe’s case, she liked looking both at pictures of shoes and at real shoes – hence her greeting sign. I apparently bored her, compared to my fellow apprentices that summer, since I only had two pairs of shoes and 13 of the other 14 apprentices were women who (not that I wish to engage in gender stereotyping) all had more shoes than I did to show off for Washoe.

Beyond questions of scientific validity, the tensions in managing a celebrity status for the individual chimpanzees while also treating them as generic representatives of a species gave the lab a nervous current of energy – as everyone tried to navigate an uncertain narrative space.

Moreover, the motivations for all of us who joined as students this privileged crucible of chimpanzee narratives were complex. While most of us hoped to help produce new scientific and/or popular narratives using the chimps, we also wanted to witness the ones we had heard about over the years through the media and link our own stories to those of these celebrity apes. Meantime, everyone I encountered at the lab (and indeed by all accounts everyone involved anywhere in this field of study) experienced at times both suspicions about other people's influence over the lab's apes as well as covetous desires for our own privileged contact with the chimps. Most of all, we all harbored the desire critic John Berger famously identified as common in people's modern relationships with other animals – the hope that these chimpanzees would look back at us with a sense of mutual comprehension, connection, and understanding.<sup>24</sup>

For me, CHCI was a time to take stock of my personal relationship to the animal kingdom. It fostered an ongoing personal sense of wonder at non-human animals, especially since the lab actively tried to undo academic tendencies I had absorbed in college of turning animals into abstractions to be examined in the context of “science;” instead encouraging me to value each individual chimpanzee as his or her own individual being. And yet, at the same time, I realized I was aided in this privileged sense of wonder because I had the extraordinary opportunity to converse directly with named chimpanzees about shoes and “black onions,” interrogating their personalities directly with language, rather than just trying to intuit what they were thinking. In such a unique space, of course it was possible to hold animals in a state of awe.

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<sup>24</sup> John Berger, “Why Look at Animals?” in *About Looking* (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 1<sup>st</sup> Vintage International edition.

But I realized this viewpoint would be harder to sustain on a daily basis when encountering subsequent animals – both virtual and physical – in less privileged settings.

During my time at CHCI, I also tried to understand Roger's efforts to thwart our impulses to touch the chimpanzees. For the safety of everyone, direct contact with the chimpanzees had been banned in the lab once they became adults, since adult chimpanzees are significantly stronger than humans and could inadvertently harm people without meaning to do so. Indirect contact – grooming through the mesh dividers in rooms and enclosures – was allowed, but only for senior researchers committed to being at the lab for several years and only when the chimpanzees initiated the contact. As Roger said, "How would you like it if strangers repeatedly came into your living room and demanded they be allowed to poke and prod you for fun?" His point was that when we try to touch animals, we do so because of a selfish desire to possess those animals' stories, without consideration of their agency as to whether they want us to be part of their story. Abiding by such a philosophy of seeing animals as more co-equal participants in human-animal stories after leaving the lab has not been easy for me: stories of animals that infuse modern American media so often encourage people to indulge avaricious desires to touch, to possess, and to appropriate animals' stories for oneself.

So I left Ellensburg with many questions to consider about relating to animals like chimpanzees: could I continue to try to know them as individuals instead of as representatives of their species (and was the latter option perhaps perfectly acceptable)? Did I really want to discover new things about them or just confirm for myself the narratives and ideas I already knew from popular culture? Why did I want to touch other animals so much? What are the challenges for anyone like the Fouts who try to manage the reputation of a species as a whole by promoting the reputations of individual animals?

## Examined and Unexamined Lives

One final reflection came out of my time in Ellensburg – one that has nagged at me for more than a decade and led directly to this project. When my dad was having lunch that summer with a biology professor at the University of North Carolina, he mentioned that I, as part of my interest in animals and the environment, was working with chimpanzees. “Chimpanzees! Why would he want to study them?” the professor indignantly scoffed. “If he really cares about the environment he’d study nematodes. Why isn’t he studying nematodes?!!”

Why indeed?

At first glance, his plaintiveness seemed amusing: *of course* most people would find the chance to study chimpanzees more interesting than nematodes if given a choice. Most people probably haven’t even heard of nematodes – despite the fact these round worms are found in virtually every environment on the planet and by some estimates account for 80 percent of the individual animals on earth, whereas chimpanzees are limited to a small set of African ecosystems.<sup>25</sup> But enhanced by popular media tales from people like Jane Goodall and the Fouts, chimpanzees simply have greater cultural cachet.

And yet this biologist was right in his implication that my preference (and that of American popular culture) for chimpanzees over nematodes has serious ecological consequences. This bias in our interest towards particular animals is deeply ingrained in all our societal institutions, even in the broadly defined field of conservation that is otherwise seemingly dedicated to the persistence of as many species as possible.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, in the annals of modern

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<sup>25</sup> *Nematodes* are round worms that comprise their own phylum of biological classification. There are more than 25,000 known species and they can exceed concentrations of a million individuals per square meter.

<sup>26</sup> When speaking of wildlife conservation it is important to have a clear understanding of what is being referred to. To use but one basic definition, the World Zoo and Aquarium Association

conservation a perverse converse of Socrates' assertion that "the unexamined life is not worth living" has emerged. For wildlife, apparently *only* the "examined" or well-known life is worth living – or at least preserving, in so far as the priorities of conservation scientists, government agencies, and the general public are concerned.

It begins with the academy, which, despite a professed interest in preserving functioning communities of many different interconnected species, has a distinct prejudice about which species actually receive long-term study to determine their population trends and habitat availability – data that then forms the backbone of subsequent conservation projects. For example, a survey of major conservation biology journals found that more than 70 percent of published studies focus on warm-blooded animals – especially birds, mammals, and physically large creatures like chimpanzees – despite there being at least twice as many cold-blooded species on the planet like nematodes. Bias also extends towards studying species inhabiting particular ecosystems – especially forests and protected areas like parks, as opposed to fragmented or urban landscapes – and to studying species in isolation, rather than considering them as parts of communities or ecosystems.<sup>27</sup> In the academic realm, it is often convenience that

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(WAZA) defines *conservation* as "the securing of long-term populations of species in natural ecosystems and habitats wherever possible." Peter J.S. Olney, ed., *Building a Future for Wildlife: The World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy* (Berne, Switzerland: WAZA Executive Office, 2005), 9. Obviously this lays open to significant debate the meaning of "natural," as well as who decides what is or isn't "possible," but it does make clear that most conservation is focused on species-level persistence and ultimately persistence in appropriate context of place, where species are integrated into broader ecological and biological communities.

Thus, for my purposes, I think of conservation activities as any that contribute to this goal, whether they are field research, domestic research (such as "zoo-based conservation"), captive breeding of endangered species with the hope of eventual reintroduction, managing human-wildlife conflicts, landscape management, fundraising towards securing habitat and species survival, or education and outreach about the potential loss of species.

<sup>27</sup> Xavier Bonnet, Richard Shine, and Olivier Lourdaïs, "Taxonomic Chauvinism," *TRENDS in Ecology and Evolution* 17(1) (2002): 1-3. At the same time, Wilson et al. note that, while



drives interest in species, especially in the competition to obtain grant funding and to complete research on academic timescales demanded by dissertations, journal articles, and tenure.

Given the bias of science that serves as its basis, it is unsurprising there is also subsequent distortion in governmental and non-governmental policymaking, with formal legal protections granted only to certain favored species. And this has long been true. Some of the earliest American wildlife conservation efforts led by Teddy Roosevelt and his Boone and Crockett Club and William Hornaday of the New York Zoological Park focused on protecting big game animals (which had largely been decimated by overhunting), protections believed to be important only in so far as these species could survive to provide outlets for future gentleman sport hunting. In this initial conservation policy realm, animals as totems of virility and proper living drove government interest in particular species rather than any scientific understanding of ecosystems.<sup>28</sup>

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scientists and the public generally align in their disproportionate interest in warm-blooded animals with anthropomorphic features, certain other species – especially invasive invertebrates – garner great interest in scientific researchers at rates far exceeding the interest of the general public, as evidenced by the relative numbers of academic and general web pages devoted to discussing them. John Wilson, et al., “The (bio)diversity of science reflects the interest of society,” *Frontiers in Ecology* 5(8) (2007): 409-414. See also I. Fazey, et al., “What do conservation biologists publish?,” *Biological Conservation* 124 (2005): 63-73.

Moreover, this bias may blind conservation efforts from considering the *entire* ecosystems in which the preferred species they try to protect are enmeshed. As Dolly Jørgensen noted in a recent *Conservation Biology* article, many conservation protocols ignore the small parasites that may be specific to particular host species and play vital roles in controlling population numbers or shaping species behaviors. For example, she points out that de-lousing of captive California condors (*Gymnogyps californianus*) and Black-footed ferrets (*Mustela nigripes*) may have inadvertently led to extinctions of their host-specific parasites, with unknown long-term consequences for the condors and ferrets that the scientists were more interested in protecting. Dolly Jørgensen, “Conservation implications of parasite co-reintroduction,” *Conservation Biology* (2014), accessed on March 6, 2015, doi: 10.1111/cobi.12421.

<sup>28</sup> Gregg Mitman, *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 14-15.

Just as debates about hunting centered around questions of masculinity, Jennifer Price argues that much the same phenomenon was at work surrounding femininity for the other early

Again much later, during political debates over the passage of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1973, arguments coalesced around the need to preserve well known and totemic species like the American bald eagle that were associated with American nationalism or featured in popular narratives. Senator Jake Garn (R-Utah), in the debate on the bill, was explicit the bill's purpose should be to protect well-known animals, stating: "I would be in favor of undertaking tremendous costs to preserve the bald eagle, and other *major* species, but that kind of effort is out of proportion to the value of the woundfin minnow, or the snail darter, or the louse-wort, or the waterbug, or many others that we are attempting to protect" [emphasis added].<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, at the time, *The Washington Post's* editorials urging passage of the bill argued that the ESA would protect prominent animals like the "cheetah, Puerto Rican parrot, and the red wolf," as well as the "mountain lion, grizzly bear, [and] black footed ferret" – with no mention of less popular taxa like amphibians or reptiles, let alone invertebrates or plants.<sup>30</sup>

Into the present day, conservation policy continues to focus on Garn's "major" species. Indeed, when enactment of the ESA soon strayed toward protecting little-known species that were affecting development projects – most infamously when enforcement led to the halting of the already underway Tellico Dam project in Tennessee in 1978 to protect a tiny fish called the

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major American conservation action – the passage of the 1904 Lacey Act to protect migratory birds in response to the slaughter of millions of birds for their plumage used in millinery. She notes that the Audubon Societies that lobbied for the protection of birds focused their campaign less on the hunting of the birds and more on trying to argue about what the use of bird feathers in hats said about women's virtues and values, a campaign ostensibly about nature thus really debating the emerging role of women in modern society. Jennifer Price, *Flight Maps* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 57-109.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Shannon Petersen, "Congress and Charismatic Megafauna: A Legislative History of the Endangered Species Act," *Environmental Law* 29 (1999): 463.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 480.

snail darter – policymakers began altering the law, both legislatively and administratively, to ensure it maintained a focus on “major” species only.<sup>31</sup>

In the first decade of the ESA’s enactment, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) devoted nearly 50 percent of its available funding for endangered species recovery planning to just 12 seemingly “major” species – only six of which were highly threatened and all of which were either birds or mammals.<sup>32</sup> The FWS admitted to Government Accountability Office (GAO) auditors that it gave priority to species with high “public appeal,” even though the agency’s own rules for a scientifically-based priority ranking system suggested more successful and cost effective protections could be achieved by focusing on other species.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Oliver A. Houck, “The Endangered Species Act and Its Implementation by the U.S. Departments of Interior and Commerce,” *University of Colorado Law Review* 64(2) (1993): 277-370.

<sup>32</sup> US Government Accountability Office, *Endangered Species Management Improvements could Enhance Recovery Program*, USGAO Report No. GAO/RCED-89-5 (Washington, DC: US Government Accountability Office, 1988), 32. See also Marco Restani and John M. Marzluff, “Funding Extinction? Biological Needs and Political Realities in the Allocation of Resources to Endangered Species Recovery,” *BioScience* 52(2) (2002): 169-177. This imbalance of funding partially resulted from specific Congressional earmarks for the funding, which designated as much as 75 percent of federal funding in any year towards certain species – usually those that were wide-ranging (and thus could garner support from legislators from a greater number of constituencies) – even though they were not as threatened as less well-known, endemic species facing loss of small critical habitats.

As of 1995, 229 of 346 listed species in the United States still had received no federal funding for recovery. Benjamin M. Simon, et al., “Allocating Scarce Resources for Endangered Species Recovery,” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 14(3) (1995): 415-432.

<sup>33</sup> The FWS argued that this policy was maintained out of a “desire for a positive public view of the program.” Similarly, the agency also prioritized funding species already near recovery anyway, so as to emphasize the potential of the ESA to be successful. *Endangered Species Management Improvements*, 3, 5, and 94.

Later GAO investigations found that this bias in funding, contrary to the agency’s own ranking system, persisted for more than two decades; with later administrators justifying the bias as focusing on those animals most likely to leverage private interest in funding and management partnerships with the government. U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Fish and Wildlife Service Generally Focuses Recovery Funding on High Priority Species, but Needs to Periodically Assess its Funding Decisions*, USGAO Report No. GAO-05-211 (Washington, DC: US Government Accountability Office, 2005).

So we return yet again more intently to the question of why I, or most any American, would find a chimpanzee more appealing than a round worm. Scholars have generally agreed the animals people appreciate most are those termed *charismatic megafauna*, a conveniently important-sounding and yet vague classification.<sup>34</sup> The trouble is, after more than 30 years of use, this term is still in search of a standard definition, let alone the ability to offer any explanatory basis for people's bias.<sup>35</sup> Apparently charismatic megafauna is like Justice Stewart's famous quote about "hard-core pornography" from the case *Jacobellis v. Ohio* (1964) – hard to define but "I know it when I see it."<sup>36</sup>

Consider the many different definitions scholars have supplied for this term: "popular well-known species and species phylogenetically close to humans" (Martin Lopez et al.); "higher" order species [meaning those resembling humans] and larger species (Metrick and

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Even in the absence of Congressional interference, federal administrators continue to allocate more funding for recovery to mammals and birds than to similarly (or more) threatened amphibians or reptiles – with funding even within mammalian species allotted primarily towards physically large species and predators, with an average one percent increase in spending for every one percent increase in relative species body size. Restani and Marzluff, "Funding Extinction?," 171; see also Andrew Metrick and Martin L. Weitzman, "Patterns of Behavior in Endangered Species Preservation," *Land Economics* 72(1) (1996): 1-16.

<sup>34</sup> Although a few sources cite Dennis Murphy, director of the Center for Conservation Biology at Stanford, as coining the term in the early 1990s, it appears in some form in academic literature at least as far back as 1982, with similar terms like "megavertebrates" also appearing in science journals as early as the 1970s. See, for example: Petersen, "Congress and Charismatic Megafauna;" Charles C. Mann and Mark L. Plummer, "The Butterfly Problem," *The Atlantic* 269(1) (1992): 47-70.

<sup>35</sup> The term does not appear in major dictionaries. At best, the *Oxford English Dictionary* offers a definition of *charismatic*, which is "one possessing or exhibiting charism or charisma." "charismatic, adj. and n.," OED Online, last modified March 2014, accessed May 19, 2014, Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/30722?redirectedFrom=charismatic>.

*Charisma* is defined as "a gift or power of leadership or authority . . . aura. Hence, the capacity to inspire devotion or enthusiasm." "charism | charisma, n.," OED Online, last modified March 2014, accessed May 19, 2014, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/30721?redirectedFrom=charisma>.

<sup>36</sup> *Jacobellis v. Ohio*, 378 U.S. 184 (U.S. Supreme Court 1964), <http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=us&vol=378&invol=184>.

Weitzman); “flagship species” that serve as “the best vehicles for conveying the entire issue of conservation to the public” (Leader-Williams and Dublin); animals of “attractiveness and mass appeal” (Kleinman and Seidensticker); “attractive species of endangered mammals” (Plotkin); “big mammals” whose conservation enjoys broader public support more than abstract environmental issues like climate change (Kollmuss and Agyeman); and “particularly appealing animal (and plant) species” that capture the public imagination and direct public attention towards conservation and preservation of the environment (Barney et al.).<sup>37</sup>

Obviously this is a term lacking any consensus. Does the term include only mammals, and perhaps birds, or are other classes of animal included as long as they are relatively big (or big relative to other animals in that class)? Or is what really matters how human-like in appearance or behavior an animal is? At best, if not quite mere “throw-away sentences,” as Leader-Williams and Dublin have derided, most of these definitions are circular.<sup>38</sup> Apparently, an animal is charismatic if it is popular and it is popular because it is charismatic. In the end, plenty of scholars give up entirely trying to define or operationalize the term and instead just list examples of animals as a way for their readers to intuit what is meant by “charismatic

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<sup>37</sup> Berta Martin-Lopez, et al., “What drives policy decision-making related to species conservation?,” *Biological Conservation* 142(7) (2009): 1370-1380; Metrick and Weitzman, “Patterns of Behavior;” Nigel Leader-Williams and Holly T. Dublin, “Charismatic megafauna as ‘flagship species,’” in *Priorities for the Conservation of Mammalian Diversity: Has the Panda Had its Day?*, ed. Abigail Entwistle and Nigel Dunstone (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 53; Devra G. Kleinman and John Seidensticker, “Review: Pandas in the Wild: The Giant Pandas of Wolong by George B. Schaller; Hu Jinchu; Pan Wenshi; Zhu Jing,” *Science*, New Series, 228(4701) (1985): 875-876; Mark J. Plotkin, “The Outlook for New Agricultural and Industrial Products from the Tropics,” in *Biodiversity*, eds. E.O. Wilson and F.M. Peter (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 1988) 106-116; Anja Kollmuss and Julian Agyeman, “Mind the Gap: why do people act environmentally and what are the barriers to pro-environmental behavior?,” *Environmental Education Research* 8(3) (2002): 239-260; Erin C. Barney, et al., “Assessing Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behavior Toward Charismatic Megafauna: The Case of Dolphins,” *The Journal of Environmental Education* 36(2) (2005):41-55.

<sup>38</sup> Leader-Williams and Dublin, “Charismatic megafauna,” 53.

megafauna.” Examples of specific animals listed in journal articles as exemplifying charismatic megafauna include: bald eagles, red wolves, blue whales, kangaroos, koala bears, grizzly bears, giant panda bears, cheetahs, mountain lions, tigers, black-footed ferrets, bison, elephants, rhinoceroses, and gorillas.<sup>39</sup>

Remarkably, most scholarly discussions of conservation and charisma tend to leave the issue there: critiquing the fact that the conservation policy and the public (and, very occasionally in moments of self-reflection, the academy) prefer certain species to others without really answering the question of why. But the question still remains: what makes an animal popular?

Recent scholarly studies have endeavored to explore this question in much greater detail. In nearly every survey and study, it is true that bigger animals are more likely to be popular with the general population than smaller animals (hence the “mega” in “megafauna”).<sup>40</sup> Of course, the question of size differs depending on whether you measure between or within taxonomic groupings. Between distinct groups like mammals and birds, for example, the preference for size is not as marked, as many well-liked and well-known birds are smaller than, say, a weasel – a mammal not particularly renowned for its popular appeal. However, within taxonomic groups larger animals are usually more popular and subject to more rigorous conservation than smaller ones.<sup>41</sup> My chimpanzees remain much more popular in social discourse, art, and conservation than shrews or voles. There are legions of “friends of” groups and conservation campaigns for

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid; Kleinman and Seidensticker, “Review: Pandas in the Wild;” Petersen, “Congress and Charismatic Megafauna;” Barney, et al., “Assessing Knowledge;” John Knight, “On the Extinction of the Japanese Wolf,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 56(1) (1997): 129-159.

<sup>40</sup> For an example of studies that focus on the general public’s preference for larger animals, see Paul Ward, et al., “The Relationship Between Popularity and Body Size in Zoo Animals,” *Conservation Biology* 12(6) (1998): 1408-1411. Ward et al. find that exhibits of larger animals at the zoo, especially mammals, are far more popular than exhibits of smaller animals.

<sup>41</sup> The same principle may be true of plants, as well, when one considers the relative public interest in saving the redwoods and sequoias and how this generates greater national/international interest compared to some efforts to save trees and plants of smaller size.

bald eagles and cranes compared to sparrows.<sup>42</sup> This preference remains true even in taxonomic groupings that are otherwise less popular as a class, like reptiles and fish: komodo dragons hold more cultural cachet than skinks and sharks definitely capture the popular imagination more than flounder.<sup>43</sup> Size also seems to be important when it comes to animals bigger than humans – potential predators or monsters that can dominate our imaginations, perhaps by challenging our sense of control or mastery of the landscape.<sup>44</sup> So considering species preferences in this light, size clearly matters.<sup>45</sup>

Humans generally also seem to have another preference genetically programmed into their constitution – a preference for creatures displaying features of *neoteny* (retention of juvenile

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<sup>42</sup> A quick Google search yields many examples, such as the Friends of the Redding Eagles, with its bald eagle cam: <https://www.facebook.com/FriendsoftheReddingEagles>; the Friends of the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge Eagles, and its bald eagle cam: <http://www.friendsofblackwater.org/eagle.html>; the Golden Eagle Trust, <http://www.goldeneagletrust.org/index.php>; the Festival of the Cranes in New Mexico, <http://www.festivalofthecranes.com/>; or the International Crane Foundation, <http://savingcranes.org>. To be fair, some support for sparrow conservation can be found, especially in India, where groups have sponsored a World Sparrow Day, but primarily to call attention to the fact that biodiversity persists even in urban environments. See, for example: <http://www.worldsparrowday.org/>.

<sup>43</sup> A prominent example of sharks' cultural cachet is the Discovery Channel's annual "Shark Week" programming of various television specials related to sharks. These specials largely trade upon and reify (even when their professed purpose is otherwise) the image of sharks as ruthless and efficient killers of the sea, made famous in the 1975 movie *Jaws*. Shark Week has consistently been among the highest rated of all cable programming on any network in a given television season. For example, during the tenth year of "Shark Week" ratings were 59 percent higher than the Discovery Channel's regular prime time average number of viewers. Jim Cooper, "Shark Week returns," *MediaWeek* 8(30) (1998): 29. Somehow I doubt "Flounder Week" would draw the masses in with the same amount of zeal.

<sup>44</sup> For more on this idea, see David Quammen, *Monster of God: The Man-Eating Predator in the Jungles of History and the Mind* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004).

<sup>45</sup> This in and of itself may explain a general bias towards mammals and birds, since morphologically endothermic, or warm-blooded, species like birds and mammals have the ability to grow relatively larger, since they can better regulate temperatures for bodily processes compared to exothermic, or cold-blooded, species that rely on solar energy.

features).<sup>46</sup> Konrad Lorenz was the first to explore this preference – arguing that, as creatures living in large related social groups, humans have an evolutionary adaptation to respond to specific triggering cues of an infant in need of maternal or paternal care, cues that allow us to respond more quickly than if we had to read the *gestalt* whole of an individual to determine if it was a needy infant.<sup>47</sup> But once we became attuned to respond automatically, these cues triggered our caring response wherever we encountered them, whether in children, a baby ocelot, Mickey Mouse, or even the former Walmart smiley face logo. Neotenous cues apparently include appearances that have: a large head to body ratio, a large eye to head ratio, a small jaw to head

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<sup>46</sup> If these biases are truly unconscious, it might explain why in many surveys about conservation policymaking, people consistently rank an animal's physical attractiveness and body size last among their supposed reasons for preferring to conserve a particular species and instead usually rank an animal's importance to the ecosystem or the rights of future people to be able to experience that species as being more important reasons for conserving animals. This holds true even as actual public efforts on behalf of particular species fail to bear out these explicitly professed priorities. Of course, this survey response could also be explained by the common research problem of people answering questions based on their perceptions of what their researchers normatively would like to see in the results – a testing threat to validity. See Don L. Coursey, "The Revealed Demand for a Public Good: Evidence from Endangered and Threatened Species," *NYU Environmental Law Journal* 6 (1998): 411-449; Brian Czech, et al., "Social Construction, Political Power, and the Allocation of Benefits to Endangered Species," *Conservation Biology* 12(5) (1998): 1103-1112.

<sup>47</sup> Of course, even with neoteny, the issue of charismatic appeal is not without debate. Stephen Jay Gould in a well-known essay about the evolution of Mickey Mouse argues that neotenous preference is socially learned, rather than innate, and merely grafted onto certain evolutionary predispositions. Stephen Jay Gould, "A Biological Homage to Mickey Mouse," in *The Panda's Thumb: More reflections in Natural History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), 95-107. Available as an online pdf at: [http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CB4QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Ffaculty.uca.edu%2Fbenw%2Fbiol4415%2Fpapers%2FMickey.pdf&ei=VK8fVP-wGdGvyATOh4LgAQ&usg=AFQjCNG2Th6nNp9mhzF1\\_7zPXbObPI2Egw&sig2=B3T-IRk9ZWOs0qlP9aa-2A](http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CB4QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Ffaculty.uca.edu%2Fbenw%2Fbiol4415%2Fpapers%2FMickey.pdf&ei=VK8fVP-wGdGvyATOh4LgAQ&usg=AFQjCNG2Th6nNp9mhzF1_7zPXbObPI2Egw&sig2=B3T-IRk9ZWOs0qlP9aa-2A). Accessed on September 15, 2014. Gould does note that even Darwin found there was an evolutionary continuity of emotions surrounding particular gestures across species, which lends support to the idea that there might be certain innate factors affecting our feelings about other animals.



ratio, and relatively fat legs and feet.<sup>48</sup> For example, hamsters with their flatter faces generally trigger greater approval or positive feelings in people than another closely related rodent, the rat, which has a pointier nose and facial shape.<sup>49</sup> Thus neoteny, while not solely an explanation for why we prefer the chimpanzee to the nematode, suggests that some of our preference for species can simply boil down to: if it innately seems cute then we care.<sup>50</sup>

Aside from size and neoteny, there are a host of other factors different scholars have asserted as potential triggers of our bias towards particular species. These include: the amount of “warm colors” in an animal’s coloration; an animal’s form of locomotion – supposedly we prefer animals that move more like us rather than like, say, snakes or centipedes; the type of surface covering – fur, feathers, scales, etc. – and its similarity to our own; the ability to sit upright; animals that exhibit a tendency to “play;” animals that display greater “intelligence,” as defined as having more human-like qualities of mind; and animals having prehensile appendages that can grasp objects in a manner similar to human hands.<sup>51</sup> While variously studied and intuitively appealing as explanations for why we like certain animals, general academic consensus has not yet fully accepted these other explanations as being universal explanations of human preference.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Fiona Sunquist, “Who’s Cute, Cuddly, and Charismatic?,” *International Wildlife* 22(6) (1992): 4-11.

<sup>50</sup> In one example of a dissenting study on neoteny, Stokes found that when he compared people’s preferences among penguin species there was no correlation to anything like neotenous features, or even a bias towards larger penguin species. David Stokes, “Things We Like: Preferences Among Similar Organisms and Implications for Conservation,” *Human Ecology* 35 (2007): 361-369.

<sup>51</sup> Stokes, “Things We Like;” Ramona Morris and Desmond Morris, *Men and Pandas* (London: Hutchinson and Company, 1966); Sunquist, “Who’s Cute, Cuddly, and Charismatic?”; Gordon M. Burghardt and Harold A Herzog, Jr., “Animals, Evolution, and Ethics,” in *Perceptions of Animals in American Culture*, ed. R. J. Hoage (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 129-151.

Moreover, several other studies have emphasized there is no “we” in “our” responses to animals. Magdoff and Barnett have found that men and women react differently to images of different animals. Similarly, Burghardt and Herzog note that a preference for animals with similarities to humans is a relatively modern phenomenon, with past Euroamerican opinions of the great apes, for example, being far less positive than the views of modern Americans.<sup>52</sup> Even a preference for larger animals is not necessarily as universal as some may believe, with Morris and Morris finding that while younger children aged four to eight do prefer larger animals – which they argue the children view as surrogate parental figures – older children aged nine to 14 apparently prefer relatively smaller animals – potentially because they serve as surrogate infants upon which older children can practice feelings of parental care.<sup>53</sup>

In the end, the fact that there is no universal human response to other animals should not be surprising. Our reactions to animals have always been conditioned by our cultural understandings of them – understandings in a dialectic tension between knowledge of the

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<sup>52</sup> JoAnn Magdoff and Steve Barnett, “Self-imaging and Animals in TV Ads,” in *Perceptions of Animals in American Culture*, ed. R. J. Hoage (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 93-100; Burghardt and Herzog, “Animals, Evolution, and Ethics.” Burghardt and Herzog note that it was only after racial attitudes about humans changed that attitudes about Great Apes started to change, since previously apes were viewed as ugly and examples of God’s disfavor and also a justification for perpetuating discrimination among different races of people. Moreover, they also note that only in modern times has there recently begun to be a widespread acceptance of animal intelligence – in contradiction to Cartesian dualistic perceptions of other animals as automata – so preferences for animals of high intelligence is also likely to be a culturally and historically contingent notion.

Yet ironically, even after Burghardt and Herzog carefully offer this historical critique of universalizing sociobiological assumptions, they proceed to posit other possible innate sociobiological explanations for preferences for certain animals without citing any evidence to back up these suppositions. These additional suggested sources of bias include a preference for animals who primarily communicate by means similar to humans (e.g. vocally and through visual cues rather than by pheromones) and an innate value of animals that display great individual variability, which they claim people see as a substitute for animal personality. Thus, the quest to search for “universal” explanations of people’s reactions to animals continues.

<sup>53</sup> Morris and Morris, *Men and Pandas*, 198.

physical animals themselves and of the animals as known through stories. And society's stories have changed in response to the presence/absence of animals, how much animals are perceived as threats/pests/omens, and how much is known about their life histories and habits. And returning to Levi-Strauss's famous quote, the stories have also changed depending upon how useful an animal has been at particular times and places to "think with" in explaining human society. Moreover, these stories have also changed their content as the media forms of transmission for the narratives have changed. Thus, while studies of charismatic megafauna suggest there is a general pool of animal traits and characteristics that may make us more likely to view a particular animal favorably, an animal's general popularity at any given time is not necessarily innate but culturally contingent on the stories we tell about or with animals.

So if it is *storytelling* that helps make an animal popular, how and why does modern American mass media tell stories about certain animals more than others? What makes an animal easier "to tell stories with," to paraphrase Levi-Strauss and how are the stories we're telling about and with animals now changing? And what transforms certain storied animals – either an individual like Rin Tin Tin or an entire species like chimpanzees – into media *celebrities*? Questions of popularity and charisma are ultimately relative – we can study why I might prefer a vole to a millipede but neither one is actually a star in our cultural narratives. Even many of the animals identified as charismatic megafauna by scholars, like black-footed ferrets, in truth lack media celebrity status (at least for now) in terms of serving as a dominant, easily commodifiable character in modern American animal storytelling in media and entertainment industries. Celebrities are a new form of human-animal relationship and not to understand them is to miss a major development for the future of conservation.

## Ready for Their Close-up

So, what is a *celebrity*? In its earliest incarnation in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, celebrity referred to “the condition of being much extolled or talked about; famousness, notoriety.” But beginning in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, a new understanding of celebrity emerged that is still with us today – a definition referring to “a celebrated person: a public character,” rather than to a state of being.<sup>54</sup> In modern usage, we sometimes extend the concept still further to the reflexive definition of a “person who is known for his well-knownness.”<sup>55</sup>

While these definitions all see celebrity as trafficking in the currency of fame, the sources of this fame and the form it takes have changed considerably over time. Fame no longer only arises organically from an individual and her achievements. Instead it can be bestowed upon (or withdrawn from) an individual. Moreover, fame has turned into an economic commodity, one that transforms those that possess it into a *brand* that can convey through repeated marketing and exposure an easy-to-consume shorthand for a specific image, idea, or story.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> “celebrity, n.,” OED Online, last modified March 2014, accessed May 19, 2014, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/29424?redirectedFrom=celebrity>.

The term has its origins either in the Latin *celebritas*, meaning “multitude/fame”; *celebrem* meaning “being thronged”; or “celeber, meaning “frequented, populous, famous”; with additional connotations of swiftness or the fleeting nature of fame implied by the terms’ similarity to the Latin *celere*, meaning “swift.” Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 1<sup>st</sup> Vintage Books edition, 57; Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 9.

<sup>55</sup> Boorstin, *The Image*, vii.

<sup>56</sup> Throughout the dissertation I use the terms *commodity* or *commodification* in describing the phenomenon of celebrity. Yet these are terms lacking stable, agreed upon definitions. In general a commodity can be thought of as an economic product of labor, but another definition more specifically sees it as an abstracted economic product – one of interchangeability. For example, corn is a commodity since our economic system treats one kernel as equivalent to any other regardless of its source. Thus celebrity can be thought of as a form of commodified story or character – once the brand for that particular celebrity is established the celebrity can be plugged interchangeably into myriad media contexts, with consumers treating certain basic tropes and ideas of the celebrity brand as a given. Yet celebrity also exists simultaneously in tension with this idea, since so often it is the idiosyncrasy of particular individual celebrities (whether human

A growing subfield of cultural studies known as “celebrity studies” has identified the rise of mass media – what historian Daniel Boorstin calls “the Graphic Revolution” – as the most important transformational cause of our changing cultural norms of celebrity.<sup>57</sup> This modern sense of celebrity is something that has developed gradually over a couple centuries and is not merely the product of the digital Internet era in which we now live, although the proliferation of media outlets today certainly heightens our daily awareness of celebrity. The widespread availability of newspapers in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and then the arrival of radio and film and later television in the 20<sup>th</sup> century all helped to transform social discourse, allowing mediated “cultural fabrications” of celebrity to emerge, while at the same time establishing the trappings that celebrity can take.<sup>58</sup>

As Chris Rojek argues, prior to this Graphic Revolution widespread fame and individual celebrity status were reserved for “ascribed” celebrities – those with royal status – and to a lesser extent those who “achieved” celebrity status through accomplishment in fields such as war, letters, or science. With the rise of mass media, however, a new form of “attributed” celebrity emerged – celebrities whose fame both arose swiftly and was often more transient since it came about not necessarily because of any innate qualities of the individual but because the media, in an effort to capture audiences, needed the public to consume their products and so established relationships with audiences via ongoing stories and characters – hence celebrities.<sup>59</sup>

This new form of celebrity is apotheosized by movie stars who become famous when Hollywood industries decide to turn them into “stars” – e.g. Clara Bow as the “It Girl” or Rin Tin

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or animal) that give them their appeal. So there is often both a push to make them interchangeable parts of media narratives and at the same time highlight their unique qualities.

<sup>57</sup> Boorstin, *The Image*, 13.

<sup>58</sup> Rojek, *Celebrity*, 10.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

Tin in the 1920s – and today appears even more frequently with the emergence of reality television “stars” – people like the Kardashians – famous for trying to become famous via media exposure, with armies of publicists and agents helping them along. Similarly, attributed celebrity now can be found in the media sensations that arise from criminal cases – think of the Sacco and Vanzetti trial in 1921, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in 1951, murderers Dick Hickock and Perry Smith immortalized in Truman Capote’s 1966 bestseller *In Cold Blood*, the O.J. Simpson murder trial in 1995, or the discovery of Amanda Berry and two other kidnapping victims in Cleveland in 2013 – that frequently emerge to become temporary subject of national and international conversations despite their limited direct relevance to most people’s lives.<sup>60</sup>

The media’s role in this modern culture of celebrity with its new forms of stars is hard to overstate, especially as “the media” is not merely the Fourth Estate of journalism but also a multibillion-dollar “entertainment industry” of movies, television, web publishing, video games, “apps,” etc. that are dependent on “products” – most of which have at their core storytelling in some form or fashion – frequently commodified into a shorthand of tropes and spectacles that heighten and manipulate the public’s emotions. Indeed, the emotional aspects of our relationships to celebrities help distinguish the changes to celebrity since the onset of the Graphic Revolution. Whereas previously celebrities might have been famous only in the sense of being known by name, today people expect to feel a sense of personal emotional connection to celebrities: the “illusion of intimacy, the sense of being an exalted confrère.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Celebrities who become broadly famous despite any discernable achievement or skill (a distinct subset from other attributed celebrities who at least can claim to renown for their beauty or skill in acting, music, or sport – even if it is still the media industry that is primarily responsible for their fame) have now been termed by scholars as *celetoids* – a “media-generated, compressed, concentrated form of attributed celebrity.” Ibid., 17-19.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. See also Michael J. Wolf, *The Entertainment Economy: How Mega-Media Forces Are Transforming Our Lives* (New York: Random House, 1999).

Moreover, this sense of intimacy is actually two-fold. Despite Boorstin's fears that an unsophisticated modern public would get lost in the celebrity "thicket of unreality" with our cultural narratives hijacked by people and "pseudo-events" constructed entirely around image, there is evidence to suggest the public is at least sometimes aware of the constructed nature of celebrity and yet nonetheless continues to appreciate multiple levels of engagement with this phenomenon.<sup>62</sup> On the one hand, many of us enjoy an emotional connection to the public image or persona of celebrity. On the other hand, we also experience a sense of connection to celebrities by deconstructing their images to try to discover the "real" private story behind the scenes – hence the prevalence of tabloids, paparazzi, and "making of" and "behind the scenes" features in the modern entertainment environment (many of which are now actively manipulated by celebrities and their agents to be yet another form of the projected public image).<sup>63</sup>

Taken together, this dual level of understanding celebrities allows for what Turner calls "para-social relations" – an extension of concern for celebrities that places them partially within our own self-defined communities. Thus, for example, though I have never met Martin Sheen and primarily know him as an actor on the television show *The West Wing*, I still might take an interest in him in the news, in the way that I might read up on a friend or colleague when their names appear on television or in a Facebook post. Because this relationship is asymmetric (in the sense that I care about Martin Sheen but he neither knows nor cares for me) it liberates me more than I would with close friends or acquaintances to treat him as a *tabula rasa* – an entity upon which to project my own ideas, meanings, and stories as a means of both reinforcing and interrogating my own identity and social norms. Moreover, by caring about a celebrity, I can feel that I am participating in and being accepted by a broader social discourse, with whom I now

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<sup>62</sup> Boorstin, *The Image*, 3, 11.

<sup>63</sup> Graeme Turner, *Understanding Celebrity* (London: Sage Publications, 2004).

share common points of reference.<sup>64</sup> This makes para-social relations a valuable, if underappreciated, form of building community.

The celebrity culture that now emerges from mass media and the industries that perpetuate it have permeated into many discourses and institutions where one might not necessarily expect to find it. Certainly American politics, while personality-driven throughout its history – which largely coincides with the Graphic Revolution – has increasingly become driven by media narratives centered on emotional connection between celebrity politicians and their constituents, with the tenor of discourse increasingly much more focused on the image of politics than the substance of policy.<sup>65</sup> Thus, for example, polls in 2004 showed many Americans just generally liked George W. Bush more than John Kerry – Bush being the type of guy more Americans rather would “have a beer with” – even though Kerry’s individual policy positions frequently polled more popularly when disassociated from him and his image.<sup>66</sup>

Similarly, as Wolf points out, advertising has created brands for many industries where the brands themselves and their logos have become celebrities in their own right.<sup>67</sup> Every time

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 23-25. See also Rojek, *Celebrity*, 16.

<sup>65</sup> True, it is important not to overstate this point, since much of American electoral politics in the past was also driven by images and slogans that in some sense centered around emotional connections – e.g. “Tippecanoe and Tyler, too” – and lurking below the political discussions about image today are very substantive policy disagreements about the future directions of the American government. So celebrity politics today is more a question of difference of degree than kind from past American electoral politics. If *The Tonight Show* or *The View* were available in 1840, it is quite possible that William Henry Harrison would have appeared on them. But it is notable that these talk shows and entertainment shows that normally play host to celebrity guests from the entertainment and sports industries also now regularly play home to politicians and even sitting presidents seeking an emotional connection and celebrity relationship with viewers.

<sup>66</sup> Richard Benedetto, “Who’s more likeable, Bush or Kerry?,” *USA Today*, September 17, 2004, accessed May 19, 2014, [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/opinion/columnist/benedetto/2004-09-17-benedetto\\_x.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/opinion/columnist/benedetto/2004-09-17-benedetto_x.htm).

<sup>67</sup> Wolf, *The Entertainment Economy*, 77-78.



America's tech geeks experience near orgasms at the presentation of the latest iProduct by Apple, the triumph of celebrity branding reveals itself once again.

And with celebrity culture permeating so many other institutions and relationships, perhaps it should come as no surprise that animals are now becoming celebrities as well. Indeed, animals seem ideally suited to the role, since most (unlike Tatu) lack the ability to speak for themselves and therefore can more easily have stories projected onto them.<sup>68</sup> Add to that the fact that – to many people – animals of the same species often look alike and you in some ways have the perfect, perpetual, and commodifiable celebrity star. Indeed, because the focus came to be on the brand rather than the individual, Rin Tin Tin, the 1920s movie dog that failed to make the transition from silent films to talkies, eventually was able to re-emerge as a celebrity in the public sphere through television. There his grandson, Rin Tin Tin III, became the new standard bearer of the brand “Rin Tin Tin,” with little disruption to popular conceptions and understandings of who it was that actually comprised the animal star in real life.<sup>69</sup>

The creation of animal celebrities arises at least in part from the same forces as human celebrities – a mass media intent on constantly generating new spectacles and narratives that become reusable commodities with which consumers build virtual relationships, in the process

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<sup>68</sup> It is important to note, however, that animals are not totally lacking in agency in these relationships: as people discover new behaviors and traits in other animals these can often disrupt the culturally constructed image previously developed for particular animals. For example, recent research on dolphin behavior has revealed them to be much more aggressive and certainly sexually promiscuous than the wholesome image perpetuated by films and the television show *Flipper*. See Rachel Smolker, *To Touch a Wild Dolphin* (New York: Doubleday, 2001). Similarly, the killing of a Sea World trainer by the orca Tilikum has partially disrupted the friendlier “Shamu” persona created by the Sea World marketing machine. See: *Blackfish*, directed by Gabriela Cowperthwaite (2013; Los Angeles: Magnolia Pictures, 2013), DVD.

<sup>69</sup> Orlean, *Rin Tin Tin*.

both creating and satiating our need for novelty and distraction.<sup>70</sup> As I said earlier, in many ways this leads to a dominant discourse of animals less focused on metaphors or totems and more on spectacle and amusement.

In general, as with human celebrities, a desire to know both the image and the behind-the-scenes reality is also present in our relationships with celebrity wildlife. People are often fascinated both by cartoon versions of iconic animals and by wildlife documentaries and television shows that promise to show the “real” shark or tiger or snake. Indeed, many zoos and wildlife eco-tours premise their existence around letting visitors have an experience that goes beyond the image of the animal to a more heightened reality. Opportunities to get to know animals in a “more real” way through touching and feeding certain animals like horseshoe crabs at most any aquarium in the world or the dolphin swims at many resorts can be equated to a desire to get to meet and touch human celebrities. Meantime, sightings of wild animals – just like sightings of human celebrities in “real” life rather than on screen – frequently result in tweets, Facebook posts, and other sharing among both serious wildlife watchers and casual viewers excited at the prospect that the characters of their virtual and physical worlds can overlap.<sup>71</sup>

Additionally, the phenomenon of animal celebrity demands a re-evaluation of the entire phenomenon of *anthropomorphism*. Many scholars have long disdained anthropomorphism – the projecting of human qualities onto non-human animals – concerned that it distorts our

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<sup>70</sup> For an analysis of the “media ecology” of animals and conservation in modern media, see Thomas Veltre, “The slums of the global village,” *BBC Wildlife* 8(5) (1990): 328-329.

<sup>71</sup> For example, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison where I study, sightings of a den of red foxes that chose to locate next to the main campus quad of Bascom Hill resulted in frequent social media images and mentions, culminating in official media stories highlighting this unexpected encounter with “wildlife” in a human-dominated landscape. Kelly April Tyrrell, “Foxes among Badgers: A family of foxes makes its home on campus,” University of Wisconsin-Madison News, April 22, 2014, accessed on May 19, 2014, <http://www.news.wisc.edu/22766>.

understandings of non-human animals and our relationships to them and that it ironically promotes an *anthropocentrism* by trying to turn animals into models of humanity.<sup>72</sup> But anthropomorphism should also be understood to be another form of celebrity para-social relationship – one that tries to incorporate animals into our broader social discourse, even when they do not share a similar interest in humans or even share the same physical space as we do. Thus, to dismiss anthropomorphism is to ignore a significant human impulse that links how we relate both to animals and to other people and also is to ignore the potential for good that para-social relationships with animals can foster. Not only does the para-social relationship of shared animal celebrity culture help to build community among people, but para-social anthropomorphism also encourages humans to extend regard, if not outright ethical concern, beyond our immediate circle of friends and family to a wider community of life.

Because the virtual animal celebrities refer back to actual animals that exist in the wild, celebrity can be a way of cutting through distraction and focusing our attention on particular animals living in the real, physical world. Thus, the world of animal celebrity can be exploited by people interested in the conservation of animals – such as those working at CHCI – who can

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<sup>72</sup> For more discussion of the issues surrounding anthropomorphism see for example Anderson and Henderson, “Pernicious portrayals,” Burt, *Animals in film*; M.J. King, “The Audience in the Wilderness: the Disney Nature Films,” *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 24(2) (1996): 60-68; J. Levin. “Smokey Bear Nation,” *Slate*, March 20, 2007, accessed December 1, 2008, <http://www.slate.com/id/2161522>; Mitman, *Reel Nature*; L.A. Vivanco, “Seeing green: Knowing and saving the environment on film,” *American Anthropologist* 104(4) (2002): 1195-1204.

Some critics are concerned that the liberties taken with anthropomorphic representations of animals reflect and “naturalize” human morals, social systems, and interests, making them appear to be universal natural laws rather than socially constructed entities. Anderson and Henderson go so far as to say that almost always “animal representations are founded on human interests and cannot, in any sense, claim to be true.” King calls anthropocentric animals on film an “ego-system” of nature through a human lens. Other critics have expressed concern that inaccurate anthropomorphism creates distorted understandings of animals’ social structures and behaviors, which distort the conservation debate about how and why to preserve certain species. Anderson and Henderson, “Pernicious portrayals,” 310; King, “The Audience in the Wilderness,” 62.

try to take advantage of (or create outright) animal celebrities in the media world to promote conservation of living animals in the physical world.

Yet media celebrity for animals – both for individual animals and for species more generally – has uncertain conservation impacts that can be both positive and negative. For example, Keiko – the killer whale that played the titular role in the film *Free Willy* – inspired thousands to rally to her assistance after they learned about the plight of captive orcas through the film. Advocates mounted a four-year, \$34 million-campaign trying (ultimately unsuccessfully) to re-introduce Keiko to the wild. On the other hand, *Kes*, a popular 1950s film about a captive kestrel, did not inspire concern for captive kestrels but instead a popular fad of owning kestrels as pets. Similarly, the IMAX film *Ocean Oasis* – which prominently featured whales, elephant seals, and manta rays – convinced then-Mexican President Vicente Fox to create a marine wildlife sanctuary in the Sea of Cortes.<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, another ocean-based film, *Finding Nemo*, led to such a soaring demand for harvesting of one wild clownfish species (*Amphiprion ocellaris*) for the pet trade the species' population crashed along Australia's Great Barrier Reef, with scientists from the University of Cumbria now calling for it to be listed as endangered.<sup>74</sup> So how we react to celebrity is not always predictable, which makes greater understanding of it even more critical for those interested in conservation.

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<sup>73</sup> Praveen Singh, "Narrative in Wildlife Films: How It Shapes Our Understanding of the Natural World and Influences Conservation Choices" (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Montana State University, 2005).

<sup>74</sup> Hannah Strange, "I can't find Nemo! Pet trade threatens clownfish," *The Times (London)*, June 26, 2008, accessed on March 24, 2014, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/environment/article2143912.ece>.

Moreover, media about animals can affect other media about animals. When the recent documentary *Blackfish*, about Sea World's captive orcas, gained significant global attention, it led to a screening of the film for executives at Disney's Pixar Studio, who changed the ending to the forthcoming sequel to *Finding Nemo*, *Finding Dory*, which had originally portrayed sea creatures ending up in an aquarium as a happy ending. Amy Kaufman, "'Blackfish' gives Pixar

## This Project

And so this brings us to my project – an attempt to explore animal celebrity, a new phenomenon in the history of human-animal relations, and what it means both for us as humans and for other animals and their survival in the Anthropocene. More specifically, the project first focuses on the challenges and impacts of celebrity for the people and institutions interested in the conservation of animal species – the advocates serving as a form of “celebrity agent” trying to produce stories of animal celebrity who must adapt constantly to changing media and changing audiences. Next, the project focuses on the audiences that consume these animal narratives and how people try to relate to celebrity narratives of animals, often by trying to re-appropriate the celebrity for themselves. Finally, the project examines how the course of celebrity can vary over time and the challenges of what happens when animal celebrity narratives are unsustainable.

In all cases, the key to sustaining and adapting animals’ celebrity to modern media centers on being able to offer attractive narratives that can be packaged and commodified by the media and entertainment industries, most commonly turning on a few narrative tropes such as: spectacle; heroism and resiliency; or villainy, transgression, and sometimes redemption. Some of these narrative tropes associated with species already appear in the long history of human storytelling about particular non-human animals, pre-dating even the Graphic Revolution of mass

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second thoughts on ‘Finding Dory’ plot,” *The Los Angeles Times*, August 9, 2013, accessed September 13, 2014, <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/aug/09/entertainment/la-et-mn-blackfish-seaworld-finding-dory-pixar-20130808>.

For other examples of perverse impacts of media celebrity leading to greater demand in the pet trade or assumptions that animals featured on film must be doing fine in terms of population numbers, see also Jason Goldman, “Do Animated Animals on the Big Screen Promote Conservation on the Ground?,” *Conservation Magazine*, March 14, 2014, accessed on March 23, 2014, <http://conservationmagazine.org/2014/03/do-animated-animals-promote-conservation/>; Kara K. Schroepfer, et al., “Use of ‘Entertainment’ Chimpanzees in Commercials Distorts Public Perception Regarding Their Conservation Status,” *PLoS ONE* 6(10) (2011): e26048, <http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0026048>; S.R. Ross, et al., “Inappropriate Use and Portrayal of Chimpanzees,” *Science* 319(5869) (2008): 1487.

media. And many of these older tropes have been reified by media representations in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, especially by major wildlife filmmaking outlets such as *National Geographic*, the BBC, and the Discovery Channel. Indeed, even as celebrity animal storytelling now transitions into a new, fragmented world of online media genres, many producers and consumers of celebrity animal narratives continue to take their cues from the animal narratives that dominated these wildlife filmmaking entities.

Along the way, I hope to consider some of the ideas that have emerged from my own journey with animals and distracting mass media. Questions like: what are the limitations for groups like CHCI that wish to create animal celebrities, in terms of transferring interest from individual animals to overall species conservation? Why does people's consumption of animal narratives so frequently become an effort to "possess" animals and their stories? What do we really hope to see when we watch physical animals – whether virtually or in the wild – and what does witnessing a living animal do for us that experiencing a virtual animal in a mass media form not offer? Why is the untrammelled "wild" so often still a part of a celebrity animal's narrative, even when we most often encounter them in landscapes clearly altered by or containing people?

To explore all these questions, I have divided my project into three case studies – each focused on a different animal celebrity, with its own particular dominant narrative tropes and its own history of promotion and consumption by conservation groups and general audiences.

Chapter One examines the case of African elephants. Elephants and humans have a long intertwined history and one in which elephants have appeared in all forms of mass media. Even outside Africa, people have a long history of knowing elephants physically through ivory, through warfare, and through zoos and circuses.

This chapter explores the challenge for elephant conservation groups who try to produce elephant media narratives and create elephant celebrities. To explore this process, I reviewed the media materials produced by several elephant conservation advocates and their affiliated conservation groups, including their websites, blogs, videos, adopt-an-animal programs and related materials to donors, and films and television shows on which they served as consultants or co-producers. I also interviewed a handful of the conservation advocates and observed elephant conservation tourism venues in Kenya.

One of the key strategies many conservation advocates have explored is creating named individual animal personalities – particular elephant stars with whom the public can identify and feel an emotional connection. Trying to do so requires these advocates to navigate a constantly changing mediaverse and the emergence of newer media formats that demand new forms of graphics and narratives – with the need for constant new material and “click-bait” material for the Internet potentially taxing the resources of even the most well organized institutions. A second challenge going forward is identifying the appropriate audiences for elephant celebrity, since increasingly non-Western audiences in East Africa and East Asia will ultimately determine the fate of elephant conservation. In doing so, elephant advocates have to beware of imposing an “eco-colonial” perspective that assumes other cultures share American or western European values and constructions of “nature” and “wildlife.” Ultimately, there is no guarantee the celebrity of the individual will ensure the conservation of the species, but conservation groups have little choice but to try to foster this bridge between the individual star and the fate of the overall species, since the alternative may be letting elephants get lost amid other distractions of a crowded media landscape.

Chapter Two focuses upon penguins. For much of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, penguins emerged as the newest *it* animal, in terms of dominant wild animal narratives in American media. Films such as *March of the Penguins*, *Happy Feet*, and *The Penguins of Madagascar* prominently brought real and imagined penguins into popular consciousness, creating a celebrity narrative built most prominently around stories of penguins as “cute” entertainers and as symbols of family and heroic resilience. Antarctic penguins became viable celebrities in part because their lack of association with place or people allowed them to be the perfect *tabula rasa* animal celebrity, which in turn made them especially adaptable to the newly emerging narrative conventions of Internet media, where a lack of context is often a virtue, since it allows animal stories to be easy bite-sized memes without any cultural baggage.

This second chapter is most interested in exploring how the dominant narratives of penguins as cute spectacles of entertainment have been consumed by the public, especially as exemplified by the ultimate consumer of wildlife celebrity – wildlife tourists. Like a Hollywood tour of movie stars’ homes, much of modern wildlife tourism is framed as a chance to see the reality behind the image of an animal that people know from wildlife films and television and other media narratives. However, it turns out that most wildlife tourists travel to see confirmation of the image of animals they think they already know – a way of affirming and appropriating an animal’s celebrity reputation for themselves while also claiming to have a unique story shared with that animal. Moreover, having once witnessed a wild animal, many modern wildlife tourists appear interested in moving on to the next *it* animal, rather than returning repeatedly to the same animal to try to establish a more in-depth understanding.

This consumptive “been there-done that” dynamic significantly calls into question the long-term benefits of ecotourism for wildlife conservation, despite the fact that many



conservation groups highlight ecotourism as a potentially viable and sustainable economic model for saving animal species from extinction. In order to attract stable numbers of tourists, proponents of specific species and landscapes may have to find ways to sustain and renew an animal's celebrity, competing in a potentially zero-sum game for attention for various animal narratives. Moreover, since many tourists want to experience wildlife in ways they can't get from films, television, or the internet – through touching, swimming with, etc. – the physical impacts of changing volumes and types of wildlife tourism may further limit the potential for wildlife tourism to promote the conservation of celebrity animal species, overwhelming fragile habitats. However, with careful management and restrictions to maintain the exclusivity of experiences, it is possible consumption of celebrity wildlife through tourism can support conservation.

To explore these issues in greater depth, the chapter on penguins follows my experience as a participant-observer on a typical Antarctic wildlife cruise – one that was specifically marketed as trying to find all eight sub-Antarctic and Antarctic penguin species for tourists. Through interviews, ethnographic observation, and a critical examination of photographs taken by several tourists, I try to deconstruct how wildlife tourists consume – and also re-produce – particular narratives of animal celebrity. I also examine the marketing of penguins by ecotourism ventures and how they try to exploit and reify these same narratives.

Chapter Three explores Americans' relationship with gray wolves and in particular with the wolves descended from those the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reintroduced into the Greater Yellowstone region in 1995 and 1996. These wolves offer a counter-example to the first two case studies, since they are a species native to the United States and are predators with a long history of being viewed as transgressors of human boundaries. Moreover, wolves serve as counterexamples in the pantheon of animal celebrity because they are not full-fledged stars but

currently are in a transitional state in popular culture – “binary stars,” seen as both villains and heroes with reputations varying across space, time, and audience.

This third chapter considers the ways different groups recently have produced, reified, and consumed narratives about wolves. Traditionally in Euroamerican cultures, narratives have associated wolves with ideas of transgression and the threat of untamed wild nature. But in the last half-century, wolves have started to assume more positive roles in American media, especially as values about “wilderness” and “the wild” have transformed. This binary reputation and the concurrent political battles over wolves’ popular image make the “eco-colonialism” concerns inherent in wolf conservation more visible to many Americans than the same issues that also underlie conservation of many other celebrity animal species like African elephants, where their foreignness and remove from American audiences may make it easier to ignore the political implications for local African residents of imposing conservation decisions.

Meantime, wolves also serve as a counterexample to elephants and penguins in that they are an example of a celebrity species that is not particularly well-adapted digitally. Both because wolves in general are difficult to film, which makes it harder to create visual spectacles for media, and because the political battles over them often make it difficult to disassociate them from geographic and historical contexts, wolves may not adapt as well to many newer digital formats that rely greatly on visual imagery and also on animals as self-contained and decontextualized commodities. Yellowstone’s wolves actually are an exception to the first problem, since two decades of scientific study with geo-tracking these wolves has allowed the general public to differentiate the wolves into known individuals and wolfpacks, providing a narrative link for audiences from around the world with particular wolves. Moreover,

Yellowstone as an environment offers easy access to viewing and filming wolves almost unparalleled in the rest of gray wolf habitat.

But the celebrity of other gray wolves in the Northern Rockies and nationally remains highly contested. And this third chapter examines how certain groups try to perpetuate the idea of wolves as celebrity heroes while others perpetuate them as celebrity villains. And while both sides of the wolf debate freight their imagery and rhetoric of wolves with many separate proxy issues, they both ultimately rely upon the same basic narrative of wolves – that they are symbols of “the wild” – while drawing opposing conclusions about the values of that narrative.

In the end, given wolves’ general lack of digital adaptability, it is possible their binary reputation is what actually will help maintain their celebrity in the United States, since a resolution of this debate would leave them less interesting celebrity figures who are poorly digitally adapted to future media. Indeed, what is interesting is comparing the national and international celebrity of Yellowstone’s wolves with the relative lack of broad interest in wolves in places like Wisconsin, where they have passively returned on their own to figure out ways to traverse (if not quite co-exist) in human-dominated landscapes. This suggests that wolves’ inextricable association with muddled notions of “the wild” may actually be a long-term liability for them, since in the Anthropocene fewer and fewer physical or virtual spaces will offer a lack of people and so this cannot be the accepted definition of “wildness” in common cultural discourse. As long as any celebrity animal narrative is premised on humans and animals being found in separate settings, it may be doomed to long-term failure.

Finally, in my conclusion I offer a few additional thoughts to consider about the concept of animal celebrity going forward. If human celebrities like Justin Bieber can be manufactured through relentless media exposure, does this mean new animal celebrities can be created, too?

And, if so, can this give conservationists interested in non-charismatic species like nematodes some hope for the future? It also ponders what the future of celebrity wildlife can offer in terms of creating hybrid virtual and physical spaces where people and non-human animals can co-exist and perhaps help change our understandings of the relationship between wildness and wildlife. In the end, the hope is that celebrity, however it may skew or distort our understanding of animals, has the potential to build para-social relations of regard for non-human animals – a chance to build what Aldo Leopold advocated nearly 70 years ago: an ethic that “enlarges the boundaries of the community” of our concern to include other animal species and their habitats, changing people from “conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it.”<sup>75</sup>

### **Elegy Written on a Laptop**

One afternoon in college, trying to come up with an idea for a final paper in a conservation class, I decided to take a nap to refresh my mind. I had been reading Douglas Chadwick’s *The Fate of the Elephant*, tracing the global ivory trade and its resulting decimation of elephant populations.<sup>76</sup> The prospect of elephant extinction was distressing but I was struggling as I dozed off to convey why it really mattered to me, without descending into issues of keystone species and ecosystem services and function – important scientific questions, to be sure, but not really why the issue had stakes for me personally.

Waking in a cold sweat, a thought crystallized in my mind: for me, the elephant is barely any more real than a cartoon character; but at least I had had the occasional privilege of seeing a live elephant in a zoo or circus before. True, I didn’t really *know* elephants at all in a personal or physical sense except as celebrities in books, films, and television shows. And their use and

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<sup>75</sup> Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), Special Commemorative Edition, 204.

<sup>76</sup> Douglas Chadwick, *The Fate of the Elephant* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1994).

meaning to me up that point had primarily been as characters to care about, metaphors to explore, or amusements and distractions as spectacles in films. But what if I could never know living elephants on more equal terms? What if the *only* way to know elephants was as characters in human narratives and not in a physical sense?

That to me is the real danger of extinction – extinction precludes the possibility that a species will ever again exist outside of a human-controlled setting and that we could know it in any way other than just as a character in a human-created story. It reduces unique species developed over millions of years without our input or help to the status of just another character in our narratives – only as real as Hamlet, Darth Vader, or Pokémon – and confines them to a virtual world of distracted, busy media, if they even make it into our stories at all.

And though human imagination is a wonderful and powerful force, isn't it hubristic to believe we can populate our narratives and physical world only with creatures of our own devising and not be impoverished somehow as a result? Moreover, in so doing, aren't we elevating humanity relative to the broader world, putting us on par with the gods in terms of our creative powers – an act of self-promotion we have been warned against repeatedly since the days of Icarus? As Sherlock Holmes succinctly cautioned, “When one tries to rise above Nature, one is liable to fall below it.”<sup>77</sup>

To me, this is why extinction matters and therefore why understanding celebrity and its effects on extinction matter as well. Too often conservation policymaking confronts intractable disagreements over questions of valuing individual species and their role in ecosystems, weighing their conservation with cost-benefit economic analysis against human activities that might otherwise threaten their existence. And these aren't insignificant considerations. As many

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<sup>77</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Creeping Man,” in *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 70.

critics have observed, Americans (myself included) frequently imagine animals living “out there” in an imagined wild when in reality all animals live among, adjacent to, or are affected by people – many of whose survival and livelihoods depend on being able to make use of the same “natural” spaces and resources as the animals. This makes the narratives we choose to tell about animals all the more critical since the presence or absence of people in those narratives goes a long way towards determining how we try to live with and conserve physical animals in the real world. So it is important not to let conservation devolve only into aesthetics or concerns of what Lucy Lippard terms visual “eco-colonialism.”<sup>78</sup>

But once we take the material needs of all people into consideration, then the main issue conservation animates is not our aesthetics but our own survival. The twin arrivals of the Anthropocene and our mass media world of distraction, spectacle, and fragmentation are interrelated and adapting to both depends on narrative. In our new Anthropocene environment, the stories we tell will determine the world we either try to preserve or newly create for ourselves to inhabit. In our new worlds of celebrity mass media – even if they can sometimes leave one feeling empty, as though they might be Macbeth’s “sound and fury signifying nothing” – the stories and spectacles we share ultimately create some form of shared cultural discourse that binds us together and defines us as communities, even as these communities are becoming less grounded in place, more fractured, and more self-selecting. In both cases, the stories we tell and live are somewhat our own choice. So if it comes down to choice, why wouldn’t we choose to preserve as many unique characters for these stories as possible? Why would we want to lose sources of wonder and awe that can transcend our own distractions?

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<sup>78</sup> Lucy Lippard, *On the Beaten Track: tourism, art, and place* (New York: The New Press, 1999), 146.

For me, the hope is that elephants do not slip into the fictional or mythic realm of Pokémon and Darth Vader. That talking chimpanzees can still fascinate my nieces' grandchildren someday and that nematodes might also manage to find their way into the conversation from time to time. That even in a world of Elmo, Lady Gaga, *Dancing with the Stars*, fantasy football, Snapchat, Tinder, Google Glass, Apple Watches and whatever media distractions come next, many fascinating physical animals will still be around to surprise, amaze, and humble us. And that there will still be opportunities for things around us not entirely of our own creation to inspire a patient wonder of the kind Rachel Carson talks about, wonder that prevents us from defining the world only on our own terms.

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The same day I was finishing the first draft of this chapter, the IUCN officially determined the Western black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis longipes*) is now extinct.<sup>79</sup> A subspecies of black rhinoceros (which as a species is considered critically endangered), western black rhinoceros territory once stretched from South Sudan across the central part of Africa to Niger. Yet with no official sightings since 2006, the IUCN concluded the subspecies is gone, existing now only in record books, old videos and photographs, and fewer and fewer people's living memory.

The western black rhinoceros has had plenty of company. Since I started working in earnest on my dissertation in 2011, the animal species and subspecies assessed as extinct in the IUCN's Red List include:

**Bermuda Saw-whet Owl** (*Aegolius gradyi*); **Coosa Elktoe** (*Alasmidonta mccordi*); **Beysehir Bleak** (*Alburnus akili*); **Iznik Shemaya** (*Alburnus nicaeensis*); **Mauritius Blue-pigeon** (*Alectroenas nitidissima*); **Rodrigues Blue-pigeon** (*Alectroenas*)

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<sup>79</sup> Denver Nicks, "Western black rhino declared extinct," *Time*, November 6, 2013, accessed May 14, 2014, <http://time.com/9446/western-black-rhino-declared-extinct/>.

*rodericana*); **Tanna Ground-dove** (*Alopecoenas ferrugineus*); **Thick-billed Ground-dove** (*Alopecoenas salamonis*); **Reunion Shelduck** (*Alopochen kervazoi*); **Mauritius Shelduck** (*Alopochen mauritianus*); **Martinique Amazon** (*Amazona martinicana*); **Guadeloupe Amazon** (*Amazona violacea*); Unnamed ray-finned fish (*Anabarilius macrolepis*); **Amsterdam Duck** (*Anas marecula*); **Mauritius Duck** (*Anas theodori*); **Chatham Bellbird** (*Anthornis melanocephala*); **Red Rail** (*Aphanapteryx bonasia*); **Rodrigues Rail** (*Aphanapteryx leguati*); **Gölçük Toothcarp** (*Aphanius splendens*); **Kosrae Starling** (*Aplonis corvine*); **Norfolk Island Starling** (*Aplonis fusca*); **Mysterious Starling** (*Aplonis mavornata*); **Dominican Green-and-yellow Macaw** (*Ara atwoodi*); **Jamaican Green-and-yellow Macaw** (*Ara erythrocephala*); **Jamaican Red Macaw** (*Ara gossei*); **Lesser Antillean Macaw** (*Ara guadeloupensis*); **Cuban Macaw** (*Ara tricolor*); **Guadeloupe Parakeet** (*Aratinga labati*); **St Helena Crake** (*Atlantisia podarces*); **Bermuda Hawk** (*Bermuteo avivorus*); **Chatham Fernbird** (*Bowdleria rufescens*); **Small St Helena Petrel** (*Bulweria bifax*); **Chatham Rail** (*Cabalus modestus*); **Liverpool Pigeon** (*Caloenas maculata*); **Labrador Duck** (*Camptorhynchus labradorius*); **Guadelupe Caracara** (*Caracara lutosa*); Unnamed arthropod (*Centrobunus braueri*); **Kioea** (*Chaetoptila angustipluma*); **Snake River Sucker** (*Chasmistes muriei*); **Bonin Grosbeak** (*Chaunoproctus ferreorostris*); **Finsch's Duck** (*Chenonetta finschi*); **Great Saint Helena Awl Snail** (*Chilonopsis nonpareil*); **Cape Verde Giant Skink** (*Chioninia coctei*); **Kona Grosbeak** (*Chloridops kona*); **Brace's Emerald** (*Chlorostilbon bracei*); **Caribbean Emerald** (*Chlorostilbon elegans*); **Ula-ai-hawane** (*Ciridops anna*); **North Island Snipe** (*Coenocorypha barrierensis*); **South Island Snipe** (*Coenocorypha iredalei*); **Bermuda Flicker** (*Colaptes oceanicus*); **Reunion Pigeon** (*Columba duboisi*); **Ryukyu Woodpigeon** (*Columba jouyi*); **Mauritius Woodpigeon** (*Columba thiriouxi*); **Bonin Woodpigeon** (*Columba versicolor*); **Utah Lake Sculpin** (*Cottus echinatus*); **New Zealand Quail** (*Coturnix novaezelandiae*); **Snail-eating Coua** (*Coua delalandei*); **Raiatea Parakeet** (*Cyanoramphus ulietanus*); **Black-fronted Parakeet** (*Cyanoramphus zealandicus*); **Navassa Rhinoceros Iguana** (*Cyclura onchiopsis*); **Santa Cruz Pupfish** (*Cyprinodon arcuatus*); Unnamed ray-finned fish (*Cyprinus yilongensis*); **Hawkin's Rail** (*Diaphorapteryx hawkinsi*); **Gardiner's Giant Mite** (*Dicrogonatus gardineri*); **Black Mamo** (*Drepanis funerea*); **Hawaii Mamo** (*Drepanis pacifica*); **Kangaroo Island Emu** (*Dromaius baudinianus*); **King Island Emu** (*Dromaius minor*); **Reunion Rail** (*Dryolimnas augusti*); Unnamed insect (*Dryophthorus distinguendus*); **Lanai Hookbill** (*Dysmorodrepanis munroi*); **St Helena Dove** (*Dysmoropelia dekarchiskos*); **Oceanic Parrot** (*Eclectus infectus*); **Closed Elimia** (*Elimia clausa*); **Fusifform Elimia** (*Elimia fusiformis*); **Hearty Elimia** (*Elimia jonesi*); **Rough-lined Elimia** (*Elimia pilsbryi*); **Ash Meadows Poolfish** (*Empetrichthys merriami*); **Fine-rayed Pearly Mussel** (*Epioblasma personata*); **Nearby Pearly Mussel** (*Epioblasma propinqua*); **Rodrigues Rail** (*Erythromachus leguati*); **Maryland Darter** (*Etheostoma sellare*); Unnamed arthropod (*Eucarlia alluaudi*); **Reunion Kestrel** (*Falco duboisi*); **Reunion Starling** (*Fregilupus varius*); **Mascarene Coot** (*Fulica newtoni*); **Whiteline Topminnow** (*Fundulus albolineatus*); **Tanna Ground-dove** (*Gallucolumba ferruginea*); **Norfolk Island Ground-dove** (*Gallucolumba norfolciensis*); **Thick-billed Ground-dove** (*Gallucolumba salamonis*); **Tristan Moorhen** (*Gallinula nesiotis*); **Dieffenbach's Rail** (*Gallirailus dieffenbachii*); **Tahiti Rail** (*Gallirallus pacificus*); **Wake Island Rail** (*Gallirallus wakensis*); **Amistad Gambusia** (*Gambusia*



*amistadensis*); **San Marcos Gambusia** (*Gambusia georgei*); Unnamed ribbon worm (*Geonemertes rodericana*); **Lord Howe Gerygone** (*Gerygone insularis*); **Thicktail Chub** (*Gila crassicauda*); Unnamed freshwater snail (*Graecoanatolica macedonica*); **Canarian Oystercatcher** (*Haematopus meadewaldoi*); Unnamed land snail (*Helicopsis paulhessei*); **Greater Akialoa** (*Hemignathus ellisianus*); **Lesser Akialoa** (*Hemignathus obscurus*); **Greater Amakihi** (*Hemignathus sagittirostris*); **Huia** (*Heterlocha acutirostris*); **Madagascan Dwarf Hippopotamus** (*Hippopotamus guidbergi*); Unnamed spider (*Hirstienus nanus*); **Tobias' Caddisfly** (*Hydropsyche tobiasi*); **Dieffenbach's Rail** (*Hypotaenidia dieffenbachii*); **Tahiti Rail** (*Hypotaenidia pacifica*); **Bar-winged Rail** (*Hypotaenidia poeciloptera*); **Wake Rail** (*Hypotaenidia wakensis*); Unnamed mollusk (*Islamia ateni*); **New Zealand Little Bittern** (*Ixobrychus novaezelandiae*); **St Helena Giant Earwig** (*Labidura herculeana*); Unnamed rodent (*Lagostomus crassus*); Unnamed mollusk (*Leiorhagium solemi*); **Madeiran Land Snail** (*Leiostyla lamellosa*); **Pahranagat Spinedace** (*Lepidomeda altivelis*); **Mauritius Grey Parrot** (*Lophopsittacus bensoni*); **Broad-billed Parrot** (*Lophopsittacus mauritianus*); Unnamed prawn (*Macrobrachium leptodactylus*); Unnamed insect (*Margatteoidea amoena*); **Olive Marstonia** (*Martsonia olivacea*); **Reunion Owl** (*Mascarenotus grucheti*); **Rodrigues Owl** (*Mascarenotus murivorus*); **Mauritius Owl** (*Mascarenotus sauzieri*); **Mascarene Parrot** (*Mascarinus mascarinus*); **Rocky Mountain Locust** (*Melanoplus spretus*); **Auckland Merganser** (*Mergus australis*); Unnamed spider (*Metazalmoxis ferruginea*); **Choiseul Pigeon** (*Microgoura meeki*); **Hula Bream** (*Mirogrex hulensis*); **Oahu Oo** (*Moho apicalis*); **Bishop's Oo** (*Moho bishopi*); **Kauai Oo** (*Moho braccatus*); **Hawaii Oo** (*Moho nobilis*); **Harelip Sucker** (*Moxostoma lacerum*); **Ascension Crake** (*Mundia elpenor*); **Kamao** (*Myadestes myadestinus*); **Amaui** (*Myadestes woahensis*); **Guam Flycatcher** (*Myiagra freycineti*); **St Helena Cuckoo** (*Nannococcyx psix*); **Rodrigues Starling** (*Necropsar rodericanus*); **Rodrigues Parrot** (*Necropsittacus rodericanus*); **Little Flat-top Snail** (*Neoplanorbis tantillus*); **Aldabra Warbler** (*Nesillas aldabrana*); **Mauritius Turtle-dove** (*Mauritius Turtle-dove*); **Reunion Pigeon** (*Nesoenas duboisi*); **Rodrigues Turtle-dove** (*Nesoenas rodericanus*); **Norfolk Kaka** (*Nestor productus*); **Phantom Shiner** (*Notropis orca*); **Scioto Madtom** (*Noturus trautmani*); **Bermuda Night-heron** (*Nyctanassa carcinocatactes*); **Reunion Night-heron** (*Nycticorax duboisi*); **Mauritius Night-heron** (*Nycticorax mauritianus*); **Rodrigues Night-heron** (*Nycticorax megacephalus*); **Laysan Weevil** (*Oodemias laysanensis*); Unnamed arthropod (*Orthomorpha crinita*); **Kakawahie** (*Paroreomyza flammea*); **Nevis Rice Rat** (*Pennatomys nivalis*); Unnamed spider (*Peromona erinacea*); **Rodrigues Solitaire** (*Pezophaps solitaria*); **Spectacled Cormorant** (*Phalacrocorax perspicillatus*); **Great Auk** (*Pinguinus impennis*); **Siamese Flat-barbelled Catfish** (*Platytrapius siamensis*); Unnamed spider (*Pleorotus braueri*); **Ovate Clubshell** (*Pleurobema perovatum*); **Colombian Grebe** (*Podiceps andinus*); **Atitlan Grebe** (*Podilymbus gigas*); **Clear Lake Splittail** (*Pogonichthys ciscooides*); **Eiao Monarch** (*Pomarea fluxa*); **Nuku Hiva Monarch** (*Pomarea nukuhivae*); **Maupiti Monarch** (*Pomarea pomarea*); **White Swamphen** (*Porphyrio albus*); **Reunion Gallinule** (*Porphyrio coerulescens*); **New Caledonia Gallinule** (*Porphyrio kukwiedei*); **North Island Takahe** (*Porphyrio mantelli*); **Marquesan Swamphen** (*Porphyrio paepae*); **St Helena Rail** (*Porzana astrictocarpus*); **Kosrae Crake** (*Porzana monasa*); **Miller's Rail** (*Porzana nigra*); **Laysan Rail** (*Porzana palmeri*); **Hawaii Rail** (*Porzana sandwichensis*); **Christmas**

**Sandpiper** (*Prosobonia cancellata*); **Moorea Sandpiper** (*Prosobonia ellisi*); **Tahiti Sandpiper** (*Prosobonia leucoptera*); **New Zealand Grayling** (*Prototroctes oxyrhynchus*); **Paradise Parrot** (*Psephotus pulcherrimus*); Unnamed land snail (*Pseudocampylaea loweii*); **Egirdir Minnow** (*Pseudophoxinus handlirschi*); **Guadeloupe Parakeet** (*Psittacara labati*); **Rodrigues Parakeet** (*Psittacula exsul*); **Seychelles Parakeet** (*Psittacula wardi*); **Large St Helena Petrel** (*Pterodroma rupinarum*); **Red-moustached Fruit-dove** (*Ptilinopus mercierii*); **Slender-billed Grackle** (*Quiscalus palustris*); **Las Vegas Dace** (*Rhinichthys deaconi*); **Lesser Koa-finch** (*Rhodacanthis flaviceps*); **Greater Koa-finch** (*Rhodacanthis palmeri*); Unnamed insect (*Rhyncogonus bryani*); **Laughing Owl** (*Sceloglaux albifacies*); Unnamed spider (*Sitalcicus gardineri*); **Thick-lipped Pebblesnail** (*Somatogyrus crassilabris*); Unnamed arthropod (*Spirobolellus prasinus*); **Fish Springs Marshsnail** (*Stagnicola pilsbryi*); Unnamed spider (*Stipax triangulifer*); **Pasadena Freshwater Shrimp** (*Syncaris pasadenae*); **Alaotra Grebe** (*Tachybaptus rufolavatus*); **Tonga Ground Skink** (*Tachygyia microlepis*); Unnamed spider (*Thomasettia seychellana*); **Reunion Ibis** (*Threskiornis solitarius*); **Stephens Island Wren** (*Traversia lyalli*); **Hodgen's Waterhen** (*Tribonyx hodgenorum*); **Fort Ross Weevil** (*Trigonoscuta rossi*); **Yorba Linda Weevil** (*Trigonoscuta yorbalindae*); **Long Jaw Tristramella** (*Tristramella sacra*); **Grand Cayman Thrush** (*Turdus ravidus*); **South Island Piopio** (*Turnagra capensis*); **North Island Piopio** (*Turnagra tanagra*); **St Helena Hoopoe** (*Upupa antaios*); **Bush Wren** (*Xenicus longipes*); **Bonin Thrush** (*Zoothera terrestris*); and **Robust White-eye** (*Zosterops strenuus*).<sup>80</sup>

And these are just the animals *assessed* extinct during the last few years, many of whom had not been sighted in decades and were only now being officially classified as extinct after scientists gave up all hope they still existed. This list fails to include dozens of species that have not been seen in years but where scientific analysis has not officially concluded they are permanently

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<sup>80</sup> “The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species,” Version 2015.1, IUCN Red List, accessed June 4, 2015, <http://www.iucnredlist.org>.

It’s worth noting just how many of these species are birds, reinforcing the point made earlier that scientific studies are biased towards birds and mammals compared to the orders of magnitude more invertebrates that exist. Moreover, it is worth considering the role of media celebrity in conservation when you consider that the only species loss on this list that made any real news was the physically largest of these species: the western black rhinoceros. Several of the smaller species on this list so lacked attention that they failed to receive even a common name before their extinction because they were simply unknown and unnoticed by their human neighbors. This anonymity made their extinction pass by without reflection as well.

For example *Islamia ateni* is a mollusk that had only ever been found in one place, on a wall amid the sulfurous hot spring of the Spa of San Vicente in northeastern Spain. Yet without the cache of celebrity, it unceremoniously disappeared when the wall that formed its habitat disappeared following the construction of a road near the spa. “*Islamia ateni*,” Version 2014, IUCN Red List, accessed September 21, 2014, <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/155726/0>.

gone.<sup>81</sup> Nor does it include those previously known non-celebrity species that have not been subject to scientific studies that would reveal their disappearance. Nor those hundreds of anonymous species never even discovered before they disappear – since no one is even sure how many species are on the planet, with estimates ranging from 2 million to 100 million.<sup>82</sup>

Sources of inspiration and wondrous characters for our stories alike are vanishing all too quickly, failing to adapt to rapid changes in our physical and media environments. Scientists believe we are now losing between 0.01 percent and 0.1 percent of all species annually – a rate of 200 to 10,000 species forever vanished each year, or somewhere between 0.5 to 27 species per day. And that’s just at the species level of biology, ignoring the obliteration of complex communities that continues wholesale every day. There are wonders a plenty in this distracted Anthropocene, but sadly “full many a flower is born to blush unseen and waste its sweetness on the desert air” indeed.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> In addition to these official listings by the IUCN, some other prominent extinctions included the Japanese government declaring that it now considers the Japanese River Otter (*Lutra lutra whitneyi*) extinct and the death of “Lonesome George,” the last known living Pinta Island Tortoise (*Chelonoidis nigra abingdonii*). These determinations, unlike so many of the IUCN’s did make international news, likely because they involved either large mammals or a “named” individual like Lonesome George, who became a celebrity as the last known representative of his species. Sabrina Richards, “2012’s Noteworthy Species,” *The Scientist*, December 18, 2012, accessed June 5, 2015, <http://www.the-scientist.com/?articles.view/articleNo/33704/title/2012-s-Noteworthy-Species/>.

<sup>82</sup> And whatever the ultimate number of species actually is, the rate of disappearance is sobering – in 2014 the World Wildlife Fund determined that global populations of fish, birds, mammals, amphibians, and reptiles declined by 52 percent between 1970 and 2010. Tom Miles, “Global wildlife populations down by half since 1970: WWF,” Reuters, September 29, 2014, accessed September 29, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/09/29/us-environment-wildlife-idUSKCN0HO2A120140929?irpc=932>.

<sup>83</sup> “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,” 1751, Thomas Gray, Thomas Gray Archive online, accessed June 6, 2015, <http://www.thomasgray.org/cgi-bin/display.cgi?text=elcc>.

## CHAPTER ONE – What’s In a Name?

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*What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.*  
 -- *Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, Scene ii, 1-2

*Elephant Fund Editor – Inclosed [sic] find \$1. I saw the elephants at Keith’s [a performing venue in Boston] last Saturday and thought they were just lovely. When my papa read from the Boston Post that the children could buy the elephants I was so happy that I offered to give a dollar which I had saved up for a new doll.*<sup>1</sup>  
 -- Helen Gately, *The Boston Post*, March 12, 1914

*Dear Shirley:*  
*I will give you ice cream on a plate.*  
*I will give you one motorcycle. ONLY ONE!*  
*I will kiss you on your ear.*

*Love Cyrus*<sup>2</sup>  
 -- Fan letter sent by three year-old to The Elephant Sanctuary,  
 September 9, 2003

### **“But I gave buns to the elephant, when I went down to the Zoo!”<sup>3</sup>**

Consider two scenes set almost exactly a century apart that illustrate both how much and how little human relationships with elephants have changed in the last 100 years.

\* \* \*

It is 1914 and the editors of *The Boston Post* are setting forth an argument to their readers and to the city of Boston: “What’s a zoo minus elephants? Worse than Hamlet without the leading character.” At the time Boston’s Franklin Park Zoo does not have elephants; so the newspaper offers a solution: purchase “Waddy,” “Mollie,” and “Tony,” three performing elephants from “Miss Orford’s troupe of trained pachyderms,” who are soon going to “retire”

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<sup>1</sup> Helen Gately, “Says They’re Just Lovely,” Letter to the Editor, *The Boston Post*, March 12, 1914, 8, accessed June 15, 2014. (Access Newspaper Archive database).

<sup>2</sup> “Shirley,” last modified 2013, The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee, accessed May 13, 2014, <http://www.elephants.com/shirley/shirleyBio.php>.

<sup>3</sup> A.A. Milne, “At the Zoo,” in *When We Were Very Young* (New York: Puffin Books, 1992), 46-47.

from the vaudeville stage. The newspaper declares that these three elephants “are said by experts to be without equals in any menagerie or circus” and they will be “the greatest attraction [the zoo] could possibly possess,” holding especial interest for the children of the city. And as a means of uniting the city, across all social classes, the *Boston Post* proposes it should be the city’s children who purchase the elephants through a collection of their pocket change.<sup>4</sup>

With this proposal, the *Post* creates a media frenzy – one presumably stemming from the city’s interest in the elephants but not coincidentally one that generates massive reader interest in the *Post*’s own publication. Almost daily for three months, the newspaper prints stories and letters to the editor, often on the front page, about children’s efforts to raise funds for the

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<sup>4</sup> “Elephants Offered City,” *The Boston Post*, March 6, 1914, 10, accessed 16 June 2014. (Access Newspaper Archive database); “Trained Elephants for the Boston Zoo,” *The Boston Post*, March 9, 1914, 12, accessed 16 June 2014. (Access Newspaper Archive database); and “Elephant Plan Approved,” *The Boston Post*, March 10, 1914, 14, accessed 16 June 2014. (Access Newspaper Archive database).

The Franklin Zoo’s method of purchasing elephants was not unique. Historian Elizabeth Hanson found at least five other American cities – Atlanta, Baltimore, Evansville, New Orleans, and St. Louis – where the city collectively raised funds to acquire elephants for its municipal zoo between 1900 and 1930. She notes that even as many cities competed to open bigger and more prestigious zoos, most initially lacked funds to stock them and so often ended took donations from private citizens.

For example, an early accounting of the collection of animals at New York City’s Central Park Zoo lists a number of animals donated from private citizens in just one year, including: squirrels, geese, owls, monkeys, quail, deer, turtles, trout, alligators, eagles, foxes, several bears, prairie dogs, opossums, an ocelot, and a coatimundi.

Early American zoos also frequently housed circus animals (both permanently through retired circus animals and temporarily when circuses were not traveling). Elizabeth Hanson, *Animal Attractions: Nature on Display in American Zoos*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 34-36, 59-60; see also Andy Newman, “Giving Life to Central Park Zoo, One Donation at a Time,” *The New York Times*, June 15, 2014, accessed June 16, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/16/nyregion/giving-life-to-central-park-zoo-one-donation-at-a-time.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/16/nyregion/giving-life-to-central-park-zoo-one-donation-at-a-time.html?_r=0); *Tenth Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park for the Year Ending December 31, 1866* (New York: Wm. C Bryant & Co., Printers, 1867), 78-80.

elephants, ultimately printing the name of every child who donates to the Elephant Fund, no matter how small his or her donation.<sup>5</sup>

For example, Robert Wright, age 16 – singled out by the paper as among the very first children to contribute – is quoted as saying, “. . . I thought it would be a fine thing to have the elephants . . . I’ve seen elephants at circuses and have fed them peanuts, and because I like them I want to see them here in Boston at our own zoo.”<sup>6</sup>

The *Post* heavily stokes this sentiment of elephants serving as touchstone of municipal pride, quoting many high-ranking citizens about the prestige elephants will bring to a zoo. For example, the Acting Chairman of the Franklin Park Commission states matter-of-factly that getting elephants for Boston would be “a fine acquisition to the Zoo, which of course would be incomplete without them.” The director of the zoo, A.B. Barker, explains his desire for the zoo to elephants in greater depth:

One thing that every zoological park looks forward to is the time when it can have elephants. The zoo officials feel as if they have made a start then. There is nothing in a zoo of greater interest than elephants. The crowds always hang around the elephant house and you will always find the children there in throngs . . . Partly the interest in them lies in their bigness. Then they are animals that are never still; they are always reaching out, always doing something, and right here lies the explanation for the great crowds which a zoo attracts . . . Because folks want to see something alive, active, not inanimate dead things such as they find in museums.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For an example of a story profiling a successful fundraising effort, see: “Girls’ Musicale Took In Cash,” *The Boston Post*, March 16, 1914, 8, accessed June 16, 2014. (Access Newspaper Archive database).

<sup>6</sup> “Boy of 16 One of First.” *The Boston Post*, March 10, 1914, 5, accessed June 16, 2014. (Access Newspaper Archive database). This article is but one of legions over the ensuing months that documented children’s attitudes towards elephants and their work to raise money for them. Parties, benefit concerts, selfless donations – all became fodder for the paper to wax rhapsodic over people’s love and desire for elephants.

<sup>7</sup> “Educators Pleased,” *The Boston Post*, March 9, 1914, 2, accessed June 16, 2014. (Access Newspaper Archive database).

In this time period, most American zoos, unlike European zoos, are municipally supported and so regularly compete with other cities to create more elegant pastoral landscapes of learning and spectacle in a rapidly urbanizing society.<sup>8</sup>

Along with citizen reactions, the *Post* regularly runs photographs and stories about the elephants – building Waddy, Mollie, and Tony into superstars for their soon-to-be hometown. Daily for weeks, the paper prints vignettes about the elephants’ personalities and adventures. The trio are variously described as “three jolly elephants,” “very friendly,” “real pets,” and “a happy family,” with Tony singled out as an impish troublemaker – “the sly little fellow” or “little rascal” – while the older two female elephants quickly become characterized as frumpy, but good-hearted maiden aunts.<sup>9</sup> Photographs of the elephants show them in various poses – sitting upright on their hind legs for a “tea party” (caption: “Isn’t this a pleasant little tea party? Here are Mollie and Waddy sitting down to an afternoon cup of tea just like two grown-ups. And they seem to be enjoying it too. Probably you didn’t know elephants liked tea. But that just shows how little you may know about them.”); getting ready for bed (caption: “Here are Molly [sic], Tony and Waddy just before bedtime. Elephants do not sleep very much and they do not like to go to bed any more than children do. You can see by their faces that they are not pleased because they have to be locked up.”); talking on an old-fashioned telephone (photo entitled: “How Clever Mollie Rings Up ‘Central’ and Talks”); and bowing down in “gratitude” in front of the Massachusetts State House, captioned:

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<sup>8</sup> Hanson, *Animal Attractions*, 9, 17, 29.

<sup>9</sup> “Elephants Have Been Trained and Petted,” *The Boston Post*, March 9, 1914, 2, accessed June 16, 2014. (Access Newspaper Archive database); “Pets in Providence,” *The Boston Post*, March 10, 1914, 5, accessed June 16, 2014. (Access Newspaper Archive database); “Tony Adds A Dime To Help Fund,” *The Boston Post*, March 17, 1914, 8, accessed June 16, 2014. (Access Newspaper Archive database).

Mollie, Tony and Waddy must have heard of all the work the children of Greater Boston are doing to see that they come to Franklin Park. These very nice bows were made especially for your benefit. Mollie doesn't like to bow very well, as you will notice by the picture, but funny little Tony is almost standing on his head so anxious is he to please.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, on June 6, 1914, the culmination of this media frenzy arrives: Boston raises more than the \$6000 purchase price for the three elephants and over 50,000 children crowd Fenway Park to greet the elephants for their official arrival as the zoo's newest residents.<sup>11</sup>

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It is July 2014. My cab driver gets slightly lost on the way – he's taken tourists here before, he tells me, although he's never been here just for himself.<sup>12</sup> Finally finding the correct entrance into Nairobi National Park, we arrive in a red, dusty parking lot filled with a few dozen mini-buses, as well as a handful of other taxicabs and a few private vehicles. Hurrying to get to the entrance on time – the facility is only open to the public one hour each day from 11 a.m. to noon – I weave past several unsigned outbuildings and sheds and fall in line behind tourists ahead of me following a guide, probably from one of the many package tours of Nairobi's most

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<sup>10</sup> “Thank You For Helping,” Photograph, *The Boston Post*, March 13, 1914, 8, accessed June 16, 2014. (Access Newspaper Archive database); “Will You Have Tea With Us?,” Photograph, *The Boston Post*, March 14, 1914, 6, accessed June 16, 2014. (Access Newspaper Archive database); “How Clever Mollie Rings Up ‘Central’ and Talks,” Photograph, *The Boston Post*, March 16, 1914, 8, accessed June 16, 2014. (Access Newspaper Archive database); Photograph, *The Boston Post*, March 20, 1914, 10, accessed June 16, 2014. (Access Newspaper Archive database).

<sup>11</sup> The added funds allow the zoo to purchase a howdah, a riding platform that will allow people to take rides on the elephants' backs. “\$6500 For Elephants and \$183 For Howdah,” *The Boston Post*, April 25, 1914, 6, accessed June 16, 2014. (Access Newspaper Archive database). See also: “Mollie and Waddy and Tony Coming,” *The Boston Post*, May 27, 1914, 1-2, accessed June 16, 2014. (Access Newspaper Archive database); Hanson, *Animal Attractions*, 67.

<sup>12</sup> Back at my suburban Nairobi homestay my hosts confirm that while many, if not most, of their guests eventually visit the Sheldrick nursery, my hosts have never been there personally, despite living only a mile away and they don't know any local Kenyans who have either. The woman running the homestay playfully teases: “That's something you crazy white people are interested in!” It is a tourist site for Westerners, despite its mission to protect local Kenyan wildlife.



prominent tourist sites. And this, according to Trip Advisor and many guidebooks, is Nairobi, Kenya's #1 rated tourist attraction: the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust's Elephant Nursery.<sup>13</sup>

The nursery is perhaps the most internationally prominent work of the Trust, nursing orphaned and injured infant wild elephants back to health and raising them each for three years in semi-captivity at the nursery and neighboring national park before transferring them to be “re-wilded” in elephant herds in Kenya's ecologically diverse and relatively protected Tsavo National Park.<sup>14</sup> The Kenyan Wildlife Service works with veterinarians to airlift infants from anywhere in Kenya to the nursery where they receive around-the-clock care from keepers who live in barns with them, feeding them every three hours with a mixture of human infant formula (cow's milk being too high in fat to be appropriate for an elephant diet), and taking them on walks through the adjacent national park. Dame Daphne Sheldrick – widow of David Sheldrick, the first park warden at Tsavo National Park and an elephant researcher – pioneered the effort and established the trust in her husband's memory.<sup>15</sup>

The orphaned elephants are grouped by age into artificial “herds” that try to re-create the experience of a normal elephant infant, who would be raised (for life in the case of females and into their teens in the case of males) in the wild in a matriarchal herd of a dozen or so elephants consisting of its mother, aunts, and older sisters. And each day for one hour Sheldrick's orphan herds are walked down to a mound of dirt and a small watering hole where the public can see

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<sup>13</sup> “David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust,” last modified July 23, 2014, Trip Advisor, accessed July 23, 2014, [http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction\\_Review-g294207-d1569686-Reviews-David\\_Sheldrick\\_Wildlife\\_Trust-Nairobi.html](http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g294207-d1569686-Reviews-David_Sheldrick_Wildlife_Trust-Nairobi.html). See also Richard Trillo, *The Rough Guide to Kenya* (DK Publishing, Inc. Rough Guides, 2010), 90, 138-139.

<sup>14</sup> The orphanage also deals with a far smaller number of orphaned rhinoceroses, usually trying to re-introduce them to the wild within a year or so in Nairobi National Park.

<sup>15</sup> For a full account of her life and work see her memoir: Dame Daphne Sheldrick, *Love, Life and Elephants: An African Love Story* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012).

them, photograph them, and most importantly (if the eager pushing and thrusting of the 200 or so people now scattered along the rope line are any indication) touch them.

I arrive as the day's presentation has just begun and the youngest herd of elephants (under a year old) has just finished being fed formula from bottles with large red rubber nipples atop them – what you could accurately term “jumbo”-sized baby bottles! Now the elephants, many no taller than my waist, are playing – rolling in the dust and climbing atop one another – and also being walked by the keepers along the rope line so everyone can get a photo and a chance to touch the leathery, wrinkly, and surprisingly hairy skin of the elephants. A few infants stand quietly, apparently contented while chewing acacia branches. A few are covered in coarse blankets – even with daytime temperatures in the low 70s, it is winter in Kenya and cold enough that an infant elephant not being kept warm by its mother is at risk of developing pneumonia.

After about 25 minutes, the keepers lead the youngest herd away for a walk, while the next herd – older youngsters between ages 1 and 2 – gambols down a nearby hillside. They eagerly jostle each other to get their trunks wrapped around bottles stacked in a wheelbarrow, fighting with the keepers for control while they drink – much like a human toddler struggling with her parents to hold her own sippy cup. This group is more independent of the keepers, wandering about and playing with the water, the dust, and each other while bellowing, rumbling, and farting to the evident delight of the crowds around the rope line.

Throughout all of this, the tourists (all but six of whom by my count are white and – from the sound of their accents – mostly British, Australian, or American) are taking pictures, trying to get close enough to an elephant to touch it, and chatting.

“I’ve now touched a giraffe and an elephant; I don’t think I need to do a safari walk today unless we’re going to see something really different,” sighs one tired-looking American woman.

Four or five teenage boys in identical sports uniforms stand at the back, teasing each other and checking out photos on each other's phones.

A mother dashes around to the far end of the rope line when a gap opens up and she is able to thrust her infant daughter over the rope to pet an elephant wandering in that direction.

An Australian family provides their own narration to a playful spat between two elephants that seem to be trying to knock each other down.

The only thing people don't seem to be doing is paying close attention to the presentation given by the head keeper via a feeble portable loudspeaker. He is dutifully trying to educate the public about a wide range of topics, starting with the history of the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, the harms of ivory poaching on Kenya's elephant population, how the Trust feeds and socializes orphans to be re-introduced into wild herds, and some basics of elephant biology.

While the keeper's delivery is very professional and knowledgeable, it is rather flat in tone, even when he earnestly pleads for audiences to pledge never to buy ivory so as to reduce the demand that leads to poaching. And while the polite audience generally remains distractedly oriented in his direction, he fails to rouse their attention . . . until he starts identifying each individual by name and offering biographical details about them. First, he explains the circumstances that caused each elephant to be orphaned – most because poachers killed their mother, because they had fallen into an abandoned well, or because their mothers had been too old or too young to care properly for an infant. Then he adds details about their personalities. In the first group of elephants, people immediately coo and crowd closer when the keeper explains one female elephant serves as mother/big sister to all the younger elephants, noting how she walks right next to the littlest elephant with her trunk extended in comfort. In the second group, when the keeper introduces one male as the biggest scoundrel and troublemaker in the group,

audience members instantly perk up, pulling out cameras that had been put away to photograph this rascalion. Indeed, after the presentation is over three British women are delighted when they spot this particular elephant making a break for the now nearly empty rope line and ducking underneath to get to the more succulent vegetation in the trust's garden beyond.

Overall, the mood of the encounter seems to be one of earnest distraction – people seeking something cute, fun, and socially worthy they can take their children to as a tourist destination in a city intensely stressful to travel around in that has the (somewhat undeserved) nickname “Nai-robbery.”<sup>16</sup> Any feelings of tragedy surrounding the orphaning of elephants by human poaching and habitat loss seem muted, not quite at the forefront of the experience – at least based on reading people's expressions and eavesdropping on their conversations as they leave. Impressed as people are by the work of the nursery, there is a sense of “cross it off the list, get back on the van” permeating most of the crowd as we walk out.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The stress to get away from the city was especially palpable that day as Nairobi had shut down for “Saba Saba” – the 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary of a major clash between protestors and government troops. Current leaders of the opposition party marked the anniversary with a rally to protest government policy on homeland security, with Kenya recently having been racked by violent attacks by Islamic militants from neighboring Somalia and by tribal in-fighting. Because of concern the rally would be used as a pretense to manufacture violence, local schools closed for the day and embassies warned foreign nationals from traveling in Nairobi.

And Kenya's general reputation as having a lack of security remains a major concern, since the country depends on tourism (especially to see wildlife) for more than \$1 billion annually in foreign currency revenue, with tourism employing more than 1 million Kenyans in the coastal area of the country alone. Annual tourist visits officially have fallen by a sixth from their peak of 1.8 million in 2011. However, some travel companies think the government has fudged these statistics, stating their surveys indicate travel to various parts of the country is actually down as much as 20 to 50 percent. See: “Travel company says Kenya ‘must be joking’ about tourism figures,” Reuters, July 28, 2014, accessed on July 28, 2014, <http://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFKBN0FX12W20140728>; Joseph Burit, “Al-Qaeda-Linked Raids Crush Kenya's Coastal Tourism Industry,” Bloomberg News, July 28, 2014, accessed July 28, 2014, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-07-27/al-qaeda-linked-attacks-crush-kenya-s-coastal-tourism-industry.html>.

<sup>17</sup> And if the comments on Trip Advisor are a fair indication, this seems to be the mood among many visitors, even those who admire the overall work of the Trust and its orphanage.

But not for everyone – and this is why the Trust works so hard to build interest in this hour-long encounter. Because the daily session with the public is the primary place the Trust makes an in-person pitch for Western donors to support their elephants, explaining it costs \$900 per month to care for each elephant but asking people to consider becoming “foster parents” for just \$50 per month. The keepers note that in addition to a monthly “Keeper’s Diary” emailed to donors with observations and news about their particular adoptee, donors will also have the opportunity to come back for a visit some evening, where they can have the privilege of seeing their adopted elephant bed down for the night in the barns.<sup>18</sup>

And the pitch works. As I walk out at least 20 or so people – mostly families that have brought children along – crowd around the adoption table, filling out donor forms on clipboards, many with a sense of excitement on their faces. On the table are stacks of small photos of each potential adoptee – almost like trading cards – for people to take as immediate evidence they have become foster parents. At a multi-paneled display with photos and detailed biographies of the elephants, mothers consult with their children, asking which elephant they want their family to adopt and debating whether Kithaka, Barsilinga, or Ngasha is really the elephant for them.

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Some representative samples from TripAdvisor reviews around the time of my visit include: from a British man, “If place is crowded, employees are more careful, but if you are first to show up it’s easier to get close with babies and take selfies. :)”; from an Australian woman, “It pays to get a good spot near the fence if you want to get some great photos. Well worth a visit and very child friendly;” from an unnamed contributor, “. . . it felt cramped crowded and we were jostled around. So honestly, I won’t go back again but I understand it’s [sic] aim is not tourism so I get that. If you are around Nairobi, yeah it’s something you should do;” from a Turkish visitor, “It is a nice project to protect these lovely animals;” and a woman from the United Arab Emirates, “I wish they were a bit more organised [sic] with the gift shops - they would earn so much more - but you can adopt an orphan and support the project.” “David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust,” last modified July 23, 2014, Trip Advisor, accessed on July 23, 2014, [http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction\\_Review-g294207-d1569686-Reviews-or10-David\\_Sheldrick\\_Wildlife\\_Trust-Nairobi.html#REVIEWS](http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g294207-d1569686-Reviews-or10-David_Sheldrick_Wildlife_Trust-Nairobi.html#REVIEWS).

<sup>18</sup> For more details, see: “Fostering Program,” last modified 2012, The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, accessed May 27, 2014, <http://www.sheldrickwildlifetrust.org/asp/fostering.asp>.

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Two scenes separated by a hundred years. True, there are several important differences. In the latter, the focus is on trying to re-create to the best extent possible the “natural” conditions of elephant life. In the former, the focus is on presenting elephants as an idealized animal version of a Western upper middle class human family. In the former, the elephants have been brought halfway around the world to be seen by people. In the latter, people have come from around the world to see the elephants.

And yet what is perhaps more striking are the similarities between these two scenes. In both, elephants are popular and beloved by people – valued both for their individual personalities and as spectacles. In both there is a tension between spectacle and intimacy – a desire among people to feel awe at animals’ exotic nature and also to feel a sense of emotional kinship with the elephants. In both, organizations are trying to cultivate elephant personalities through stories and biographies to leverage public financial support. And in both, elephants are celebrities.

Yet the form of elephant celebrity during the last century has had an interesting journey. Elephants have always been popular creatures throughout human history, and in the modern mass media era they have long been celebrity characters in different media. But at the start of the twentieth century, the longstanding celebrity of wild elephants and what they represented was what supported the celebrity of individual elephants like Mollie, Tony, and Waddy. But programs like the Sheldrick Trust’s adoption program show how the paradigm had shifted by the start of the twenty-first century: now the celebrity of individual elephants (both wild and captive) is being used to help support the celebrity of elephants in the wild.

This chapter will consider this recent development in African elephant celebrity to examine how people interested in conservation try to produce individual elephant stars in the

hopes of saving the overall species. First, we will consider why elephants are so adaptable to being animal celebrities. Through their large size and trunks, their ivory, and their natural habitat, African elephants long been commodified in media as spectacles and as symbols of mythic ideas of an Edenic African wild. And in the latter part of the twentieth century new ideas about elephants as exemplars of animal emotional intelligence also became part of their celebrity image thanks to elephant scientists deliberately introducing this information into popular media.

Second, we will consider how – using methods of modern ethology and behavioral ecology to identify and follow known individual elephants – elephant conservation groups like the Sheldrick Trust began to turn semi-wild and wild elephants into the individual media sensations that captive elephants had previously been. This strategy has ended up being quite successful at drawing Western public attention to the individual elephant populations and rehabilitation centers served by these conservation organizations. But it also has presented challenges for these advocates. First, it requires significant investment of time and resources to produce a constant, engaging output of narratives and celebrity elephant characters. Second, it requires advocates to adapt to a constantly evolving set of new media formats and platforms. And finally, it requires advocates to regularly re-evaluate which audiences they need to reach in order to try to effect successful global elephant conservation.

In the end, one question remains unanswered: will celebrity for named individual elephants be enough ultimately to arrest the decline of African elephants as an overall species? The stakes are incredibly high. Consider that during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, even as elephants remained consistently popular with the public, their welfare as a species plummeted precipitously. When the Boston Zoo was acquiring Mollie, Waddy, and Tony, hunters were already slaughtering more than 65,000 African elephants annually to ship 1,000 tons of ivory a year onto the global market,

especially in response to then heightened consumer demand for ivory for use in piano keys and billiard balls.<sup>19</sup> This slaughter continued largely unabated throughout the last century. Whereas a mid-20<sup>th</sup> century African elephant population census was estimated to be at least 1.3 million, today the remaining wild population is estimated to be between only 400,000 and 650,000.<sup>20</sup> So hoping the celebrity of elephants as a species would be enough to save them clearly has not worked. Hence we have arrived at this gambit by conservation groups like the Sheldrick Trust to try to change the public's affections and values towards named individual elephants – to see what is in the power of a name and whether conservation benefits when we know elephants as Kithaka, Barsilinga, or Ngasha rather than as an abstract species. These groups are trying to produce elephant celebrity and trying to see if ultimately we can give back to elephants as much as we have received in the history of human-elephant relationships.

### **From Hannibal to Horton**

The elephants at the Boston Zoo in 1914 were so popular with the public because even by then elephants were already mass media celebrities, known from popular appearances in circuses and vaudeville, as characters in popular safari narratives, as graphic symbols, as children's book characters, and as popular subjects of the then-budding medium of cinema – circus elephants had appeared on film at least as early as 1897 in the short film “Trick Elephants.”<sup>21</sup> And this celebrity for elephants generally and for specific elephant characters has continued in mass media throughout the last hundred years up to the time of my visit to the Sheldrick Trust.

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<sup>19</sup> Martin Meredith, *Elephant Destiny: Biography of an Endangered Species* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), 62, 108-112.

<sup>20</sup> Alex Shoumatoff, “Agony and Ivory,” *Vanity Fair*, online edition, August 1, 2011, accessed on November 1, 2014, <http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2011/08/elephants-201108>.

<sup>21</sup> “Trick Elephants,” directed by James H. White (Menlo Park, NJ: Edison Manufacturing Company, 1897). As documented at Internet Movie Database (IMDB), accessed May 1, 2015, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0217106/>.



Examples of celebrity elephant characters featured in media throughout American history abound. For example, the circus elephant Jumbo in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century lent his name to a new addition to the English lexicon: *jumbo* – indicating enormous size.<sup>22</sup> An acquisition of the London Zoo, who had been desperate to acquire the majesty of African elephants as opposed to the smaller Asian elephants, Jumbo became the largest known elephant in captivity and a beloved British icon – with the British people regularly bringing him gifts of liquor and pastries (sometimes unfortunately laced with hat pins), enjoying rides on his back, and deeming him “the children’s friend.”<sup>23</sup> In 1881, U.S. circus impresario P.T. Barnum negotiated the purchase of Jumbo from the London Zoo, despite (or more likely because of) being warned by his sales agent that: “Jumbo is as popular as the Prince of Wales . . . All England would be outraged at the idea [of selling him]; he is an English institution and is part of the national glory. You might as well think of buying Nelson’s Column.”<sup>24</sup> Barnum leveraged the public outrage on one side of the Atlantic and curiosity on the other about acquiring such a grand British national institution for America into an international media sensation, whose coverage in newspapers overshadowed other contemporaneous events like the attempted assassination of Queen Victoria.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the word is a noun in and of itself, although in compound form it is used “to distinguish things of very large size.” “jumbo, n.,” last modified September 2014, *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, Accessed on November 18, 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Chambers, *Jumbo: This Being the True Story of the Greatest Elephant in the World* (Hanover, NH: Steerforth Press, 2008), 1<sup>st</sup> U.S. Edition, 7, 24, 45-46, 64-65, 72, 78, 90.

<sup>24</sup> As quoted in *Ibid.*, 119. Mark Twain also supports this account of Barnum’s conversation about Jumbo and his exploitation of media interest in the sale to raise publicity for his circus. Mark Twain, *Following the Equator: A Journey Around the World* (Hartford: The American Publishing Company, 1898), online edition, 639-642. Available online at Google Books.

<sup>25</sup> The London Zoo, which was motivated apparently by a desire to be rid of Jumbo’s personal keeper, welcomed the sale, even as members of its own board did not. Beyond the loss of a troublesome employee, the zoo enjoyed the media attention, seeing attendance surge to the point that more than 24,000 onlookers a day visited the zoo in the last weeks of Jumbo’s residency in London (compared to a few hundred on a normal day). The transaction did not work out quite as well for Barnum, since Jumbo was struck and killed by a train car a few years after arriving in

Elephants as a species were also celebrity characters in many safari narratives that enjoyed popular acclaim in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Elephant stories instantly afforded distinction to the hunter writing the tale because of their supposed danger and hunters went out of their way to reify popular visions of elephants as imposing creatures. For example, in his hunting account Theodore Roosevelt observed:

No other animal, not the lion himself, is so constant a theme of talk, and a subject of such unflagging interest round the camp-fires of African hunters and in the native villages of the African wilderness, as the elephant . . . Its huge bulk, its singular form, the value of its ivory, its great intelligence—in which it is only matched, if at all, by the highest apes, and possibly by one or two of the highest carnivores—and its varied habits, all combine to give it an interest such as attaches to no other living creature below the rank of man.<sup>26</sup>

Other big-game hunter-authors similarly popularized elephants in their safari accounts while also using them to burnish their own reputation as hunters. For example, C.H. Stigand wrote that elephant hunting is “vastly superior to all other big game shooting;” Richard Tjader reinforced the idea that the elephant is the “King of Beasts” because it is “the largest and strongest land animal [and] probably also the most intelligent;” while hunter Roualeyn Gordon-Cumming played up the might of the elephants by noting that their fortitude forced him to shoot multiple times to kill them, so that he “often lamented having to inflict so many wounds on the noble animals.”<sup>27</sup>

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the U.S. But Barnum continued to display his skeleton as part of the circus sideshow. Chambers, *Jumbo*, 119-146. See also: Janet M. Davis, *The Circus Age: Culture & Society Under the American Big Top* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), Plate 4.

<sup>26</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *African Game Trails, an account of the African wanderings of an American hunter-naturalist* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1910), 237.

<sup>27</sup> Chauncy H. Stigand, *Hunting the Elephant in Africa and Other Recollections of Thirteen Years’ Wanderings* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1913), 1; Richard Tjader, *The Big Game of Africa* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1910), 53; Roualeyn Gordon-Cumming, *Five Years of a Hunter’s Life in the Far Interior of South Africa, Volume II* (London: John Murray, 1850), Second Edition, 10.

For a list of additional popular elephant-hunting safari narratives from this era, see Nigel Rothfels, “Killing Elephants: Pathos and Prestige in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Victorian*

By the turn of the twentieth century elephants also enjoyed popular celebrity as graphic images in political symbolism. Indeed, the elephant first became the symbol of the modern Republican Party in the United States in 1874. Of course, the fact that the image was the result of ironic commentary was soon largely forgotten – political cartoonist Thomas Nast drew a cartoon in which Republican voters, scared away from voting their actual party preferences for Ulysses Grant for a third term by continual charges of “Caesarism” from the *New York Herald*, were depicted as a large elephant who was pathetic for being so powerful and yet timid as to be scared of a jackass covered in a lion’s skin (representing the *Herald*).<sup>28</sup> But the elephant as a recognizable popular shorthand for Republicans has remained a part of American media culture up to the present day.

Meanwhile drawings and tales of elephant characters had been and remain staples of children’s literature as well. For example, Rudyard Kipling’s (fictional) folklore in his *Just So Stories* (1912) built upon and reified popular fascination with elephants’ trunks, suggesting the grotesque origin of the appendage as the result of a curious elephant child getting its nose bitten and stretched after getting close to a crocodile on the “great, grey-green, greasy Limpopo River.”<sup>29</sup> And celebrity elephant characters have continued to emerge from children’s literature since then to the present day. The *Babar* series of children’s books about the titular elephant who runs away from the jungle to be civilized in French society before returning to be king of the jungle has enjoyed global popularity. The series authored by French artist Jean de Brunhoff first in 1931 (1933 in an English translation in the U.S. and Britain) has sold more than 12 million

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*Animal Dreams: Representations of Animals in Victorian Literature and Culture*, eds. Deborah D. Morse and Martin A. Danahay (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2007), 56, FT 2.

<sup>28</sup> William Safire, *The new language of politics; a dictionary of catchwords, slogans, and political usage* (New York: Collier Books, 1972), 129-130.

<sup>29</sup> Rudyard Kipling, “The Elephant Child,” in *Just So Stories* (New York: Doubleday Page & Company, 1912), online edition. Accessed through Google Books.

copies globally and sparked a popular recent animated television series, *Babar and the Adventures of Badou*, based off the original books.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, another popular children's book elephant, Dr. Seuss's Horton, who first appeared in book form 1940 and "meant what he said and said what he meant" has been no slouch in celebrity visibility either, remaining in print to this day and spurring an animated short in 1942, a television special in 1970, the Broadway musical *Seussical* in 2000, and a 2008 Jim Carrey movie based off the original books that grossed more than \$150 million at the box office.<sup>31</sup>

And in cinema, and later television, elephants have remained popular characters since their aforementioned first appearance in 1897. A search of the Internet Movie Database (IMDB), one of the largest databases of films in the world, finds that elephants appear as a keyword in reference to 538 films or television programs between 1890 and 2010, holding fairly steady as featuring in some way in at least 50 to 75 productions each decade between 1930 and 1970. Elephants have appeared as the subject and main characters in everything ranging from ethnographic films like *Chang: A Drama of Wilderness* (1927), directed by Merian Cooper who was the famed producer of *King Kong*; to animated children's films like Walt Disney's Academy Award-winning classic *Dumbo* (1941); to episodes of family television programs like the long-running staple zoo program Marlin Perkins' *Wild Kingdom* (1963-1988); to "blue-chip" wildlife

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<sup>30</sup> Stuart Elliott, "A New Coronation for the King of the Elephants," *The New York Times*, November 14, 2012, accessed June 1 2014. (LexisNexis Academic); Adam Gopnik, "Freeing the Elephants," *The New Yorker*, September 22, 2008, accessed July 31, 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/09/22/freeing-the-elephants>; Charles Bremner, "Why Babar the Elephant just can't forget his colonial past," *The Times (London)*, August 8, 2006, accessed August 1, 2014. (LexisNexis Academic).

<sup>31</sup> Dr. Seuss, *Horton Hatches the Egg* (New York: Random House Books for Young Readers, 2004); "Horton Hears a Who!," IMDB.com, accessed July 31, 2014, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0451079/>; "Horton Hatches the Egg," IMDB.com, accessed July 31, 2014, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0198545/>; "Horton Hatches the Egg," IMDB.com, accessed July 31, 2014, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0034870/>; "Seussical," IBDB.com, accessed July 31, 2014, <http://www.ibdb.com/production.php?id=12571>.

documentary specials from companies like National Geographic, the BBC, and Discovery Channel in the 1990s and 2000s. Indeed, elephants are such a staple of animal-related stories in film and television that it was little surprise the Animal Planet television network, focused on animal-themed programming and launched in 1996, featured as its original logo the profile of an elephant next to planet Earth.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, the pervasive celebrity of elephants as graphic imagery and symbols commodified in modern commerce is visible anywhere you turn. A recent Google search of “elephant merchandise” yields elephant imagery appearing on everything from dresses to stickers, piggy banks, computer mousepads, bathrobes, coffee mugs, greeting cards, blankets, jewelry, tattoos, throw pillows, t-shirts, chrome light fixtures, candleholders, tote bags, tabletops, hats, clocks, and bags of peanuts (and that’s just page one of more than 1 million results).<sup>33</sup>

So elephants have long been a part of the American mediaverse as animal celebrities who are useful to tell stories with and whose images and characters instantly convey certain key ideas. The reasons elephants have been so well-adapted to becoming media celebrities especially has to do with their physical nature – specifically their large size, trunks, and ivory – and their location – as the largest creatures in the savannahs and forests of Africa. Together, these advantages have allowed elephants to become media celebrities who can serve as commodified shorthand for tropes and narratives of spectacle and power and of Edenic ideas of “the wild.”

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<sup>32</sup> The logo was abandoned in 2008 when Animal Planet rebranded itself to “shed its soft and furry side” and offer more “extreme” animal-themed programming that appealed to adult male demographics. Adrian Brune, “Animal Planet presents new face to the world,” *PR Week*, January 16, 2008, accessed on May 1, 2015, <http://www.prweek.com/article/1254348/animal-planet-presents-new-face-world>.

<sup>33</sup> “elephant merchandise,” last modified May 1, 2015, Google Search, accessed on May 1, 2015, <https://www.google.com/search?q=elephant+merchandise&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8#q=elephant+merchandise&tbm=shop&spd=12388669962805443089>.

These tropes about elephants emerged from a long history of human-elephant co-existence. Early human contact with elephants is known from elephant drawings appearing in positions of prominence in rock art dating back at least 15,000 to 17,000 years in Font-de-Gaume and Vallon Pont d'Arc in France and in the oldest surviving North African rock art from 6,000 B.C.E. in Chad – although the precise symbolism or meanings behind these drawings has not been established.<sup>34</sup> Elephants also appeared early on in many religious traditions – frequently as symbols of might and divinity – with Asian elephants showing up first in the ancient Hindi texts of Ramayana and Mahabharata from the first millennium B.C.E. Since the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Asian elephants have also featured prominently in Hindi mythology as Ganesh – the elephant god who is son of Shiva and Parvati and the “god of beginnings, remover of obstacles, divinity of intellect and wisdom, and patron of arts and sciences.”<sup>35</sup> Asian elephants later featured in early Buddhist theology, while early Chinese religions saw Asian elephants as *Da Hsiang* – mighty beasts with power over nature. Meanwhile African elephants appeared in early Roman religions, while early Christian practice viewed elephants as “bearers of all infirmities.”<sup>36</sup> In Africa, at least 40 cultures have been known to incorporate African elephants into their imagery and ritualistic practices, again frequently focusing on elephants’ size and power, such as the Zulu who called their chieftains “Great Elephant” into the 19<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>37</sup>

As long as humans have known elephants, the most obvious feature that has stood out about them is their large size. At over six tons, African savannah elephants are the largest living

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<sup>34</sup> Dan Wylie, *Elephant* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 63-79.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid; Heathcote Williams, *Sacred Elephant* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1989), 9-11, 46. For a more comprehensive analysis of Hindi views of Ganesh and his relationship to elephants, see Robert L. Brown, ed., *Ganesh: Studies of an Asian God* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

land animals humans know, with African males reaching up to 13 feet in height at the shoulder.<sup>38</sup> This large size makes elephants quite distinctive visually so that they are instantly recognizable when used in graphic imagery. Moreover, their status as “the largest” animal, makes them the perfect symbol and characterization of might, power, and grandeur.

This association of size and power has been reinforced through humans’ direct lived experience with elephants. For example, the Carthaginian commander Hannibal famously used domesticated African elephants as a form of imposing animal “tank” in the Punic Wars with Rome in the third century B.C.E. And the use of elephants’ size to aid in warfare pre-dates Hannibal. Both the Persians and Indians are recorded as having deployed armored Asian elephants in battles against Alexander the Great in the fourth century B.C.E., while the Ptolemaic Egyptian dynasty deployed African forest elephants in battle against the Seleucids (who used Asian elephants in their armies) in the Third Syrian War in the third century B.C.E.<sup>39</sup> And even while elephants have now disappeared from the modern battlefield, in south Asia humans still

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<sup>38</sup> In popular discourse, people often talk about “elephants” generically, as though there is an *ur*-elephant. There isn’t. Living today are two groups – Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*) and African elephants (*Loxodonta africana*) – representing not just different species but different genera. Both emerged from an order of animals with elongated noses – *Proboscidea* – that evolved approximately 50 million years ago. The now-extinct mammoths and *Elephas*, which includes modern Asian elephants, appeared 10 million years ago and gradually spread all over the world. The genus containing modern African elephants, *Loxodonta*, only appeared 5 million years ago, with African elephants as a species emerging 1.5 million years ago.

And even talking about “the” African elephant glosses over the fact that there are two recognized subspecies – savannah elephants (*Loxodonta africana africana*) and forest elephants (*Loxodonta africana cyclotis*), the latter being much less studied or popularly known than their plains-dwelling relatives and also smaller (males are usually only eight feet in height at the shoulder) and with smaller tusks. Recent studies now suggests they may be genetically distinct enough to be reclassified as separate species. Meredith, *Elephant Destiny*, 134-140; Wylie, *Elephant*; Nadin Rohland, et al., “Genomic DNA Sequences from Mastodon and Woolly Mammoth Reveal Deep Speciation of Forest and Savanna Elephants,” *PLoS Biology* 8(12) (2010): e1000564, doi:10.1371/journal.pbio.1000564; Richard Carrington, *Elephants: A Short Account of their Natural History Evolution and Influence on Mankind* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1959).

<sup>39</sup> Meredith, *Elephant Destiny*, 5-25.

continue to employ Asian elephants' size for use in manual labor and construction – as animal versions of cranes, bulldozers, and other large mechanical equipment.<sup>40</sup>

Humans have also capitalized on elephants' large physical size to serve as sources of popular spectacles. For example, in the first and second centuries A.D., the Romans used elephants as part of triumphal processions and staged animal and gladiatorial games.<sup>41</sup> And on into modern times, elephants have frequently been displayed as symbols of the power of those who possess them. Consider the example of the Boston Zoo's elephants described earlier, where Boston was convinced having elephants would automatically confer prestige and honor on the city. Or consider the use of elephants in circuses in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, where at their peak 98 traveling circuses in the United States often featured an "elephant parade" to announce their arrival in town. As historian Janet Davis notes, the large elephants presented people with a spectacle of exoticism and "unsettling power" that disrupted their sense of the world – offering a liminal spectacle of neither the wild nor domestication.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Today, there are an estimated 14,000 Asian elephants in captivity in South Asia, primarily in Myanmar, India, and Thailand. In addition to employment as tools and vehicles for construction, elephants also serve in many religious and cultural rituals, as they have been in India since 4500 B.C.E. Fred Kurt, Khyne U Mar, and Marion E. Garaï, "Giants in Chains," in *Elephants and Ethics: Toward a Morality of Coexistence*, eds. Christen Wemmer and Catherine A Christen (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 327-345. See also: Dhriti K. Lahiri Choudhury, "Elephants and People in India," in *Elephants and Ethics: Toward a Morality of Coexistence*, eds. Christen Wemmer and Catherine A Christen (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 149-166.

<sup>41</sup> Meredith, *Elephant Destiny*.

<sup>42</sup> Davis, *The Circus Age*, xiii, 7, 14, 148-150, 227-229.

Even in death circus elephants continued to serve as spectacles for the public whereby people could exact feelings of control in fantasies of revenge. "Rogue" circus elephants that misbehaved and/or killed trainers or circus-goers frequently were killed in public "executions" staged as mock trials to convict them of their "crimes." Killings took the form of hangings, firing squads, and many other gruesome execution methods. At least 36 circus elephants were publicly killed in the United States between 1880 and 1929. Amy L. Wood, "'Killing the Elephant': Murderous Beasts and the Thrill of Retribution, 1885-1930," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and*



Given this long history of humans witnessing elephants' great size and power, it is no surprise celebrity media finds them such useful symbols of might and grandeur. For example films have long deployed elephants as symbols of might. *Chang*, one of the top five Paramount pictures of 1927, creates a "melodrama of the wild" – as its promotional materials billed it – the ultimate story of man against nature. Throughout the tale of a village ravaged by a herd of "giant Chang!," or elephants, the filmmakers use the might and power of elephants as symbol for the power of nature man must overcome. Elephants are the "dread destroyers" and only by taming them at the end is human civilization able to survive another day in the battle against nature.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, animation has long used elephants' might and size as the focus of attention on their characters, with animated shorts with titles like *Terror on the Midway* (1942), *Jerry and Jumbo* (1953), or *Two-Ton Baby Sitter* (1960) being frequent subjects of shorts during the middle of the twentieth century.

Moreover, elephants' physicality in the form of their trunks has also made them well-adapted for use as media celebrities. The trunk is a multi-purpose, prehensile arm-like organ that can manipulate food and objects (including in the case of some captive elephants paint brushes and harmonicas), suck up water, touch other elephants, and otherwise help elephants explore their environments and express themselves.<sup>44</sup> These capabilities make elephants seem unusual

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*Progressive Era* 11(3) (2012): 405-444. See also: *Electrocuting an Elephant*, directed by Thomas Edison (1903; New York: Kino, 2005), DVD.

<sup>43</sup> *Chang*, directed by Merian C. Cooper and Ernest S. Shoedsack (1927; Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, Milestone Film and Video, 2005), DVD.

<sup>44</sup> For an example of media (and public) fascination with elephants painting with their trunks, see: Jason G. Goldman, "Creativity: The weird and wonderful art of animals," BBC News, July 24, 2014, accessed August 1, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20140723-are-we-the-only-creative-species>. For a zoo-produced story on an elephant playing a harmonica, see: "Shanthi, the National Zoo's Musical Elephant, Plays the Harmonica," last modified on May 1, 2012, YouTube, Smithsonian's National Zoo, Accessed on May 2, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FgCu84NPbnw>.

compared to other animals. Indeed, elephant expert Cynthia Moss has surmised that the trunk is the aspect of elephant-ness that most often fascinates people and, in her view, most gives elephants their celebrity status compared to other animals of nearly similar size, endangered status, or from the same ecological regions.<sup>45</sup>

And the trunk also helps makes elephant useful celebrities in media. For starters, it gives elephants a unique physical profile – there is no other living creature with a similar appendage – and so the trunk makes the image of the elephant even more recognizable visually. The multi-functional expressiveness of the trunk also makes elephants useful characters with which to tell visual stories, since it provides the anthropomorphic equivalent of a hand – allowing the animal character to act more plausibly in human-like ways. Consider the elephant characters in the aforementioned classic film *Dumbo*. While it is Dumbo’s big ears that are the focus of his character – causing him ridicule before allowing him to fly – it is his trunk that allows Disney to humanize the character for audiences. At times, Dumbo uses his trunk to hold his mother’s trunk like a human child would hold its mother’s hand – emphasizing for audiences the character’s youth and inexperience – and at other times he uses the trunk like a gun to shoot peanuts in gleeful revenge at the other elephants. Meanwhile, Dumbo’s mother, Mrs. Jumbo, uses her trunk to seem more like a human mother, at times cradling Dumbo in it and another time using it spank an ill-behaved human.<sup>46</sup> With such an expressive instrument to create an anthropomorphic character it is small wonder that elephants have featured in more than 120 animated cartoons in the last century, according to IMDB.

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<sup>45</sup> Cynthia Moss. Personal interview with author. June 19, 2014.

<sup>46</sup> *Dumbo*, directed by Samuel Armstrong, et al. (1941; Burbank: Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment, 2011), Blu-Ray.

The final physical source of elephants' advantages in becoming an animal media celebrity is their tusks and the ivory trade, which ironically is also the primary reason elephants have become an endangered species. Most ivory in global circulation comes from elephants' tusks, which are elephants' modified lateral incisor teeth made of dentin that continually grows from their mouth over the course of their life.<sup>47</sup> As a material, ivory endures, can be used in many different types of products, and is malleable without splintering, making it highly valued among craftsmen in many societies. A network of ivory trading developed across Africa, Asia, and Europe as early as 5,000 B.C.E., forming a significant basis of the luxury and decorative economies of the early Egyptians, Syrians, Hebrews, Greeks, Persians, and Romans.<sup>48</sup> Ivory became and has remained a symbol of wealth and power, as seen, for example, in the Old Testament where the splendor of King Solomon's riches is capped by his possession of a "great throne of ivory."<sup>49</sup>

People's rapacious demand for ivory quickly devastated elephant populations and transformed African landscapes, with the Romans complaining as early as 77 A.D. that ivory was in short supply due to the almost complete extirpation of African elephants in north Africa.<sup>50</sup> And the demand for ivory rarely has slackened since. Between 1500 and 1700 A.D. more than

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<sup>47</sup> Boyd Welsch, et al., "Tusk Extraction in the African Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*)," *Journal of Zoo and Wildlife Medicine* 20(4) (1989): 446-453. Certainly a few other animals have ivory tusks – such as the aquatic Narwhal (*Monodon monoceros*) or Warthogs (*Phacochoerus africanus*) – but elephants' tusks stand out in the ivory market for their immense size.

<sup>48</sup> James Mellon, *The African Hunter* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975).

<sup>49</sup> 2 Chronicles 9:17, King James Version.

<sup>50</sup> C. Plinius Secundus, "The docilitie of Elephants," in *The Historie of the World, Book VIII*, trans. Philemon Holland (London: Adam Flip, 1601), unpaginated online edition, Chapter 3, accessed June 1, 2014, <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/holland/pliny8.html>. "And yet of late daies, for great scarcitie & want of the right teeth, men have been glad to cut and saw [elephants'] bones into plates, and make yvorie thereof. For hardly can wee now come by teeth of any bignesse, unlesse wee have them out of India. For all the rest that might bee gotten in this part of the world betweene us and them, hath been employed in superfluties onely, and served for wanton toies."

100 tons of ivory left Africa annually – representing the deaths of at least 10,000 African elephants a year (not including infants and other family members who may have perished as a result of the loss of the slaughtered elephants) – with India also exporting over 250 tons of ivory from Asian elephants annually at the same time.<sup>51</sup> Into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the global ivory trade continued to accelerate, with Britain alone importing 260 tons annually by the 1830s, after the price for ivory increased ten-fold over 50 years.<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile, the value of all this ivory changed people’s relationship with living elephants, since the varying length and size of elephants’ tusks helped to differentiate the value of individual elephants to hunters, making “tuskers” – older males with especially large tusks – the most valued of all elephants. In fact the size of old elephants’ tusks lent them an almost mythological sense of honor and grandeur, since it was assumed surviving so long without being killed by hunters meant a particular elephant was especially brave or crafty.<sup>53</sup> With the ivory of all elephants’ tusks such a valuable commodity throughout human history, by association elephants have long been connected with themes of prestige, wealth, and a sense of the elite – a symbolism that also makes them especially well-adapted for use in many different types of narratives and media throughout history.

Beyond their physicality lending associations with themes of power and prestige, the other major factor that has made African elephants so well adapted for use in a variety of media has been their location in Africa. Since the days of big game safaris by colonial visitors, Western

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<sup>51</sup> Wylie, *Elephant*, 155.

<sup>52</sup> Meredith, *Elephant Destiny*, 62, 108-112.

<sup>53</sup> For examples of this see: Mellon, *The African Hunter*.

In extreme cases, African elephants’ tusks potentially can grow to over 100 kilograms per pair from the largest bulls, but hunting pressure has reduced the average size of elephant tusks and now is even starting to select for a “tuskless” gene among African elephants. E.J. Milner-Gulland and Ruth Mace, “The Impact of the Ivory Trade on the African Elephant *Loxodonta africana* Population as Assessed by Data from the Trade,” *Biological Conservation* 55 (1991): 215-229; H. Jachmann, et al., “Tusklessness in African elephants: a future trend,” *Journal of African Ecology* 33 (1995): 230-235.

media and culture have long constructed Africa as “the Other” – an imagined landscape still largely composed of an Edenic and somewhat people-less wild (or at least a wild without “civilized” people).<sup>54</sup>

For example, safari narratives frequently identified Africa either as the “dark continent” (in contrast to Antarctica’s construction as the “white continent,” a moniker discussed in my next chapter) – filled with danger, mystery, and foreboding black natives – or else as the “unspoiled continent” – a paradise landscape apparently made for sportsmen.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, in his well-known account of his year-long safari through Africa in 1910, Theodore Roosevelt writes: “Continually I met men with experiences in their past lives which showed how close the country was to those primitive conditions in which warfare with wild beasts was one of the main features of man’s existence.”<sup>56</sup>

This problematic vision still persists in modified form in popular media today, allowing Western audiences to excise local communities from their understanding of the place and making

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<sup>54</sup> Gregg Mitman, *Reel Nature: America’s Romance with Wildlife on Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 180-202.

<sup>55</sup> This construction persisted throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century in many hunters’ and white colonials’ constructions of Africa. For example, see: Peter H. Beard, *The End of the Game* (New York: Viking Press, 1965), Pp. 4.

Beard goes on to portray the African wilderness in feminized terms, a trope that Carolyn Merchant has identified as being common in many men’s constructions of the American wilderness as well. Merchant notes that men frequently view land as a virginal female in need of being conquered. In Beard’s case, he talks of the ambitious men who came to Africa to “court her.” Carolyn Merchant, *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 2, 22, 103-104.

<sup>56</sup> Roosevelt, *African Game Trails*, 227.

Roosevelt’s expedition took more than 11,000 specimens. In addition to this popular safari narrative of this safari entering American discourse about Africa, Roosevelt’s bagged specimens -- including elephants – became the centerpieces of the American Museum of Natural History’s Hall of African Mammals in New York City, thereby further shaping Americans’ perceptions of Africa as a continent filled with nothing but wildlife. Mitman, *Reel Nature*, 5. See also Stephen C. Quinn, *Windows on Nature: The Great Habitat Dioramas of the American Museum of Natural History* (New York: American Museum of Natural History/Harry N. Abrams, 2006).

it easier for colonial and post-colonial Western governments and organizations to believe they can impose their will on the management of Africa's wildlife and economies.<sup>57</sup> Such a view of "the wild" and mankind existing in separate frames is in fact all too common to many constructions of wild animals, as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Three with people's constructions of wolves.<sup>58</sup>

But despite its inaccuracy, the fact that elephants are the largest inhabitants of this supposedly mythic Eden makes them inextricably intertwined in media narratives with a vision of Africa as "the wild," which in turn makes them attractive candidates for media celebrity.

For example, many hunters have used elephants as symbols of a romanticized notion of an Africa disappearing as African colonies (and in later decades independent nations) rapidly "civilized." The big game hunter Arthur Neumann, for example, opined that elephants' "continued existence is incompatible with the advance of civilisation [sic]" except perhaps limited to reserves "where effective control can be exercised alike over natives and Europeans."<sup>59</sup> In these narratives the elephant (in arguments similar to those made in the same time period about the American bison and the American West) would continually recede over the

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<sup>57</sup> Ishita Sinha Roy, "Worlds Apart: nation-branding on the National Geographic Channel," *Media, Culture & Society* 29(4) (2007): 569-593; Dan Brockington, "Powerful environmentalisms: conservation, celebrity and capitalism," *Media, Culture & Society* 30(4) (2008): 551-568.

<sup>58</sup> A great many of the stories about elephants in Western popular media focus more upon African elephants than Asian elephants. This raises a question as to whether there being so many Asian elephants living in captivity as domesticated workers in close proximity with people makes them seem less interesting as story subjects for a Western imagination with a long history of seeing elephants only as "wild" creatures.

<sup>59</sup> Arthur H. Neumann, *Elephant-hunting in East Equatorial Africa: being an account of three years' ivory-hunting under Mount Kenia and among the Ndorobo savages of the Lorogi Mountains, including a trip to the north end of Lake Rudolph* (London: Rowland Ward, 1898), viii.

horizons of nostalgia, since the end of the “wild” was inevitable and the elephant was so linked with notions of the African wild that its survival was considered impossible.

In another example, during later debates about how best to stop the decline of elephant populations in response to ivory poaching in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a condescending and exasperated Ian Parker, himself a former hunter and influential wildlife manager, argued in his memoir that the species could survive just fine as long as people abandoned the fantasy elephants could exist in hybrid spaces of people and animals. “A million elephant [sic] may well be doomed to disappear, but this will be of little consequence to the survival of the species if a quarter of a million survive in a series of parks.”<sup>60</sup> His point was that, in his view, African elephants could only persist in people-less landscapes but that Africa had plenty such protected spaces to offer.

Similarly, popular media like wildlife documentary specials have long continued to maintain constructions of Africa as a wild landscape of people-less nature, which by extension uses elephants as symbols of that Edenic landscape. For example, the Discovery Channel’s IMAX film *Africa’s Elephant Kingdom* begins with panoramic visions of lush vegetation and waterfalls in Amboseli National Park in Kenya, seeming to imply that this is the real and only landscape of Kenya and Africa. Finally focusing in on an elephant herd, the narration underscores this sense of being in a lost Eden by saying: “In all the world there is no where else like this. Here in this place called Kenya the forest, water, and grass give protection to us all.”<sup>61</sup>

In another example, the National Geographic special *Survivors of the Skeleton Coast*, while noting the presence of human communities near elephant communities and the potential

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<sup>60</sup> Ian Parker and Mohamed Armin, *Ivory Crisis* (London: Chatto & Windus, The Hogarth Press, 1983), 179.

<sup>61</sup> *Africa’s Elephant Kingdom*, directed by Michael Caulfield (1998; Silver Springs, MD: Discovery Channel Pictures Productions, 2001), DVD.

for human-elephant conflicts, nevertheless profiles wildlife filmmakers following elephants as able to enjoy feeling “closer to nature here [in Namibia] than any place in the world.”<sup>62</sup> Again, the idea is that being out with elephants is to be away from people and in a privileged world of nature. And since Eden is such a powerful trope, useful in so many different types of narratives, elephants’ association with this trope makes them very adaptable to lots of different media.

So all these factors – elephants’ size, trunks, ivory, and geographic location – give African elephants the association with spectacle and power and with myths of an Edenic wild that help to explain why they are so well-adapted to being modern celebrities. But even with this longstanding celebrity, by the second half of twentieth century one fact about African elephants was clear: African elephant populations were collapsing. Trophy hunting and the general ivory trade had significantly depleted elephant numbers prior to the 1960s. And independence in some African nations soon led to armed conflicts, with the ivory trade serving as a major source of funding for supplying illegal arms to these conflicts.<sup>63</sup> Meanwhile, a rapidly developing Asian middle and upper class – first in Japan and more recently in China – eager to attain luxury symbols of upward mobility provided an even larger global market for ivory.<sup>64</sup> By the 1970s and 1980s, the elephant crisis reached a peak, with 50 percent of all extant African elephants killed between 1979 and 1989.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Survivors of the Skeleton Coast*, directed Des and Jen Bartlett (1993; Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2007), DVD.

<sup>63</sup> Ronald Orenstein, *Ivory, Horn, and Blood: Behind the Elephant and Rhinoceros Poaching Crisis* (Buffalo, NY: Firefly Books, 2013), 47.

<sup>64</sup> For more on the ivory trade in Japan in the 1980s, see: Douglas Chadwick, *The Fate of the Elephant* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1992). For information about the transition of the recent ivory trade to focus on China, see: Orenstein, *Ivory, Horn, and Blood*.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

And according to the most recent report from Save the Elephants, another 20 percent of the remaining African elephant population – 100,000 out of 500,000 – may have since been lost between 2010 and 2012. *Annual Report 2014*, Save the Elephants (Nairobi, Kenya: Save the



Thus, celebrity status for the species as a whole was not enough to guarantee elephants' continued survival in the wild. Into this situation emerged several leading elephant scientists and conservation groups who gradually developed a different form of celebrity for wild elephants: one based on the celebrity of individuals. In a sense, this was nothing new, since individual captive elephants had long been popular media celebrities – think of Jumbo, Mollie, Tony, and Waddy. But the advent of studies of wild elephant social structures allowed scientists in the 1960s and 1970s to begin identifying and photographing wild elephants as distinct individuals, recognizable by sight via their size, ear shape, and tusks. And the longitudinal nature of many of these studies meant the elephants came to be known as members of communities, with their own personalities, relationships, and complicated biographies and histories. Thus individual wild elephants had the potential to become media stars in a way heretofore unknown.

But stardom for individual wild and rehabilitated elephants has only been possible because elephant scientists and related conservation groups choose to invest the significant time and effort beyond their basic research or rehabilitation work necessary to create and to produce these media narratives and characters. And even if conservation advocates are willing to commit the resources to building this support, at least two challenges still confront this strategy: 1) the need for constant adaptation to newly evolving media platforms and 2) the uncertainty of how to reach the appropriate audiences who most affect the odds of African elephants' survival. At one level, the payoff for such work has been clear – at least in terms of building broad public support in the West for their projects and study elephant populations. At the broader level, the effectiveness of this strategy for the conservation of the species as a whole remains to be seen.

So how did this celebrity for individual wild elephants first begin to get produced? It started when elephant scientists raised their own media profile with Western audiences, which in turn raised the profile of their conservation organizations and their study elephants.

### **The Family Who Live With Elephants**

Elephant scientists had occasionally branched out into working with media even as far back as the mid-twentieth century. For example, in 1951 David Sheldrick, mentioned at the start of the chapter as the first warden of Tsavo National Park in Kenya and namesake of the Sheldrick Trust, served as a technical expert about elephants and wildlife on *Where No Vultures Fly*, a popular British film inspired by the work of conservationist Mervyn Cowie, which tried to generate sympathy for wild elephants by condemning the senselessness of the ivory trade.<sup>66</sup>

And serving as scientific consultant for films and television continued to remain an important role both for supporting elephant scientists' work and building their reputations throughout the rest of the century. Indeed, of the 538 films or television programs between 1890 and 2010 listed in the Internet Movie Database (IMDB) that contain "elephants" as a keyword in some capacity, 38 list a scientific or technical advisor of some kind.<sup>67</sup> And in recent decades, only a handful of elephant scientists and conservation organizations have come to dominate this role in popular cinema and wildlife television, with corresponding benefits for their own reputations: Cynthia Moss and the Amboseli Trust for Elephants in Kenya served as consultant

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<sup>66</sup> For example, the protagonist, Bob Payton, bemoans of the continuous big game hunting: "I've had a bellyful of killing." *Where No Vultures Fly*, directed by Harry Watt. (1951; London: Optimum Releasing, 2009), DVD. Sheldrick's role working on the film is mentioned in Sheldrick, *Love, Life and Elephants*.

<sup>67</sup> There are almost assuredly countless more films that deal with elephants in some way and probably several more that had scientific advisers. However, IMDB, which is the world's largest film database, is largely dependent on user-generated information in terms of keyword tagging. Still, it is one of the best available resources for historical film information.

on 10 projects listed in IMDB; the Shamwari Rehabilitation Center in South Africa, the Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee, and National Zoo in Washington, D.C. each served as consultants on four projects; and Iain Douglas-Hamilton and family, who founded the group Save the Elephants, and the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust each served as consultants on three projects.

But in addition to merely advising or consulting with media, in the 1970s and 1980s many elephant scientists – as historian of science Gregg Mitman has detailed – started to create their own media celebrity and actively tried to leverage this celebrity into conservation advocacy on behalf of elephants.<sup>68</sup> Their celebrity started in memoirs and television programs that focused on the work of these scientists and in the process it also began to introduce as individuals the elephants they were studying. Indeed, what clearly made so many of these accounts popular with the public was that they offered a vicarious experience of what it would be like to know wild animals as individual personalities and to be able to touch them, crossing Derrida’s “abyssal rupture” and bridging the divide between human and non-human animals.

Popular interest in memoirs and wildlife television portraying field biologists had started to explode in the 1960s with Jane Goodall’s behavioral research with chimpanzees in Gombe Stream National Park in Tanzania. Louis Leakey, Goodall’s mentor, worked with National Geographic to create magazine articles and television films that both helped fund her work and helped build popular interest in it. Indeed, a single image from National Geographic’s 1965 film *Miss Goodall and the Wild Chimpanzees* rocketed Goodall into international superstardom – the scene where Goodall reaches out and touches finger to finger with the infant chimpanzee Flint – a moment of contact and seeming inter-species understanding between humanity and “the Other”

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<sup>68</sup> Gregg Mitman, “Pachyderm Personalities: The Media of Science, Politics, and Conservation,” in *Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, eds. Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 175-195.

that was later paralleled (if unintentionally) in the sci-fi blockbuster *E.T. – The Extra-Terrestrial*, when Elliott touches E.T.’s glowing finger.<sup>69</sup>

Prior to such narratives of field scientists appearing, anyone – tourist, zoo-goer, or cinema-goer alike – could have seen wild animals. But as Donna Haraway notes, these new images of science presented as attainable the fantasy that people could have an even more intimate relationship with living wild animals, one where they could truly know them through the intimacy of touch.<sup>70</sup> They suggested that animals could reach out to us – that we would not just see other animals but be seen by them and share moments of understanding.<sup>71</sup>

Furthermore, in her autobiographical memoirs aimed at a lay audience – most notably *In the Shadow of Man* and its sequel *Through a Window: My Thirty Years with the Chimpanzees of Gombe* – Goodall helped establish a standard for this genre of field memoir, which gave immersive details of named individual animals, presented as living in complex worlds parallel to our own. Thus, Goodall introduced readers to the lives of chimpanzees like Flo and Fifi, explaining their behaviors in ways that made them seem uniquely chimpanzee, but also human-

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<sup>69</sup> *Miss Goodall and the Wild Chimpanzees*, directed by Marshall Flaum (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 1965), Television Program.

Goodall herself has not been uncritical of many of these portrayals of her work. Even as she has straddled the divide between celebrity and researcher, she has struggled at times to keep her scholarly work and conclusions from being overshadowed by outside media trying to impose particular narratives on her that she feels distort her work as a scientist. Jane Goodall, “Foreword,” in *Shooting the Wild: An Insider’s Account of Making Movies in the Animal Kingdom*, Chris Palmer (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2010), xiii-xviii.

<sup>70</sup> Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 134-136, 146-160. Haraway goes on to note these *National Geographic* specials elided over many issues of gender and race – innocent, unbiased white woman scientist going into the jungles of dark Africa to study chimps – and also helped to elide over any sense that animals like chimpanzees had a sense of history, always putting them in a timeless context, even as they were turned into specific individual chimps.

<sup>71</sup> To paraphrase John Berger’s essay that I mentioned in the Introductory chapter. John Berger, “Why Look at Animals,” in *About Looking* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 3-30.

like at the same time in their drama – a form of animal *Our Town*, where the relationships and happenings of individuals weave into a large communal tapestry.<sup>72</sup>

Beginning in the 1970s and throughout 1980s and 1990s, elephant researchers followed Goodall's lead in similarly promoting their own work and study subjects in popular media. For example, in 1973, Iain Douglas-Hamilton, a British zoologist, cooperated on the making of *The Family That Lives With Elephants*, a television film produced by Survival Anglia, all about his family's life while studying elephants in East Africa.<sup>73</sup> Included in this film were photos he had taken of one of his study elephants, Boadicea, charging at the rapidly retreating vehicle of the camera crew. The popularity of this image, which revealed not only closeness with elephants but also the dangerous adventure in getting to know them so intimately, soon led to the photos appearing in publications worldwide, becoming the best-known photographs of a charging elephant ever and raising Douglas-Hamilton's global profile.<sup>74</sup>

Later, Iain and his wife, Oria Douglas-Hamilton, jointly wrote a memoir of their lives as elephant advocates that also began to introduce elephants as individual personalities like Boadicea, the matriarch who had charged him in the film. The memoir described elephants on intimate terms, as creatures who possessed “an alien intelligence tantalizingly like our own when it comes to family ties, loyalty and love,” and also presented the Douglas-Hamiltons as having managed to experience cross-species touch and connection.<sup>75</sup> For example, in the book they describe feeding by hand a wild elephant they had named Virgo and later introducing their three

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<sup>72</sup> Jane Goodall, *In the Shadow of Man* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1971); Jane Goodall, *Through a Window: My Thirty Years with the Chimpanzees of Gombe* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1991), Reprint edition.

<sup>73</sup> *The Family That Lives With Elephants*, produced by Aubrey Buxton (London: Survival Anglia, 1973), Television Program.

<sup>74</sup> Iain and Oria Douglas-Hamilton, *Battle for the Elephants* (New York: Viking, 1992), 21. See also Mitman, “Pachyderm Personalities.”

<sup>75</sup> Douglas-Hamilton and Douglas-Hamilton, *Battle for the Elephants*, 27.

month-old daughter directly to the elephant to be sniffed and touched by her trunk. As Oria notes with sorrow after Virgo and her family were decimated by the wave of elephant poaching of the 1970s: “I felt we were on the brink of an understanding, but before I could cross the threshold of that open door events closed in, Virgo’s family was swept away and the tenuous bridge [between species] collapsed.”<sup>76</sup>

Another elephant researcher who similarly started to build her reputation through television exposure and personal memoirs in the 1980s was Cynthia Moss, founder of the Amboseli Trust for Elephants in Kenya. In her popular memoir, Moss avoids any mention of physical contact with elephants. But more so than the Douglas-Hamiltons, she explores in detail the biographies of individual elephants with names like Slit Ear and the many family groupings she had come to know, all the while conveying a sense of being privy to a secret understanding and connection with another species. For example, twice she compares elephant society of Amboseli National Park in Kenya to a “soap opera,” noting that she has “always said that watching elephants is like reading an engrossing, convoluted novel that [she] cannot put down but also do[es] not want to end.” She concludes her memoir by writing about a time when she returned to the park after a trip abroad and suddenly many elephants appeared at the park lodge that had not been observed for many days. She reveals that she was secretly pleased when her colleague suggested the elephants were returning specifically to see her – emphasizing the idea of personal cross-species connections.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Cynthia Moss, *Elephant Memories: Thirteen Years in the Life of an Elephant Family* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1988), 17, 139, 321. While she does not emphasize her own touching of the elephants, Moss does note frequently just how tactile elephants are as a species, “often touching each other with trunks, or leaning or rubbing on one another.” Ibid., 35.

Moss, like Douglas-Hamilton, also began to court television exposure for her study elephants, recognizing that their popularity would give her leverage in the realm of public opinion and, by extension, in international elephant conservation policymaking. Moss found that she could only get the attention of wildlife television producers at the BBC after the high rate of elephant poaching in the 1980s made global news, but once she had their attention she actively collaborated with the BBC Natural History Unit on the production of the first television film about her work in Amboseli National Park in Kenya – *Echo of the Elephants*.<sup>78</sup>

The film was wildly popular and led to considerable public interest in the United States and Europe in Amboseli's elephants and Moss's work. Indeed, the original film was so popular it merited two follow-up documentaries, with the ultimate death (from natural causes) of the elephant star at the center of the series, Echo, becoming global news in 2008. By that point, Echo had become such an individual celebrity that fans left love notes among her bones in the park.<sup>79</sup> This outpouring of interest and support for Moss's work and elephants had not happened by chance. Moss worked closely with the television films' producer and director, helping to write the script for the first film in a way that would intentionally try to pique public interest and picking out the individual elephant she thought could best serve as the narrative focus of a film. In selecting Echo and her family, Moss acted not from any ecological significance or personal attachment to Echo – indeed Echo only merits a single mention by name in Moss's memoir, which describes Echo as “a real homebody.”<sup>80</sup> But, Moss realized she needed to create an instantly identifiable character that could become a celebrity and the audience's point of entry

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<sup>78</sup> *Echo of the Elephants*, directed by Martyn Colbeck (London: BBC and PBS, 1993), Television Program.

<sup>79</sup> *Echo: An Elephant to Remember*, directed by Mike Birkhead (London: BBC and PBS, 2009), Television Program.

<sup>80</sup> Moss, *Elephant Memories*, 75. Reading the memoir, it is clear Moss has much more personal attachment to and interest in the elephants she christened Slit Ear and Teresia and their families.

into the world of elephant life at Amboseli. Thus, for the sake of the logistical needs of the BBC camera crew, she chose a matriarchal family that was small and led by a sedentary “homebody” so that it would always be easy to find and film the entire family when needed. And for the sake of identification, she picked an elephant easily distinguishable to lay audiences just based on appearance (Echo’s tusks were distinctive compared to other elephants in her herd).<sup>81</sup>

While Douglas-Hamilton and Moss were among the most prominent East African-based elephant researchers who began to build personal fame through memoirs and television films and by extension began to make the public aware of named, individual wild elephants, plenty of other African elephant advocates also pursued similar strategies that at the same time helped introduce the public to elephants as individual stars. For example, another researcher connected to Moss’s work, Joyce Poole – who got her start working on Moss’s study team – frequently cooperated with wildlife film crews from National Geographic and the Discovery Channel highlighting her research and also wrote a popular memoir that, like Moss’s, took pains to emphasize both elephants as distinctive individuals and the privilege of human researchers sharing direct connection with these elephants. For example, she writes of Virginia, “a favorite elephant,” whom Poole would always sing “Amazing Grace” to whenever they were alone. And she tells of Aristotle, “a docile older male,” who freaked her out early in her career by choosing to doze right next to her car with three other bull elephants.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, she closes the book by declaring that she “wanted to be completely surrounded by elephants, to feel and smell their

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<sup>81</sup> Moss, Personal interview with the author.

<sup>82</sup> Joyce Poole, *Coming of Age with Elephants: A Memoir* (New York: Hyperion Books, 1996), 33, 274.



presence” and then holding her baby daughter outstretched to her study population of elephants, who in turn greet the baby in ritualized elephant fashion.<sup>83</sup>

Similarly, Dame Daphne Sheldrick, who founded the David Sheldrick Elephant Sanctuary in honor of her late husband, also wrote a memoir describing her work rehabilitating orphaned elephants and emphasizing the tremendous privilege of closeness she enjoys with them. For example, she writes of an orphaned elephant named Eleanor: “We had shared many tender moments, her massive trunk prickly as she wrapped it gently around my neck, one huge foot raised in greeting for me to hug with both my arms.”<sup>84</sup>

Meanwhile, Carol Buckley, while not a wild elephant researcher, co-founded one of the most prominent American-based elephant advocacy organizations, the Elephant Sanctuary in Hohenwald, Tennessee, which runs a reserve of several hundred acres where captive elephants from zoos and circuses can retire into socialized elephant herds free to roam outdoors. The Sanctuary has worked to consult on several television documentary specials and other films, such as *One Lucky Elephant* (2010), about the journey of the circus elephant Flora to the sanctuary, and *The Urban Elephant* (2000), which in part tells the story of Shirley’s arrival at the sanctuary from a zoo.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, Buckley, too, has written a memoir of her work, although it is a children’s book, which tells the story of her close partnership performing with her elephant, Tarra. As with the wild elephant researchers, Buckley’s memoir paints a close portrait of Tarra as an individual and emphasizes Buckley’s close bond with the elephant, noting: “In the wild, [Tarra’s] mother and sisters and aunts and cousins would always be with her, socializing and

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 275.

<sup>84</sup> Sheldrick, *Love, Life and Elephants*, xv.

<sup>85</sup> For the sake of accuracy, it should be noted that not all the elephants at the Elephant Sanctuary are African elephants, as many captive elephants are Asian elephants. *One Lucky Elephant*, directed by Lisa Leeman (2010; New York: Virgil Films & Entertainment, 2012), DVD; *The Urban Elephant*, directed by Allison Argo (2001; New York: WNET), Television Program.

touching and taking care of each other. Here, she had me, but she still loved to touch and be touched. She would run her trunk over my clothes, arms and shoes.”<sup>86</sup>

### **Battle Over a Ban**

In addition to raising the own profiles and those of their individual elephant stars, through memoirs and television specials in the 1980s and 1990s these scientists also began to have a greater voice in changing scientific and popular understandings about elephant conservation. The naming of the elephants had come from these scientists’ original field studies, with many ethologists and behavioral ecologists of the era giving study animals names rather than numbers, either out of respect for animals as something more than mere Cartesian machines or because mnemonically they were simply easier to remember than numbers.<sup>87</sup> But this methodological focus on named individuals also helped scientists like Douglas-Hamilton and Moss uncover the importance of social structures and family bonds to elephant survival, suggesting that management of elephant populations through culling could not be based on mere numbers but had to consider instead which elephants within communities were taken so as to ensure the stability of family memory and leadership.

Slowly, and with public setbacks – Douglas-Hamilton lost the chairmanship of the IUCN’s African Elephant Specialist Group in 1981 when others in the group questioned his census data that suggested the elephant population was in crisis due to ivory poaching – Douglas-Hamilton, Moss, Poole, and others doing similar studies were able to push back against the population-based science that had dominated elephant conservation policy up to that point and that traditionally had ignored concepts like the emotional needs of individual elephants. And

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<sup>86</sup> Carol Buckley, *Travels with Tarra* (Gardiner, ME: Tilbury House, Publishers, 2002).

<sup>87</sup> Moss, *Elephant Memories*, 36.

by the late 1980s, they eventually changed the conversation not only from being about managing African elephant populations through culling and controlled ivory sales to pushing for a complete ban on ivory sales in order to protect dwindling elephant populations and their communal structures.<sup>88</sup>

The focus of their efforts were international scientific and policymaking groups like the aforementioned IUCN group and the triennial meetings of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). CITES, signed in 1973 and coming into force in 1975, has been the primary international governance mechanism for trying to protect endangered species in the last 40 years. It groups protected animals into one of three appendices, with species in Appendix I considered threatened with extinction and species in Appendix II considered potentially threatened with extinction without regulated trade. Species listed in either appendix cannot be exported without specific permits certifying that the trade won't be detrimental to the wild population and species in Appendix I cannot be imported for commercial purposes. African elephants had been listed on Appendix II as early as 1976, but this still did not effectively ban commercial ivory trade.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> For an overview of the battles between competing sets of population managers, see Mitman, "Pachyderm Personalities."

These battles over elephant management policy were fierce and personal. For example, former hunter and game manager Ian Parker derisively castigated "the worldwide malaise" of conservation organizations pushing for ivory bans, groups he felt had become "sheep for the wolves who live off their sentiments." Indeed, Parker took the position that only former hunters and game managers had the rational "common sense" to understand the harsh realities of conservation that "amateurish" academic scientists could not see. In his view, this meant elephants could be protected only in a few well-regulated (read: regularly culled) populations in national parks and there should be no sentimental effort to try to save all remaining elephants everywhere in Africa. In particular, Parker called out Iain Douglas-Hamilton by name in his personal memoir, tossing innuendos against "a leading light" of the pro-ivory ban movement in a thinly-veiled screed against Douglas-Hamilton's work and arguments. Parker and Amin, *Ivory Crisis*, 161, 174, 180.

<sup>89</sup> Orenstein, *Ivory, Horn, and Blood*, 53-55.

Throughout the 1980s, regional differences in the African elephant populations and poaching problems exacerbated efforts by CITES to control the ivory trade, since in East Africa populations were falling at the hands of major poaching problems while in southern Africa stable elephant populations in several places were exceeding the carrying capacity of protected areas to hold them. Quotas were put in place to allow ivory sales only from nations where populations were stable and scientifically managed. But these legal sales from southern African nations made it easy to mask poached ivory from other parts of Africa – a report in 1987 said 78 percent of “legal” ivory was the result of poachers.<sup>90</sup>

As the crisis of poaching and declining elephant populations worsened, Douglas-Hamilton, Moss, and Poole launched a public outreach campaign that focused on elephants as individuals, trying to amend the general celebrity of elephants that focused on majesty and spectacle to also make people see elephants as complex and emotional social beings with complicated intelligence and communications abilities. Via an international advertising and petition campaign in 1988 and 1989 coordinated with animal rights groups, these elephant advocates further discovered political power that came from focusing on individual elephants rather than on elephants as a species – turning the cause of conservation into something less about numbers and more explicitly about the “moral rights of elephants.”<sup>91</sup>

Partly as a result of their actions, the 1989 CITES meeting transferred African elephants from Appendix II to Appendix I, effectively banning the commercial ivory trade, even as it allowed individual nations to apply in the future for Appendix II listing for their elephants. Globally ivory prices declined, American trade in raw ivory fell to less than one ton per year from a peak of seven tons per year in the 1980s, and Japanese production of ivory fell by two-

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 55-59.

<sup>91</sup> Mitman, “Pachyderm Personalities,” 191-192.

thirds in less than a year. Meanwhile, poaching of African elephants in many parts of Africa fell by as much as 90 percent.<sup>92</sup> But at the end of the 1990s, even as parties to CITES set up a more intensive and coordinated monitoring program – Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) – poaching began to become a major problem again. Markets for ivory grew in China, facilitated by southern African nations earning rights for one-time sales of ivory stocks in 1999 and 2007 that again allowed for legal ivory trade to mask poached ivory.<sup>93</sup>

**“If they knew sweet little you they’d end up loving you, too . . . baby of mine”<sup>94</sup>**

Thus, the last fifteen years have seen a resurgence of elephant poaching and a burgeoning ivory trade. Hence, many elephant scientists and advocates have continued trying to push for public support for wild elephant conservation in general by creating greater celebrity for their named study and rehabilitation elephants in particular. Whether they succeed at a broader level in protecting elephants, their celebrity focus has definitely been a way to build much needed support for their own work.

Indeed, one of the most successful strategies for capitalizing upon individual elephant celebrity has been the development of “adoption” or “foster” programs, such as the one at the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust described in this chapter’s introduction. In the last couple decades several elephant advocacy organizations have also pursued this strategy, including the

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<sup>92</sup> Orenstein, *Ivory, Horn, and Blood*, 62-64.

<sup>93</sup> Samuel Wasser, et al., “Elephants, Ivory, and Trade,” *Science* 327 (2010): 1331-1332; John E. Scanlon, “Ivory and Insecurity: The Global Implications of Poaching in Africa,” Testimony before United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing, May 24, 2012, Washington, DC, accessed November 18, 2014, [http://cites.org/eng/news/sg/2012/20120525\\_SG\\_US-Senate\\_testimony.php](http://cites.org/eng/news/sg/2012/20120525_SG_US-Senate_testimony.php); Orenstein, *Ivory, Horn, and Blood*, 81.

<sup>94</sup> “Baby Mine,” written by Frank Churchill and Ned Washington, (1941; Burbank: Walt Disney Records), *Dumbo* soundtrack.

Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee, the National Zoo in Washington, D.C., and most recently the Amboseli Trust for Elephants.

The benefits of such programs to the advocacy groups are several. First, in a crowded media environment where it can be hard for appeals from non-profits to be noticed, having celebrity characters and stories is a useful way to cut through the distractions and short media attention spans of potential donors. Second, they create a synergy between the media publications that highlight individual elephants these groups already produce anyway for outreach purposes and their fundraising operations. In essence, almost every media publication can be both informational outreach to the general public and a means of bolstering relations with donors who have already adopted and are interested in these specific elephants. Third, because donors have a stake in specific elephants, they are more likely to pay attention to the challenges facing advocacy groups and more likely to stay vested in those groups' particular successes, rather than just hoping for generic success of "save the elephants." Fourth, these programs can provide funding earmarked for specific equipment purchases or animal care services not normally budgeted for via other operating funds or grants.<sup>95</sup> And finally these programs allow elephant advocates to couch direct appeals for financial donations in a much less transactional language, deflecting focus onto the individual animals rather than on the money being asked for.

Of course, there are costs to these programs harnessing individual elephant celebrity. Not only must they create an initial connection for donors with a particular elephant or elephant family being adopted, they must then sustain it – usually through intensive, regular media

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<sup>95</sup> For example, the National Zoo in Washington, D.C. used monies from the Adopt-a-Species program to fund its Asian elephant artificial insemination program, resulting in 2000 in only the fifth successful elephant artificial insemination ever completed. "How Adopting Helps Animals," Undated webpage, Friends of the National Zoo, accessed May 20, 2014, <http://nationalzoo.si.edu/Support/AdoptSpecies/HowADOPTHelps/default.cfm>.

outreach about each adoptee. Most groups offer monthly updates and other special communications just for adoptive or foster parents, each communiqué trying to further the fantasy that donors are personally involved in *their* elephants' lives. Thus, the Sheldrick Trust, for example, shares each month with donors elaborate "Keepers' Diaries" that keep them up-to-date on the status of their adoptees – which other elephants they bond with, their likes and dislikes, their health, how much they are growing and developing, what interactions they have had with the human keepers, etc. But Sheldrick chooses not to sugarcoat these stories too much, being sure to reveal just how hard the work with new elephant orphans is, perhaps in a bid to convince donors of the need to renew their support each year. Thus diaries also underline hardships and heartache suffered by the staff as they pursue their work. For example, a sample month's diary starts out:

March is a month filled with tragedy for the Nairobi Nursery, beginning with the arrival of the 2 week old baby female elephant named "Lekupeh" from the Meibai Conservancy near Wamba in Laikipia on the 12th. This baby arrived with a raging white cell count and suppurating foot pads, having obviously walked for many miles before falling into an erosion gully. Despite our best efforts, we simply could not control the septicemia, or the pain, and she passed away on the 23rd March, the same day that we lost the battle to save precious little Olodare, who suffered complications with his umbilical hernia and a new mysterious overnight swelling on one hind leg, which we suspected might have been a snake bite.<sup>96</sup>

Meanwhile, similar publications are standard at many other elephant adoption programs. The Elephant Sanctuary puts out an e-newsletter called *Trunklines* that tells adoptive parents all about the latest goings-on among the sanctuary's residents. Amboseli offers password-protected access to a website where users can go if they want bi-monthly updates and videos of their particular elephant family.

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<sup>96</sup> "Keeper's Diary for Foster Parents," last modified on March 2014, The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, accessed May 13, 2014, <http://www.sheldrickwildlifetrust.org/asp/monthly.asp?o=ISHANGA&month=mar>.

Moreover, many adoptive programs also have to engage in a large program of sharing supplemental fringe benefits, both physical and digital, that are used to cement potential donors' interest in making and renewing their donations. So if the Sheldrick Trust's electronic monthly summary diary, electronic "collectible monthly watercolor," "interactive map indicating where your orphan was found," and *de ringer* certificate of adoption and photograph for only \$50 or more isn't enough to convince you to donate, you have plenty of other options for benefits from adopting elephants via other elephant advocacy organizations.<sup>97</sup> For example, the Friends of the National Zoo in Washington, D.C. offers adoptions running anywhere from \$40 to \$1,000, but \$65 or more will get you an adoption package shipped in "an animal carrier box," including a personalized certificate of adoption, photo of your adoptee, fact sheet about him or her, letter of appreciation, and 12-inch plush toy. And adoptions of at least \$50 will get you a "framed replica" footprint of your adopted elephant (or other species), just like those many new parents have of their newborn child.<sup>98</sup> The San Diego Zoo has adoptions starting at \$35, but you will need to pay at least \$100 to get the plush animal toy, although giving at that level also earns you an adoption certificate, window cling decal, and reusable shopping bag.<sup>99</sup> The Amboseli Trust for Elephants' program, Elatia – which means "neighbor" in the Maa language of the Maasai, only costs \$30 per year, but you can only sponsor one of five elephant families, as opposed to choosing specific individual elephants, and it just gives you access to the aforementioned password-protected website with bi-monthly updates that will alert you to "any social dramas"

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<sup>97</sup> "Fostering," Undated website, The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, accessed on May 13, 2014, <http://www.sheldrickwildlifetrust.org/asp/fostering.asp>.

<sup>98</sup> Framed prints are "available for all species except for bald eagle and California sea lion." In these latter two cases you receive instead a Giant panda paw print; because that's the same thing, right? "Adopt A Species," Undated website, Friends of the National Zoo, accessed on May 20, 2014, <http://nationalzoo.si.edu/Support/AdoptSpecies/default.cfm>.

<sup>99</sup> "Adoption Programs," last modified 2014, San Diego Zoo, accessed May 20, 2014, <http://www.sandiegozoo.org/adopt/index.html>.



of “your family,” photographs, videos, and a family tree.<sup>100</sup> Looking for the ultimate bargain? The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee has adoptions starting as low as \$10 that come with a certificate of adoption, printed photo and elephant biography, and subscription to its electronic newsletter *eTrunklines* (although sadly none of their adoption packages include a plush toy).<sup>101</sup>

Beyond these physical enticements, the benefits for the public in these adoption schemes are obvious as well. Calling the transaction “fostering” or “adopting” instead of a donation allows donors to engage in a form of fantasy role-play, where they can believe they get the benefits of an “adoption” without any of the burdens of actually physically engaging in animal care – no worries about personally protecting, feeding, housing, disciplining, or picking up after the elephants.

Moreover, having been offered a menu of animal adoptees (with lovingly crafted biographies and photographs like those I observed at the Sheldrick Orphanage), donors’ support of conservation becomes an act of consumer choice, where they can pick the individual animal’s story that most appeals to them and that they most want to co-opt as a part of their own. For example, the Elephant Sanctuary and the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust offer donors the chance to select from among several named individual animals (13 and 150 elephants, respectively), each with highly detailed biographies describing their personalities, e.g. –

Debbie is very calm-natured and predictable. At times, she shows signs of exploring her independence, but spends the majority of her time socializing within the herd. During the

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<sup>100</sup> Moss. Personal interview with author. See also: “Elatia: A New Way to Follow Amboseli Elephants!,” *News From the Amboseli Trust for Elephants*, May-June 2014, accessed July 28, 2014, <http://myemail.constantcontact.com/News-from-ATE---May-June-2014.html?soid=1103441313201&aid=ZPmaeJgRoHM>; “Elatia,” Undated website, Amboseli Trust for Elephants, Accessed May 1, 2015, <https://www.elephanttrust.org/index.php/the-elatia-project>.

<sup>101</sup> “Support an Elephant,” Undated website, The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee, accessed May 20, 2014, <http://shop.elephants.com/product/43E6178/supportanelephant.php>.

warmer seasons, Debbie can usually be found swimming in the upper pond or grazing alongside her best friend Ronnie, whom she tends to follow everywhere she goes!<sup>102</sup>

– and/or differing as to the harrowing accounts of their rescue, e.g. –

At 4 p.m. another call from Samburu informed us that an attempt had been made to return the calf to his aunt, the mother not having been found, and known to have crossed the Uaso Nyiro river to join her sister and remaining family, her own mother having died some time ago. It was, apparently, the first calf of a very young mother, who estimated to be only about 10 years of age - another result of a population in disarray, deprived of a normal family structure where all the age groups are intact, and when a young cow would be protected from the advances of unruly young bulls by older dominant females.<sup>103</sup>

When ordinary appeals for funds invoke the need to “save” a threatened individual or species, a donor who writes a check in support has merely “responded” to a story but not become

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<sup>102</sup> “Debbie,” last modified 2013, The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee, accessed May 27, 2014, <http://www.elephants.com/debbie/debbieBio.php>.

<sup>103</sup> “Tomboi,” last modified 2012, The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, accessed May 27, 2014, [http://www.sheldrickwildlifetrust.org/asp/orphan\\_profile.asp?N=47](http://www.sheldrickwildlifetrust.org/asp/orphan_profile.asp?N=47).

Of course, choice can sometimes lead to unequal support for named elephants if they lack the same level of celebrity appeal. For example, while the Elephant Sanctuary does not publicly state which adoptee is most popular, it does share financial information about the individual endowments it has set up seeking \$185,000 to support the care of each of elephant. And they have received quite varying levels of public interest. The endowment for Shirley, the elephant featured in the BBC documentary *The Urban Elephant*, had accumulated ~\$199,000 toward its target of \$185,000. Tellingly, Shirley and all the other elephants who came to the sanctuary from zoos had reached at least a third or more of their endowment goals as of May 2014. This perhaps might be because these elephants’ prior tenure at zoos raised a public awareness of them as individuals who then carried over a fan base when they arrived at the Sanctuary.

Meanwhile, the former circus elephants at the sanctuary lack a built-in fan base of people that regularly saw them as individuals prior to arriving at the sanctuary, which is perhaps why the endowment farthest from meeting its target (as of May 2014) was the mere ~\$16,000 raised for Debbie – one of eight elephants sent as a group to the Sanctuary when the USDA cited her previous owners for mistreatment. Indeed, like Debbie, all but two of the former circus elephants had failed to top even \$30,000 for their endowments. And significantly, the only two former circus elephants to have fundraising success for their endowments were those that had been the subjects of major media exposure: Tarra – founding elephant of the sanctuary, subject of a children’s book *Travels with Tarra*, and subject of several viral videos from CBS and other news outlets covering her friendship with a dog – and Flora – subject of the documentary *One Lucky Elephant*. Thus, it is not just naming animals that allow donors to feel connections to animals but also the biographies and personal details that flesh out the animals into distinct individuals with specific stories that donors decide whether they want to relate to. “Elephant Endowments,” last modified 2013, The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee, accessed May 20, 2014, <https://www.elephants.com/estore/endowments.php>.

part of it. Conversely, when a donor becomes an “adoptive parent” of one of these named individual elephants, suddenly she can think of herself as part of that animal’s story. The whole affair turns into an ‘illusion of collusion,’ whereby a person is flattered by conservation organizations into believing she can buy her way into being an integral part of a celebrity wildlife narrative. It is this idea that groups like the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust try to exploit when they declare that, “as one of our foster parents, you are considered part of the . . . team.”<sup>104</sup>

Thus, by harnessing the celebrity of individual animals for these foster programs, the Sheldrick Trust and other elephant groups have tried to create a sustained interest and loyalty among current and potential donors in their own elephant conservation and advocacy that would be harder to generate otherwise.

### **Elephants on Parade**

But while the naming and perpetuation of individual elephant celebrities has real financial benefits, at least at the level of the individual conservation organization, it also has other costs in terms of use of staff and resources – especially when it comes to dealing with the question of digital adaptation.

We are currently in a period of transition among dominant media formats in society. While older mass media like radio, television, and newspapers have not gone away, the Internet is clearly the ascendant medium of the moment. And on the one hand, the Internet offers certain advantages as a communications medium for groups trying to produce celebrity for African elephants and other animals. For starters, because digital content can be shared almost instantaneously and limitlessly, groups can respond more quickly to changing events when producing new media content and distributing it to audiences. Moreover, listserves, web forms,

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<sup>104</sup> “Fostering,” The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust.

and Twitter and Facebook followers can create more targeted databases to which communications can be sent knowing the audiences have self-selected to indicate an interest in the information, as opposed to wasting money and resources on blanket postal mailings or other publications that may reach mostly uninterested audiences.

On the other hand, the biggest disadvantage of the Internet as a dominant medium is that there is no single Internet. The Internet is actually an overarching term for an entire digital world that conveys multiple types of content – such as emails, articles, blog posts, Tweets, digital videos and photos, text messages, etc. – via multiple platforms – such as email, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Vine, Reddit, and millions of other websites – all accessed through multiple different portals – such as computers, smart phones, e-readers, and tablets. Each type of content has its own formatting rules and norms that affect the kinds of narratives and images that can easily and appealingly be shared through them. These narratives and images are further constrained by the choice of portal one chooses to share that content on – e.g. Vine limits videos to six seconds in length and Twitter limits “Tweets” to no more than 140 characters. Furthermore, the technical creation of content that can easily be read by different types of portals – both mobile and desktop – requires additional investment of time and technical skill. Thus, digitally adapting the celebrity of any animal to the Internet is perhaps more challenging than it has ever been compared to creating celebrity animals in previous forms of mass media. And yet one of the key elements of modern celebrity is media ubiquity – saturating as many media as possible with stories, photographs, and other forms of content that all reinforce the public’s relationship with a celebrity. So to maintain celebrity, advocates of animals have no choice but to try to digitally adapt to all these different Internet platforms.

Another challenge for adapting elephant celebrity and other forms of animal celebrity to the Internet is that it is a medium, as Nicholas Carr has famously written, for “shallow” exploration and distraction. For example, on average people spend only 19 to 27 seconds looking at any given webpage (including the time required to load it in the browser) before moving on to click their next webpage. We have become a society of “skimmers,” with the act of scanning being an end in itself rather than a means to an end.<sup>105</sup> Thus adapting an animal’s celebrity to such a digital environment requires producing a greater volume of content and not just a few pieces of high-quality media content. A group that produces only one or two new pieces of media about their celebrity animals, no matter how good, risks falling out of the habitual browsing of Internet users. It also risks not being promoted by the algorithms of search engines that prioritize websites and platforms that are accessed more frequently.<sup>106</sup>

Thus, all of these challenges add to the burden of elephant advocacy groups that try to produce and sustain media celebrity for individual elephants. Not only do they have to create relatable elephant characters with accessible biographies and personalities for audiences to care about, but they constantly have to produce new content about each elephant that is adapted to a proliferating number of platforms while being cognizant of the narrative and graphic constraints of each platform. And these normative constraints of the different forms affect the actual content of what is communicated.

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<sup>105</sup> Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2011), 136-138.

<sup>106</sup> Indeed, as Carr points out, Google has designed its algorithm guiding searches for content to emphasize pages that are more frequently linked to and clicked on by other websites and people. So even if you produce good quality content, if it is rarely updated and people click on it less often, your web platform will fall in search rankings on Google (and other search engines), which means even fewer people are likely to find your content if they don’t already know about it – a feedback loop that then makes the content ever harder for audiences to find. Carr, *The Shallows*.

For example, many African elephant advocacy groups have started producing their own short digital videos for the Internet, especially on their own YouTube channels. Of the advocacy groups mentioned earlier who have served as film consultants and/or produced elephant adoption programs, as of April 2014, the Amboseli Trust for Elephants had posted 31 videos; Save the Elephants had posted 40 videos; the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust had posted 135 videos; the Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee had posted 158 videos; the National Zoo in Washington, D.C. had 194 videos (although only five featured elephants); and only the Shamwari Rehabilitation Centre had no official videos posted at all.<sup>107</sup>

Looking at the videos from each of these groups, it is obvious not all are produced equally – some have narration, music, title cards, and professional editing, whereas others are essentially raw footage from the field or webcam feed of captive elephant enclosures. And yet what seems to matter most to audiences are not the aesthetics or professionalism of the videos but whether or not the videos display “cute” or unusual behaviors and/or display a sense of an elephant’s personality. These are the videos that people are more likely to watch and share or promote via their own Facebook and Twitter accounts or that will get picked up by web aggregation websites like BuzzFeed.

Thus, the most watched of the Amboseli Trust’s videos, viewed more than 2 million times as of April 2014, is one of its team rescuing a cute baby elephant from a well, during

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<sup>107</sup> “Amboseli Trust for Elephants YouTube Channel,” YouTube, Amboseli Trust for Elephants, accessed April 4, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/user/AmboseliTrust/videos>. “The Elephant Sanctuary YouTube Channel,” YouTube, The Elephant Sanctuary, accessed May 5, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/user/elephantsanctuarytn/videos>; “The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust YouTube Channel,” YouTube, The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, accessed May 12, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/user/dswtkenya/videos>; “Save the Elephants YouTube Channel,” YouTube, Save the Elephants, accessed April 11, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/user/savetheelephantsinfo/videos>; “Smithsonian National Zoo YouTube Channel,” YouTube, Smithsonian National Zoo, accessed May 1, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/user/SmithsonianNZZP/videos>.

which the cameraperson narrates about who the elephant calf is, while cooing: “Oh baby, I’m sorry. You fell in a well, you silly girl.”<sup>108</sup> And Save the Elephants also has as its most watched video one that features cute baby elephants: in this case infants in the wild who had been playing on a riverbank and temporarily lost track of their mothers having crossed to the other side and so hurriedly plunge into the river to rejoin their families. Viewers had watched this video more than 100,000 times as of April 2014.<sup>109</sup> Meanwhile, although it doesn’t feature a baby elephant, the most watched Elephant Sanctuary video, viewed over 800,000 times, is an edited video with New Age music soundtrack celebrating the adorable friendship between Tarra the elephant and her closest companion at the sanctuary, Bella the dog, with cute imagery of inter-species bonding.<sup>110</sup> And while it doesn’t feature “cute” behavior per se, the National Zoo’s most watched elephant video features Shanthi, an elephant who learned to play the harmonica with her trunk when keepers tied one to the edge of her enclosure as enrichment. This amusing and unusual elephant behavior has garnered more than 350,000 views.<sup>111</sup>

The extensive numbers of hits on the most popular videos from these groups is evidence that production of this type of celebrity media can engage broad public audiences in learning about individual elephants. But the response to the videos also suggests the limitations of web videos as a means of communicating elephant celebrity for purposes of conservation. Not only does this video production seem to require frequent updates that emphasize the cute and the odd

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<sup>108</sup> And as of May 2015 this video has been seen more than 5 million times. “ATE team rescue another baby elephant from a well,” last modified October 12, 2012, YouTube, Amboseli Trust for Elephants, accessed April 4, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JOHw7IX3Gu4>.

<sup>109</sup> “Lost Elephant Babies,” last modified January 23, 2013, YouTube, Save the Elephants, accessed April 11, 2014, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9\\_bv5\\_Vhu6U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_bv5_Vhu6U).

<sup>110</sup> “Tarra and Bella: A Match Made in Ele-Heaven,” last modified January 5, 2009, YouTube, The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee, accessed May 5, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qAN5nf04L2s>.

<sup>111</sup> “Shanthi, the National Zoo’s Musical Elephant, Plays the Harmonica,” Smithsonian’s National Zoo.

in order to keep the public engaged, but it also limits the ability of elephant advocates to include content that emphasizes other aspects of conservation besides the elephants themselves.

For example, most elephant advocacy groups believe successful conservation of elephants must focus on building local capacity and economies for the human communities living near elephant habitat, thereby helping to ensure local residents don't need to destroy habitat or poach elephants in order to survive. But when advocates try to share this broader message – at least in video form – as part of their other media production about elephants it fails to draw public interest and almost seems to repel audiences. Thus, the *least* watched videos among all these different groups by far are ones that prominently feature local people. For example, Amboseli's least watched videos focus on their student scholarship programs and livestock programs for communities living near Amboseli National Park – with these videos having drawn fewer than 350 views each as of April 2014 (compared to more than 2 million views for the group's most popular video).<sup>112</sup> Similarly, the least watched videos from the David Sheldrick Trust are those focusing on a day-in-the-life of an African elephant keeper, a profile of the group's mobile veterinary unit, and an interview with Dame Daphne Sheldrick herself, all drawing fewer than 600 views each compared to the more than 400,000 views for their most popular video showing the rescue of an infant wild elephant.<sup>113</sup> And Save the Elephants' least

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<sup>112</sup> “ATE's Scholarship Project,” last modified October 21, 2013, YouTube, Amboseli Trust for Elephants, accessed April 4, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLXPERcqWAQ>; “ATE's University Scholarship Project,” last modified November 27, 2013, YouTube, Amboseli Trust for Elephants, accessed April 4, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhRo0HbWU14>; “Livestock Consolation Project,” last modified December 5, 2013, YouTube, Amboseli Trust for Elephants, accessed April 4, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLBKI4KBBhw>.

<sup>113</sup> “The DSWT Mobile Vet Unit in action,” last modified January 31, 2013, YouTube, The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, accessed May 12, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Og-JDo8KF3I>; “Radio Interview: Day in the Life of a Keeper,” last modified May 4, 2011, YouTube, The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, accessed May 12, 2014,



popular videos – showing the darting and radio collaring of wild elephants by researchers – clearly seems to deter audiences, perhaps because they destroy the illusion of wild elephants as living in places far from humans – and so they have been viewed by fewer than 30 people each.<sup>114</sup>

We can also see the constraints on elephant celebrity media content by considering other Internet platforms and their norms. For example, all of these groups have Facebook pages on which they regularly share updates – often several posts a day that are a mixture of photographs, news articles, video clips, action alerts, and thank-yous to sponsors and donors. But since Facebook is a platform predicated on getting users to “Like” posts and “Share” them with their friends on their own Facebook pages, elephant advocacy groups have to be particularly careful about what types of content they share in order to attract users to engage with them on a regular basis.

Thus, for example, Cynthia Moss explains that the Amboseli Trust for Elephants has an articulated strategy of sharing three positive or “happy” posts about elephants – such as them enjoying time with their families, having birthdays, or gaining new public support – for every

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ghLs63bhS8/>; “Dame Daphne Sheldrick speaking from her home,” last modified March 29, 2011, YouTube, The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, accessed May 12, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5p7O510LJao>; “The Rescue of Kithaka,” last modified December 7, 2011, YouTube, The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, accessed May 12, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wcnjzYN1nA>; as of May 2015, this last video has now been viewed more than 1.2 million times.

<sup>114</sup> “Collaring drama,” last modified September 19, 2013, YouTube, Save the Elephants, accessed April 11, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvJ8E3BOsjY>; “Collaring an Elephant,” last modified September 19, 2013, YouTube, Save the Elephants, accessed April 11, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yO0JA-KCVw>.

To be fair, this lack of interest may have other explanations. A video of collaring elephants posted on Amboseli Trust for Elephant’s You Tube channel had received more than 21,000 views as of May 2015 – although this is still well below the number of many of Amboseli’s other most watched videos. “Amboseli Trust for Elephants – Collaring Operation 2011,” last modified August 9, 2011, YouTube, Amboseli Trust for Elephants, accessed May 1, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MMj6P9jsN5U>.

one “negative” or worrying post that might reveal bad news about ivory smuggling rates or the death of beloved elephants from poaching. The strategy is rooted in a conviction that the norms of Facebook and what users expect from it force the Amboseli Trust to remain overly positive in their Facebook communications, no matter how important disturbing news may be to elephant conservation.<sup>115</sup> This is not to say that the Amboseli Trust cannot share difficult information, only that its communications must parcel it out in limited amounts so as not to overwhelm the warm (but presumably shallow) emotional bonds that its online audiences believe they have with individual celebrity elephants.

Looking at the Facebook pages of other groups suggests they also employ similar strategies and for similar reasons. Thus, for example, in one sample two-day period from last December, the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust shared five Facebook posts. One showed an aerial photograph of an elephant herd in a forest that Sheldrick noted happily was kept poacher-free for a year. One showed Dupotto, a rescued infant doing well and caressing an older elephant in the orphan herd at the sanctuary. And two showed photographs of the infant elephant Ndoria – both her dramatic rescue from the wild and her being lovingly handled by a keeper after having recovered back at the elephant orphanage. These four posts collected more than 3,800, 5,200, 6,900, and 7,800 “Likes,” respectively.<sup>116</sup> Meanwhile the one downbeat post during this same

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<sup>115</sup> Moss. Personal interview with author.

<sup>116</sup> David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust’s Facebook page, accessed May 1, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/thedswt/photos/a.167086934888.112085.120805694888/10152881866669889/?type=1&theater>; David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust’s Facebook page, accessed May 1, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/thedswt/photos/a.167086934888.112085.120805694888/10152893869244889/?type=1&theater>; David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust’s Facebook page, accessed May 1, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/thedswt/photos/a.167086934888.112085.120805694888/10152881853134889/?type=1&theater>; David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust’s Facebook page, accessed May 1, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/thedswt/posts/10152890835854889>.

period tried to focus on the ivory trade by offering a link to an elaborately produced short film called “Last Days,” directed by Academy Award-winner Kathryn Bigelow. The animated video harrowingly links the purchase of ivory in China to arms trade in Africa that facilitates problems like the militant attack on Westgate Mall in Nairobi in 2013, as seen in real footage from the attack included in the film. But despite the video’s high production values and important message, this serious content was Liked by fewer than 3,000 people.<sup>117</sup>

So the challenge of digital adaptation is a daunting one for conservation advocates. In service of the same basic goal – elephant conservation -- they must create celebrity individuals using a variety of different formats like blog posts, videos, photographs, and articles, as well as ever increasing engagement with newer platforms to distribute this content. Thus, for example, while all these groups have their own websites, blogs, e-newsletters, annual reports, YouTube channels, Facebook pages, and Twitter feeds, only the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust and the National Zoo are on Instagram so far.<sup>118</sup> And while absence from this single platform might not seem to matter, the problem is that as new platforms come along, they can become more popular with particular audiences and potential constituencies, making it harder to reach those audiences if elephant advocates don’t also adopt those platforms. Thus, for example, in the United States Facebook users tend to be disproportionately White or Asian, while Twitter users are disproportionately African American.<sup>119</sup> And a recent survey of teens – the potential next

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<sup>117</sup> David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust’s Facebook page, accessed May 1, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/thedswt/posts/10152890976729889>.

<sup>118</sup> David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust’s Instagram Account, accessed May 1, 2015, <https://instagram.com/dswt/>; Smithsonian’s National Zoo’s Instagram Account, accessed May 1, 2015, <https://instagram.com/smithsonianzoo/>.

<sup>119</sup> Eszter Hargittai and Eden Litt, “The tweet smell of celebrity success: Explaining variation in Twitter adoption among a diverse group of young adults,” *New Media & Society* 13(5) (2011): 824-842; Nick Couldry and Tim Markham, “Celebrity culture and public connection: bridge or chasm?,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 10(4) (2007): 403-421; Nick Couldry, et al.,

generation of conservation supporters – found that even as 47 percent still use Facebook, only 14 percent consider it their most important social network; whereas Instagram is now the most important outlet of choice for 32 percent of teens and Snapchat has jumped to become the most important network for 13 percent of teens despite not even registering as a serious choice even a year ago in the same survey.<sup>120</sup> So advocacy groups that don't choose to provide content on these newer platforms risk losing access to potential future supporters. And this is what makes digitally adapting elephant celebrity to new media a never-ending process – posing difficult choices for conservation advocacy groups about how best to deploy their limited resources of time, money, and staff.

### **Yao Knows Elephants**

And that just takes into consideration trying to adapt for the audiences and platforms elephant advocates have already identified as important and for which they have already made substantial investments in creating celebrity of their individual elephants. But given that elephant poaching has continued unabated in recent years – as demand has caused the raw price of ivory to triple in the last four years to US\$2,100 per kilogram – many elephant advocates are now realizing they need to turn their attention to producing celebrity elephant media for new audiences entirely.<sup>121</sup> Indeed, as mentioned earlier, the market for illegal ivory has now shifted largely from the West to East Asia, with the Chinese today comprising nearly 70 percent of the

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“Connection or disconnection? Tracking the mediated public sphere in everyday life,” In *Media and Public Spheres*, ed. R. Butsch (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 28-42, accessed March 10, 2015, <http://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/4815>.

<sup>120</sup> Martin Beck, “Only 14% of U.S. Teens Say Facebook Is Most Important, But Nearly Half Still Use It,” Marketing Land, April 14, 2015, accessed May 1, 2015, <http://marketingland.com/only-14-of-u-s-teens-say-facebook-is-most-important-but-nearly-half-still-use-it-125158>.

<sup>121</sup> *Annual Report 2014*, Save the Elephants.

world's ivory market.<sup>122</sup> So this means a whole new round of thinking about how to create celebrity – first learning the existing context of elephants in the popular Chinese imagination and then figuring out the most appropriate media channels in China to build and sustain interest in elephants and to discourage the purchase of ivory.

And in some ways this shift in focus has meant having to start over almost from zero in terms of building elephant celebrity, since not only is it a question of getting new groups of people to care about individual elephants but it is also a question of building a new level of cultural familiarity with elephants where little may have existed before. For example, a survey of the Chinese public found that only 33 percent of Chinese knew elephants were poached for their tusks, with many believing ivory tusks fell out and were regularly replaced in elephants' mouths – in the same way deer shed their antlers each year – or were only harvested from elephants that died naturally.<sup>123</sup> So even as they try to build emotional connections with individual celebrity elephants, advocacy groups must also focus on conveying basic factual information about ivory and elephants. As a result, elephant advocacy groups like Wildlife Direct are now hiring full-time Chinese liaison officers to figure out how best to reach the Chinese public and also bringing Chinese interns to Africa to gain more direct experience with elephants.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> To be fair, the Chinese government has recently announced the intent to close down its legal ivory-working industry in order to stem the poaching crisis and officially only licenses 182 factories and retail outlets to trade and work ivory legally sold in 2008 as part of a one-time sale of 62 tons authorized by CITES from government stockpiles built up by Botswana, Namibia, and Zimbabwe. But some of these shops have since been shown to be trafficking in illegal ivory. *Ivory Demand in China* (WildAid, 2014), accessed May 1, 2015, <http://wildaid.org/sites/default/files/resources/WEBReportIvoryDemandinChina2014.pdf>.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Chris Kiarie, "What We Do; Chris Kiarie, Chinese Liaison Officer," last modified March 17, 2015 Wildlife Direct Baraza Blog, accessed May 1, 2015, <http://baraza.wildlifedirect.org/2015/03/17/what-we-do-chris-kiarie-chinese-liaison-officer/>.

An example of one of the most substantial new campaigns to target Chinese audiences to date is one that makes use of a human celebrity – Yao Ming, a former NBA basketball center and one of the most popular athletes in China. WildAid, Save the Elephants, the African Wildlife Foundation, and the Yao Ming Foundation partnered to produce a campaign centered upon Yao’s travel to meet and experience elephants for himself in Africa and encouraging an end to the ivory market in China. The campaign’s slogan in China is: “When the buying stops, the killing can too.” It so far has included screening of a two-part documentary, “The End of the Wild,” on Chinese television in August 2014, distribution of more than 7,000 public service announcements on Chinese television networks in 2013, and release of a travel blog covering Yao’s experiences with elephants (and rhinos) during his journey. Yao also delivered a petition to the Chinese government from his “Say No to Ivory” campaign, urging the government to ban ivory sales.<sup>125</sup>

However, the long-term success of such campaigns remains to be seen. For example, WildAid’s Chinese language version of its Elephant Infographic web video about mounting impacts of poaching and the ivory trade on elephant populations has only been viewed 400+ times on YouTube more than a year after its release. But, of course, this may have to do with the need to find media platforms that Western audiences might not frequent but that best reach Chinese audiences, since YouTube is not nearly as popular in China as it is in the West. Yet even on one of the most popular Chinese web sharing services, Youku, on which WildAid has its own

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<sup>125</sup> “Yao Ming Urges China to ‘Say No To Ivory and Rhino Horn’ With New Film,” WildAid News, August 8, 2014, accessed May 1, 2015, <http://wildaid.org/news/yao-ming-urges-china-%E2%80%98say-no-ivory-and-rhino-horn%E2%80%99-new-film>; “Yao’s Journey to Africa,” Undated website, accessed May 1, 2015, <http://yaomingblog.com/>; Andrew Revkin, “China’s Basketball Giant Again Presses Case for Elephant Conservation,” *The New York Times* (Blogs), September 25, 2013, accessed November 18, 2014. (LexisNexis Academic). The campaign also addressed rhino poaching and the market for rhino horns.

channel, a search of its videos with Yao Ming and elephants reveals that most have been viewed only a few hundred or thousand times in a nation of more than one billion people. The principal exception is the Chinese version of Bigelow’s “Last Days” short mentioned earlier, which WildAid has shared on its Youku account to more than 500,000 views to date.<sup>126</sup> So the process of changing hearts and minds and building elephant media celebrity among a new audience begins, but it will take some time to determine the most effective messages and mediums to employ and to see if it actually has an impact on wild African elephant conservation.

Meantime, many elephant advocacy groups have also recognized that halting demand on one end of the ivory supply chain needs to be partnered with halting the supply at the other end. They have chosen to do so not by excoriating local African elephant hunters for participating in the process – since most local poachers participate out of economic necessity, with the tusks of a single elephant worth as much as 10 times the average annual income of a person in many African nations.<sup>127</sup> Instead, elephant advocacy groups are trying to change local values and perceptions of elephants, so that the elephants are celebrities at home as well as abroad.<sup>128</sup> This

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<sup>126</sup> “WildAid Elephant Infographic (Chinese),” last modified January 29, 2014, YouTube, WildAid, accessed May 1, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWunzWUyUAU>. On Youku, the same video has been seen just over 1,000 times. “Last Days,” Youku, WildAid, accessed May 1, 2015, [http://v.youku.com/v\\_show/id\\_XODU1ODE4ODA0.html?from=y1.7-2](http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XODU1ODE4ODA0.html?from=y1.7-2).

For other examples of WildAid videos on Youku, see: <http://i.youku.com/u/UMjk0NzU3NDYw/videos>; [http://v.youku.com/v\\_show/id\\_XMTI5NjYwMA==.html?from=s1.8-1-1.2](http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XMTI5NjYwMA==.html?from=s1.8-1-1.2); [http://v.youku.com/v\\_show/id\\_XNTk0ODY4MTk2.html?from=s1.8-1-1.2](http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XNTk0ODY4MTk2.html?from=s1.8-1-1.2). The other most watched WildAid video is a PSA ad that features soccer star David Beckham, Yao Ming, and Prince William asking people not to buy ivory, rhino horn, or shark fins that has been viewed more than 24,000 times.

<sup>127</sup> Jeffrey Gettleman, “Elephants Dying in Epic Frenzy As Ivory Fuels Wars and Profits,” *The New York Times*, September 4, 2012, accessed July 28, 2014. (LexisNexis Academic).

<sup>128</sup> It is important to note that, as in the United States and Europe, people’s attitudes towards elephants in East Africa and elsewhere where elephants are native are not monolithic. Research has found that attitudes in Kenya, for example, vary with people’s land usage – agriculturalists who suffer from elephant raids hold more negative views of elephants than pastoralists. And

campaign presents a challenge, since the global management of elephant conservation has frequently created local and national resentments in nations across Africa, who see the management of these resources for Western values as an imposition of eco-colonial authority over their economies that denies the validity of their local knowledge and values regarding elephants.<sup>129</sup>

But some advocates are trying to improve the local celebrity of elephants and the ways they are valued. For example, the group Wildlife Direct has created a campaign in Kenya called *Hands Off Our Elephants*, whose message is framed to create a sense of national ownership of elephants – a belief that poaching of elephants (which is often carried out by locals working in international networks) is really a plundering of the nation’s own natural legacy. The campaign has enlisted the nation’s first lady, Margaret Kenyatta, as a patron of the campaign at photo-ops across the country, while also plastering the slogan and logo everywhere from the sides of bush planes to banners and billboards in the major shopping malls in Nairobi.<sup>130</sup> Meanwhile, Wildlife Direct has also aimed to reach out to Kenyan residents via other local media, such as supporting

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many local communities in Kenya like the Maasai and Samburu already have long-held cultural traditions that value elephants for aesthetic or cultural reasons, as opposed to economic or use value of elephants. But even among groups that have long supported elephant conservation, conflicts over land, water, and human safety can negatively alter people’s perceptions. See: Michelle E. Gadd, “Conservation outside of parks: attitudes of local people in Laikipia, Kenya,” *Environmental Conservation* 32(1) (2005): 50-63; Moses Makonjio Okello, “Land Use Changes and Human-Wildlife Conflicts in the Amboseli Area, Kenya,” *Human Dimension of Wildlife: An International Journal* 10(1) (2005): 19-28; Renee Kuriyan, “Linking local perceptions of elephants and conservation: Samburu pastoralists in northern Kenya,” Breslauer Graduate Symposium on Natural Resource Issues in Africa, March 5, 2004, accessed May 5, 2015, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/1wf778kk>.

<sup>129</sup> Rosaleen Duffy, “The Ethics of Global Enforcement: Zimbabwe and the Politics of the Ivory Trade,” in *Elephants and Ethics: Toward a Morality of Coexistence*, eds. Christen Wemmer and Catherine A. Christen (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 451-468.

<sup>130</sup> “Current Campaigns,” Undated website, Wildlife Direct, accessed November 18, 2014, <http://wildlifedirect.org/about/current-campaigns/>; “Hands Off Our Elephants,” Undated website, Wildlife Direct, accessed November 18, 2014, <http://hooe.wildlifedirect.org/>.



an issue of a popular Kenyan comic book hero, Roba, written by Chief Nyamweya, in which the hero battles elephant poachers – with the strip serialized in national newspapers in 2013.

Beginning in 2014, the group also started to seek funds to create a future television soap opera for adults that would portray poaching in a negative light.<sup>131</sup>

Other groups have also employed approaches that reach out to provide education about elephants directly to Kenyan schoolchildren rather than through media channels. For example, both Save the Elephants and Wildlife Direct try to turn local students into ambassadors for wildlife and bring them into the national parks in the hopes of exposing them to a view of elephants and wildlife as seen through a more aesthetic/emotional eye.<sup>132</sup> And in a related strategy, the Amboseli Trust for Elephants and Save the Elephants also try to build local support for their programs by offering scholarships and other educational support for students from

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<sup>131</sup> “Word from Our Chairman,” Undated website, Wildlife Direct, accessed November 18, 2014, <http://wildlifedirect.org/about/word-from-our-chairman/>. Many of the serialized strips are available online at a Roba Facebook page. Roba’s Facebook Page, accessed May 1, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.553420281377457.1073741827.553401818045970&type=1>.

<sup>132</sup> Save the Elephants found when they went into certain Kenyan schools and initially asked children about elephants more than 72 percent had fearful ideas about encounters with elephants and another 4 percent hated or disliked elephants. Such fear is not surprising, since perceptions about elephants can be affected by distorted understandings of risk – for example, as Naughton-Treves and Treves note, overall harm to crops from rodents and small pests is far more damaging than elephants but single traumatic attacks by raiding elephants garner greater attention and therefore lead to a greater perception of risk from elephants than from other species among many agricultural communities.

After Save the Elephants conducted field trips to see wild elephants with these same students, 36 percent said elephants were important to humans and 32 percent said elephants were similar to humans. For more information, see: Lisa Naughton-Treves and Adrian Treves, “Socio-ecological factors shaping local support for wildlife: crop-raiding by elephants and other wildlife in Africa,” in *People and Wildlife: Conflict or Coexistence?*, eds. Rosie Woodroffe, Simon Thirgood, and Alan Rabinowitz (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 252-277; “Creating Elephant Ambassadors,” Undated website, Save the Elephants, accessed May 1, 2015, <http://savetheelephants.org/awareness/creating-elephant-ambassadors-mobile-education/>; “The Amboseli Count Diary,” last modified April 12, 2015, Wildlife Direct Blog, accessed May 1, 2015, <http://baraza.wildlifedirect.org/2015/04/12/3137/>.

communities surrounding their field sites, in the hopes of building community resources while also generating goodwill towards the elephant programs operating in the same area.<sup>133</sup>

Whether working in East Asia or East Africa, though, the challenge with these new communication strategies is that in order to create effective communications they require new understandings of local cultural histories with and beliefs about elephants that may differ significantly from those of the Western audiences previously targeted. Moreover, even if advocates can figure out how to produce effective messages, figuring out new means of distribution on different media platforms and types of media than what dominate in Europe and the United States means investing even more time, money, and personnel on communications, since most groups will want to continue also producing elephant celebrity media on their existing platforms and media for existing audiences as well. All of this will strain the limited resources of elephant conservation and advocacy groups. If they believe in individual elephant celebrity as a means of ensuring elephant conservation, however, these are unavoidable challenges advocates must accept.

### **The Big Five™**

But, of course, all this assumes that building elephant celebrity is the best route to elephant conservation. Certainly, there is evidence that the intentional naming and development of individual elephant personalities can be a powerful force to drive audiences to care about particular elephants and want to gain more experience with them. For conservation groups like

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<sup>133</sup> Save the Elephants to date has supported 80 students' high school education and 15 students' collegiate education. *Annual Report 2014*, Save the Elephants; "Elephant Scholarships," Undated website, Save the Elephants, accessed May 1, 2015, <http://savetheelephants.org/awareness/elephant-scholarships/>; "Capacity Building," Undated website, Amboseli Trust for Elephants, accessed May 1, 2015, <https://www.elephanttrust.org/index.php/program#capacitybuilding>.

the Amboseli Trust for Elephants, the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, Save the Elephants, and the Elephant Sanctuary, the hope is that this engagement with the celebrities will then increase a general interest and sense of wonder about all African elephants and thus lead to financial and political support for wild elephant conservation. However, this outcome is not pre-determined. Indeed, the final challenge of producing celebrity animals in media is that production and consumption of celebrity are separate processes completed by different groups of people. Once stars are made, how the public “consumes” stardom cannot be controlled.

This is especially true when looking at the consumption of celebrity wildlife and their narratives in the realm of “eco-tourism” – a non-consumptive wildlife-based tourism that many conservationists highlight as a potential solution for building sustainable economies that protect endangered species and their habitat while providing local communities with a steady source of income and livelihoods. As we’ll see in the next chapter on penguins, tourists have their own priorities in consuming celebrity wildlife narratives – priorities that often seek to excise people from the frame, whether local residents or other tourists – potentially reifying an eco-colonial view of the planet as Edenic playground and potentially making ecologically sustainable local economies and celebrity wildlife tourism incompatible.

Moreover, even when consumers of wildlife embrace animal celebrities and their media narratives, their embrace may often be short-lived. Consider one final elephant-related example that highlights this problem of brief attention spans when consuming celebrity wildlife.

\* \* \*

I’m in the back of a Land Rover barreling across a deeply rutted “track” through the savanna and wooded hills of a protected conservancy adjacent to the Masai Mara National Game Reserve in Kenya. The whine of our engine cuts through what had until just moments ago been

the quiet calm of an early morning viewing a single bull elephant grazing amid some acacia trees. Now our vehicle is careening wildly at odd angles, hitting potholes and rocks our guide would normally negotiate with slow, nimble driving (indeed our return trip will take nearly 45 minutes to traverse the path we now fly across in just under 20 minutes). But caution be damned we're on a mission: our guide has heard on his radio that a Leopard (*Panthera pardus*) has been spotted on the border of the conservancy.

As a solitary nocturnal hunter of stealth, leopards are difficult targets for wildlife watching – our guide tells us there are only three leopards known to populate the conservancy and the most recent spotting was three months ago. So in some sense it is only natural we should want to see one when its whereabouts are known. But in another sense our near-suicidal race over hills, through rocky gullies, and between heavily spiked branches of acacia trees to try to catch a glimpse of a single animal is quite odd.

We have already seen other cat species – lions and cheetahs – in great numbers (as many as 15 at a time) and from much closer distances (at one point napping lions encircled our vehicle) than we could see this one leopard. Moreover, our safari company has helpfully provided a list of 200 species (50 mammals and 150 birds) we might spot in the conservancy and among the many animals we have yet to see that we could also spend the morning trying to find are: species as large as small leopards – e.g. the Striped hyena (*Hyaena hyaena*); species harder to see than leopards – e.g. the armored and nocturnal Ground pangolin (*Manis temminckii*); species as potentially deadly as leopards – e.g. the Eastern green mamba snake (*Dendroaspis angusticeps*); species more colorful than leopards – e.g. the Yellow-necked francolin (*Pternistis leucoscepus*); and species more endangered than leopards – e.g. the White-headed vulture (*Trigonoceps occipitalis*). Moreover, as I mentioned, when the radio call came in we had been enjoying a

tranquil, close viewing of a bull elephant. But when given the option, every one of us six guests in the Land Rover chose to abandon the sure thing of the elephant in front of us for the uncertain hope that an hour's round trip of driving would yield a glimpse of a leopard, even at the expense of most of our remaining time on the final morning of our game-watching safari.

Why?

The question demands an answer even more when you consider what our encounter ultimately entails. We arrive at the base of a rocky outcropping and take two minutes even to find the leopard camouflaged amid the trees and brush. But within less than five minutes it walks out of sight into a gully, with only the worried noises and stares of a pair of Kirk's dik diks (*Madoqua kirkii*) to provide any further evidence as to its presence. No stunning photos, no close encounters, no rare behaviors or evidence of the leopard's predatory nature "red in tooth and claw." Just a quick glimpse to check a box on a list.

In part we made this mad dash because the leopard is a part of a celebrity animal brand – "the Big Five" – a group that also includes elephants, lions, buffalo, and rhinoceroses (both white and black). This brand first emerged among big game hunters in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, who referred to the five species as the most dangerous to hunt, but later promoters of non-consumptive safari tourism and wildlife watching/photography co-opted it as a marketing term.<sup>134</sup> Open almost any tourist guidebook for anywhere in Africa and it will mention the "Big Five" in its discussion of wildlife and safaris. For example, Lonely Planet's *East Africa* notes:

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<sup>134</sup> For an example of a reference to these animals as the most dangerous to hunters, see Tjader, *The big game of Africa*, 43, 105. For example of how these five being referred to by the big game hunting fraternity as "the Big Five," see: James Mellon, *The African Hunter*, 71, 132. For discussion of the Big Five in tourism, see: H. Goodwin and Nigel Leader-Williams, "Tourism and protected areas – distorting conservation towards charismatic megafauna?," in *Priorities for the conservation of mammalian diversity: has the panda had its day?*, eds. A. Entwistle and N. Dunstone (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 257-275.

“Kenya is home to all of the charismatic mega-fauna that draws so many visitors to Africa and the daily battle between predators and prey brings so much personality to the Kenyan wilds. The ‘Big Five’ . . . are relatively easy to spot in at least two of the major parks.” Later, when it discusses the Tsavo West National Park in Kenya, the guide boldly proclaims the park “boasts all of the Big Five – see them all in one day and you’ve hit the safari jackpot.”<sup>135</sup> And more than 100,000 tourists visit the Masai Mara annually in part because the chances of seeing all of the Big Five there are more promising than other wildlife refuges and parks in Kenya.<sup>136</sup>

And we tourists clearly have responded to this branding. Studies of tourists’ preferences for going on African safari have found most want to see the Big Five above all other animals and will usually declare themselves satisfied with their trips if they see the Big Five, even when they represent fewer than two percent of all the mammals and other large vertebrates available to be

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<sup>135</sup> Mary Fitzpatrick, et al., *East Africa* (Melbourne, Australia: Lonely Planet, 2012), 9<sup>th</sup> Edition, 20, 259. While the guide does spell out what animals comprise the Big Five, it waits until page 593 to offer as a “cool” highlighted factoid the information that the term derives from hunting safaris and doesn’t refer to some ecologically-based grouping of species.

Interestingly, even guides that encourage their readers to broaden their wildlife-watching horizons to less celebrated animals still reify the power of the Big Five brand. For example, the Rough Guides’ guide to South Africa implores its readers not to “let the Big Five . . . blinker you into missing out on the marvellous [sic] wilderness areas that take in dramatic landscapes and less publicized wildlife.” Yet it proceeds to re-assure readers at every possible opportunity of opportunities to see the Big Five, for example noting that, despite the compact nature of Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park, the “Big Five are all here,” and starting its description of Addo Elephant National Park by declaring it “a Big Five reserve.” The guide even suggests that when beginning to watch wildlife at Addo: “The best strategy is to ask where the pachyderms and the other four of the Big Five have last been seen . . .” Tony Pinchuck, et al., *The Rough Guide to South Africa, Lesotho & Swaziland* (London: Rough Guides, Ltd., 2011), 65, 314-315, 414.

<sup>136</sup> For discussion of tourist visitation and impacts on the Masai Mara region, see: Geoffrey Karanja, “Tourism Impacts in Masai Mara National Reserve,” in *Wildlife and People: Conflict and Conservation in Masai Mara, Kenya*, Wildlife and Development Series No. 14, eds. Matt Walpole, Geoffrey Karanja, Noah Sitati, and Nigel Leader-Williams (London: International Institute for Environment and Development, 2003), 5-16.

seen in a given area.<sup>137</sup> True, preferences vary somewhat – younger, more experienced safari-goers and local safari-goers are more likely to be interested in general “biodiversity” than the “safari novices” – who tend to be older, wealthier, and more likely to go on large group safaris to single destinations – who most want to see the Big Five. But all tourists still rate the animals of the Big Five as their runaway top choices for animals to see, even when other animals in the area would count by most popular definitions as “charismatic megafauna” like cheetahs, ostriches, or giraffes.<sup>138</sup> Thus, with the brand what matters is less some quality intrinsic in the animals themselves than the story and celebrity status the safari industry, travel writers, governments, and, of course, conservation advocates have conferred upon them – a status reified by each subsequent tourist quest to see these particular species. And this means the goal for many tourists becomes less about trying to know any one species in a meaningful way and more about trying to consume the experience of all of them to be able to say we have done so.

And this is true even when tourists don’t explicitly know about the Big Five. Indeed, in my Land Rover that morning, none of the other passengers – two Japanese women and an Italian family – had originally known, when quizzed by our guides, which five animals comprised the Big Five. But when asked what they were most interested in seeing all of them discussed having

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<sup>137</sup> And forget about interest in invertebrates, reptiles and amphibians, and (for the average tourist) even most birds. Kerley et al. found that signage and significant information about specific invertebrates in information pamphlets and guidebooks distributed in protected areas can attune tourists to be “educated and sensitized to relatively obscure species,” such as the dung beetle. But by and large most tourists are interested in seeing large and/or dangerous mammals. Graham I.H. Kerley, Bev G.S. Geach, and Claire Vial, “Jumbos or bust: do tourists’ perceptions lead to an under-appreciation of biodiversity?,” *South African Journal of Wildlife Research* 33(1) (2003): 19.

<sup>138</sup> Enrico Di Minin, et al., “Understanding heterogeneous preference of tourists for big game species: implications for conservation and management,” *Animal Conservation* 16 (2013): 249-258. See also Kerley, et al., “Jumbos or bust”; Oliver Krüger, “The role of ecotourism in conservation: panacea or Pandora’s box?,” *Biodiversity and Conservation* 14 (2005): 579-600; Goodwin and Nigel Leader-Williams, “Tourism and protected areas,” 257-275.

come to “Africa” wanting to see the animals included in the Big Five – interestingly with the exception of the Cape buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*) – as well as hippopotami and giraffes.<sup>139</sup> Thus, the latent influence of the Big Five brand had helped shape all of our imaginings about what a wild Africa looked like, even when we didn’t explicitly know the brand itself.

Thus, having been told by our guides that the chance to see all of the Big Five in one place was one thing that makes the Masai Mara so popular, this quest to complete the list became our mission, the benchmark by which we defined our experience of the place as “complete” and representative of the real “Africa” rather than the quality of encounters we have with animals.<sup>140</sup> This meant the Italian family was largely over elephants, having “been there, done that” by seeing elephants in Amboseli National Park prior to their arrival at this conservancy. So they had only impatiently indulged my request to stop and watch that bull elephant on our last morning. And when seeing the leopard became a possibility, it trumped all other considerations. For all of us, the Big Five brand ended up serving “as the norm of authenticity that reality [had] to try to live up to” – a phenomenon frequently noted by tourism scholars whereby the celebrity image we have from media changes our touristic gaze of the physical world through which we travel.<sup>141</sup>

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Thus, even after individual African elephants become celebrities in media, there is no guarantee the public will respond to that celebrity in the ways hoped for by the conservation

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<sup>139</sup> Goodwin and Leader-Williams have also found that the desire among tourists to see cape buffalo compared to the other Big Five is less for “non-consumptive” wildlife tourists generally as compared to tourist safari hunters. Goodwin and Leader-Williams, “Tourism, protection and charisma,” 270.

<sup>140</sup> Indeed a British family of birders who had left the conservancy the day before had admitted that while they loved the birding their biggest disappointment was that they had not completed their Big Five search by seeing a leopard.

<sup>141</sup> Orvar Löfgren, “Narrating the Tourist Experience,” in *Tourists and Tourism: A Reader*, ed. Sharon Bohn Gmelch (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 2004), 96.



advocates who helped produce the celebrity. People's love for Slit Ear, Boadicea and other celebrity wild elephants may foster a desire to save other wild elephants. But it may also encourage us to devour these other elephants as consumable experiences on a tourist checklist, where the checklist matters more than the animal being viewed.

All too often the history of humans' relationship with elephants has been about appropriating things from them for ourselves, whether it is hunting them for their ivory or possessing them for the associations of symbolic grandeur, as with the Boston Zoo and Tony, Waddy, and Mollie a century ago. Even when we "adopt" elephants for their protection, as with the Sheldrick orphans, we often frame the experience as primarily an opportunity to make ourselves a part of the elephants' lives.

Elephant advocates have bet that by naming individual wild elephants, we the public will come to care more about and aid elephant-kind overall. That elephant celebrity can benefit the elephant half of human-elephant relationships as much as it benefits us. But in some sense this bet comes down to this question: would an elephant by any other name, or more accurately with no name at all, smell as sweet?

## CHAPTER TWO – March of the People

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. . . in the theatre the actor gives; in the cinema, the actor is taken from.<sup>1</sup>

-- Richard Brody, "The Essence of Stardom."

*Once there was a man who filmed his vacation.  
He went flying down the river in his boat  
with his video camera to his eye, making  
a moving picture of the moving river  
upon which his sleek boat moved swiftly  
toward the end of his vacation. He showed  
his vacation to his camera, which pictured it,  
preserving it forever: the river, the trees,  
the sky, the light, the bow of his rushing boat  
behind which he stood with his camera  
preserving his vacation even as he was having it  
so that after he had had it he would still  
have it. It would be there. With a flick  
of a switch, there it would be. But he  
would not be in it. He would never be in it.*<sup>2</sup>

-- Wendell Berry, "The Vacation"

"Who doesn't like penguins? If you don't like penguins you ought to have your head examined." And so our journey to meet penguins begins.

It is November 2011 and I am an ethnographic participant-observer on a 14-day tourist eco-cruise traveling to the South Shetland Islands, the tip of the Antarctic Peninsula, into the Weddell Sea, and finally to the Falkland Islands.<sup>3</sup> This particular trip is eschewing the "classic"

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Brody, "The Essence of Stardom," *The New Yorker*, July 25, 2014, accessed July 25, 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/essence-stardom>.

<sup>2</sup> Wendell Berry, "The Vacation," in *American Life in Poetry*, Column 425, 2012, curated by Ted Kooser, accessed July 19, 2013, <http://www.americanlifeinpoetry.org/columns/425.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Arnold Arluke and Clinton Sanders argue that auto-ethnography, with an honest assessment of the researcher's own place and points of view is an essential part of field research that seeks to uncover how the meanings of non-human other animals are socially created by human society. Thus, I feel it important to include my own journey here in this chapter as part of my observations of other tourists on this trip, to be supplemented by historical data and histories by other scholars. Admittedly, Arluke and Sanders argue that ethnographic field research should continue to the point of "saturation," but with the prohibitively high costs of field research in

Antarctic tourist voyage along the western coast of the Antarctic Peninsula and heading instead into the entrance of the Weddell Sea on the east coast, where the ice is only just beginning to break apart for the summer. Along the way we 107 passengers and 45 crew and expedition staff must sail across the dreaded Drake Passage – a two-day sail each way over the open water between South America and Antarctica where the Antarctic Convergence (the boundary of the colder Antarctic waters with their distinct hydrological, climatological, and biological attributes) oscillates throughout the year between 48 and 61 degrees south latitude and where some of the wildest ocean conditions occur due to a lack of land to impede winds and ocean currents from circling the globe.<sup>4</sup> On days when the ocean is relatively calm, ships' crews nickname it the "Drake Lake;" on days when it is not, it is known as the "Drake Shake."

But either with or without seasickness, this part of the journey is a two-day monotony of grey ocean in all directions, differentiated only by the changing angle of the sun, the weather, and the petrels, prions, and albatross that effortlessly glide around the ship and feed in its wake. The sense of marking time during this part of the voyage is hard to avoid. On our trip (as on most Antarctic tourist expeditions) expedition leaders gamely try to overcome ennui by offering a series of lectures and films about Antarctica. These presentations in the ship's dining room – on Antarctic geology, historic expeditions, recent expeditions, climate change in the polar region, and Antarctic wildlife – are meant to provide context that will deepen our appreciation of the sights we will see. But many people attend primarily as a diversion from boredom.

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Antarctica, a "drive by" ethnography will have to suffice for this study, although future, better-funded research is definitely warranted. For more discussion of ethnographic research of human constructions of non-human animals, see: Arnold Arluke and Clinton R. Sanders, *Regarding Animals* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> John May, *The Greenpeace Book of Antarctica: a new view of the seventh continent* (New York: Doubleday, 1989).

Even so, this doesn't mean people attend all talks indiscriminately. The talk on Ernest Shackleton's ill-fated 1914-1917 voyage aboard the *Endurance* attracts around 40 passengers.<sup>5</sup> But the talk that immediately follows it attracts just about every able-bodied passenger on the ship not committed to hard-core, round-the-clock birdwatching above deck or throwing up from seasickness below deck. This is our naturalist's talk about penguins – the headliner stars of our expedition, which has been marketed as a chance to try to see all eight species found in the Antarctic and sub-Antarctic.<sup>6</sup>

And we're not the only expedition interested in penguins – in recent years people have been coming to Antarctica in droves, in large part to see these animal celebrities. Incredibly, tourism today is the primary reason people visit Antarctica.<sup>7</sup> While the continent hosts as many as 4,000 people annually for scientific research at 104 permanent bases and research camps run

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<sup>5</sup> This is surprising, as Shackleton's voyage – in which he rescued his ice-bound ship and crew by sailing in a lifeboat for days at great risk of being lost at sea and then skiing across the uncharted mountainous interior of Elephant Island to reach a supply station – is one of the most celebrated in Antarctic history and is frequently cited in tourism literature. For the full story, see: Frank A. Worsley, *Endurance: an epic of polar adventure* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Hence our less common itinerary into the Weddell Sea, since Emperor penguins (*Aptenodytes forsteri*) are more easily spotted (a highly relative term) in the Weddell Sea.

<sup>7</sup> While tourist expeditions began as early as the late 1950s through Lindblad Expeditions, for most of its history the volume of travelers was meager – only an estimated 35,000 tourists ever visited Antarctica prior to the early-1990s. But at the height of the recent Antarctic tourism wave, in the 2007-2008 season alone Antarctica received more than 46,000 tourist visitors. See: *Antarctic Tourism – A Resource for Science* (IAATO, 1997), accessed September 1, 2014, [http://iaato.org/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=151a4038-e2f6-4572-ad70-4b8c0d1b28c5&groupId=10157](http://iaato.org/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=151a4038-e2f6-4572-ad70-4b8c0d1b28c5&groupId=10157); *Trends 1992-2006* (IAATO, 2005), accessed September 1, 2014, [http://iaato.org/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=e7c38d36-e400-4469-bb81-e609b3b20948&groupId=10157](http://iaato.org/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=e7c38d36-e400-4469-bb81-e609b3b20948&groupId=10157). See also: *2007-2008 Tourism Summary* (IAATO, 2008), accessed September 1, 2014, [http://iaato.org/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=bcd40dfe-3145-4951-88e4-915b59448b03&groupId=10157](http://iaato.org/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=bcd40dfe-3145-4951-88e4-915b59448b03&groupId=10157).

For further history of Antarctic tourism, see: E. J. Stewart, et al., “A Review of Tourism Research in the Polar Regions,” *Arctic* 58(4) (2005): 383-394; Patrick T. Maher, et al., “Antarctica: Tourism, Wilderness, and ‘Ambassadorship,’” in *USDA Forest Service Proceedings* (Washington, DC: USDA Forest Service, 2003), 204-210; John Snyder, *Tourism in the Polar Regions: The Sustainability Challenge* (Paris: UN Environmental Programme and the International Ecotourism Society, 2007).

by 30 countries – especially Argentina, Russia, Chile, the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States – that number is dwarfed by the annual tourist traffic: I am one of 26,509 tourists who will visit the continent during the 2011-2012 season as part of an official tour. So big is this tourism business that the International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators (IAATO) boasts 47 full members focused on Antarctic travel, with an additional 74 associate and affiliate members offering limited travel opportunities to the continent (as of June 2015).<sup>8</sup> And all this tourist traffic has surged, not coincidentally, since the onset of a recent boom of penguins in popular media.<sup>9</sup>

During our naturalist's talk, it is striking how much nearly everyone in the room seems to share a common set of understandings of penguins built mostly from popular media imagery and narratives. Indeed, these media images and frames echo throughout the talk. For example, the naturalist shows his personal recordings of Rockhopper penguins (*Eudyptes crestatus*) moving through their rookery and draws knowing laughter from the audience when he titles their progression as the "march of the penguins," in reference to the popular film of the same title. While offering scientific details about the differences among the eight penguin species we may

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<sup>8</sup> In addition to these principal companies, the continent also receives visitation annually from dozens of private yachts and vessels. "IAATO Membership Directory 2014-2015," (IAATO, 2015), accessed September 1, 2014, <http://apps.iaato.org/iaato/directory/list.jsf>.

For information about Antarctic bases, see: "Main Antarctic Facilities," last modified 2014, Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs (COMNAP), accessed April 30, 2015, [https://www.comnap.aq/Information/SiteAssets/SitePages/Home/Antarctic\\_Facilities\\_List\\_13Feb2014.xls](https://www.comnap.aq/Information/SiteAssets/SitePages/Home/Antarctic_Facilities_List_13Feb2014.xls).

<sup>9</sup> To be fair, the boom in tourism also has been facilitated by the break-up of the Soviet Union making surplus Soviet icebreaking vessels available for tourism, allowing regular polar travel through ice-strewn waters to be much safer. But while the new ships made tourism easier, there has to be a reason to go. And tourism numbers really exploded only after the beginning of the onslaught of penguins in the media, as discussed later in the chapter. For more on the availability of Soviet icebreaking vessels, see: Gordon Cessford, "Antarctic Tourism: A Frontier for Wilderness Management." *International Journal of Wilderness* 3(3) (1997): 7-11.

encounter, he focuses primarily on what gives them charismatic appeal in popular media, characterizing them as “cute,” especially when tobogganing on their bellies. The fact that the audience mostly nods knowingly when he goes on to describe these penguin behaviors as “classic” suggests either a room filled with penguin connoisseurs or else a room filled with people so steeped in particular media images of penguins that we all think we know what a “classic” behavior is.<sup>10</sup> Somehow I suspect the latter.

Moving on in his talk, he plays up a trope familiar in many film and media portrayals of penguins as heroic everyman, persevering in a fragile existence against the natural elements. Even as he notes that several penguin species actually are biologically adapted for life in polar climates and have more trouble coping with overheating than the cold, he still reifies the popular impression perpetuated by many media stories that penguins’ lives generally are an against-all-odds quest for survival. As he says, “Penguins are incredibly strong physically – well every way actually. They’re probably the toughest creatures on the planet.” Thus he encourages us tourists to think of penguins as plucky heroes merely because some live in the Antarctic – enhancing their likeability and perhaps inviting us to use them as proxies for imagining what our own battles against the Antarctic elements would be like.

Interestingly, about the only depiction of penguins found in popular entertainment media the lecture does not touch upon is penguins as symbols of family. Our naturalist does briefly discuss where penguin rookeries are located and the challenges of nesting, but the focus of his

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<sup>10</sup> In a study of “destination images” of tourist sites, researchers found that when people have limited knowledge of a place they are much more affected in their thoughts and motivations about that tourist destination by media framing of the place. Moreover, they acquire up to 75 percent of what they know through visual imagery. Steve Pan, “The Role of TV Commercial Visuals in Forming Memorable and Impressive Destination Images,” *Journal of Travel Research* 50(2) (2011): 171-185. So it is not far-fetched to assume that a roomful of people from places without penguins (except for the Australians in the group) might derive most of their “destination image” of penguins from films, television, and other visual mass media.

talk is much more on penguin anatomy and their abilities as swimmers and divers. He acknowledges his omission of penguin family life by concluding that the “incredible story” of penguin breeding and chick rearing is one we all probably already know anyway, as he assumes we have all seen the documentary film *March of the Penguins*.

At the end of his talk, while showing a series of “head shots” of various penguins that in close-up look as though they have Mohawk or Afro hairstyles – images that play up penguins’ resemblance to anthropomorphized humans and that look similar to the stylized works of renowned animal photographer Timothy Flach – he concludes by discussing penguins’ effects on tourism.<sup>11</sup> He notes that tourism in the area, especially to the Falkland Islands, has recently increased, possibly as a result of the newfound popularity of Macaroni penguins (*Eudyptes chrysolophus*) – which are found primarily in the Falklands – through the recent release of the film *Happy Feet 2*.<sup>12</sup> In turn, he explains the Falkland Conservancy now promotes penguins as their symbol when trying to generate financial support. He chuckles that if the Conservancy’s requests spotlighted instead, say, a native skua – a predatory form of seagull – or a turkey vulture, they would hardly achieve the same level of public response. He concludes: penguins simply have that “undeniable appeal.” Laughing without stopping to question this difference in popularity, we passengers applaud and break for lunch.

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But why were all of us on the ship so uncritically accepting of penguins’ “undeniable appeal” compared to other sympatric Antarctic birds like the skua? Why is it that penguins have become the celebrities of choice for use by groups like the Falkland Conservancy? What

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<sup>11</sup> For examples of Flach’s work, see: <http://timflach.com/>.

<sup>12</sup> True, *Happy Feet 2* focuses primarily on emperor and Adélie penguins, but perhaps its most standout character – Lovelace, voiced by the late Robin Williams – is a macaroni penguin.

qualities have allowed the one avian resident to become a star over the other? And why were so many of us tourists packed into that room to begin with – paying in many cases more than \$10,000 per person for our journey – to “consume” the penguins’ celebrity stardom?

As I argued in the Introduction and Chapter One, celebrity species are commodified stories and characters, instantly adaptable narrative and graphic shorthand, and species are more likely to retain celebrity when they are digitally adapted to fit the demands of many genres and forms of media. But whereas Chapter One focused on the agents telling stories who produce and adapt commodified animal celebrity trying to create specific conservation outcomes, in this chapter I will focus more on the experience of those who consume (and in the process often reproduce) animals’ media celebrity and the implications of this for wildlife conservation. In particular, I am especially interested in considering perhaps the ultimate consumer of animal narratives – wildlife tourists that travel to an animal’s native habitat to try to see and to appropriate for themselves the characters and stories of animal celebrity.

Antarctic penguins offer a story of animal stardom and media adaptation like African elephants – but they are a newer celebrity in human history who have relatively quickly been filmed, storified, and commodified into, among other things: a cute spectacle, an exemplar for human behavior, and the heroic apotheosis of the Antarctic. Like elephants, penguins’ celebrity has emerged in part because they so adaptably lend themselves to telling many different kinds of stories in many different genres and media formats. In particular, penguins’ lack of history with humans has made them especially adaptable to newer forms of online media that trade in bite-sized, decontextualized narratives.

And having become such adaptable celebrities, many people are consuming penguin narratives through wildlife tourism. But interestingly, wildlife tourism turns out to be a



bifurcated process – a lived experience and a photographed one, with the latter being the experience re-produced for further consumption by friends and family after the tourist experience is over. And this photographed experience turns out to try to reify the commodified narrative of penguins known from popular mass media. Consuming penguins through wildlife tourism thus becomes a mix of *exclusivity* – creating a unique personal connection with animals that those who stay home do not have – and *celebrity* – finding for oneself the commodified vision of those animals that everyone else already thinks they know.

In the end, consuming animal celebrity through wildlife tourism creates considerable impacts on the landscapes and species it seeks to encounter, demanding ever closer and more tactile experiences to create a sense of authenticity in a world of hypervisual spectacle. But this intensity may destroy the physical nature itself. Moreover, it may destroy the illusion of nature as a wild place apart that so much of animal celebrity seems to rely upon, raising conundrums for those who see wildlife tourism as a potential panacea for conservation.

### **A Star is Born**

In the last 15 years, penguins have become “the next big thing” in the realm of animal celebrities, with a remarkable explosion of popularity in more traditional forms of mainstream media entertainment. According to the Internet Movie Database (IMDB), on average fewer than 20 film and television productions per decade featured penguins from 1910 to 2000, with the vast majority of those being animated programs featuring anthropomorphic characters like Chilly Willy and Pingu. But in the first decade of the 2000s, more than 60 penguin-related productions appeared, about 20 of which were documentaries (although this has not always made portrayals

of penguins any less anthropomorphic).<sup>13</sup> And popular penguin productions have continued apace into this decade – in fact PBS’s long-running *Nature* series kicked off its most recent fall 2014 season with a multi-part documentary entitled *Penguins: Spy in the Huddle*, which sent animatronic penguins with concealed cameras into wild penguin rookeries.<sup>14</sup>

Penguins’ true coming out party in wildlife film first arrived in 2005, when National Geographic Films and Warner Independent Pictures released a small-budget documentary film produced by the French filmmaker Luc Jacquet. The film followed a year in the life of an emperor penguin colony in Antarctica, revealing tremendous hardships faced by penguin parents trying to mate, incubate an egg, and raise a chick in a polar climate. According to the director at

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<sup>13</sup> These numbers come from a keyword query of films listed in the Internet Movie Database (IMDB.com).

Use of the IMDB database is an imperfect measure to be sure, since it relies upon user input – like a wiki site – to tag films with keywords. Since keyword choices are at the discretion of the site’s users, oddities emerge. For example, in searching for “penguins” and “Antarctica” only 24 films had both terms as keywords, although many more overlaps have just not been labeled as such by the database’s users (indeed, at the time of my search users had tagged the 2002 television movie *Shackleton* with the keyword “Penguins” but surprisingly not “Antarctica,” although it is based on the story of one of the most famous Antarctic explorations where penguins just happen to appear in the background). And to be sure, plenty of known examples are not labeled at all, such as many of the cartoons featuring penguin character Chilly Willy (of which currently only a few appear in the keyword search). Another limitation is that keywords fail to identify in what capacity the tagged terms appear (e.g. as locations, central characters, passing references, metaphors, Batman super villains, etc.). Thus, for example, “Antarctica” is a keyword for a film entitled *Antarctica*, even though the film is an exploration of the lives of Israel’s gay subculture.

Moreover, while the website is extensive – with more than one million titles – many productions, especially from the early era of film and television, do not appear. Despite these limitations, I believe it provides a useful snapshot for considering broad trends in film and television production, even as many finer details may be lost.

<sup>14</sup> *Penguins: Spy in the Huddle*, directed by John Downer (2013; London: BBC, 2014), Television Program.

the time of the film's release, what he thought he was making was "this pure and simple, very straightforward story of survival for this cursed species."<sup>15</sup>

What he actually had created was the aforementioned *March of the Penguins*. The film is arguably the most successful wildlife film of all time – ranking as the second-highest grossing documentary film ever (earning more than \$77 million at the U.S. box office and more than \$122 million in total worldwide). It went on to win the 2006 Academy Award for Best Documentary Film and opened the doors for a spate of mainstream, big-budget film and television productions focused on penguins, including: 2006's animated film *Happy Feet* (grossing more than \$197 million in the United States and winning the Academy Award for Best Animated Film) and its 2011 sequel *Happy Feet Two* mentioned by our ship's naturalist; the 2011 live-action and CGI adaptation of the classic children's book *Mr. Popper's Penguins* starring Jim Carrey (grossing more than \$170 million worldwide); the *Madagascar* series of animated films, whose breakout characters were its penguins that ended up with their own television series – *The Penguins of Madagascar* – as well as a holiday television special and spin-off film slated for release in 2015 (with the whole franchise of *Madagascar*-related productions to date having grossed more than \$1 billion worldwide); as well as penguins featuring in several episodes of the recent blue-chip wildlife documentary series *Planet Earth* (2006) and *Frozen Planet* (2011), co-produced by the Discovery Channel and the BBC (which were shown on a loop on our shipboard televisions).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> "March of the Penguins Press Notes," last modified 2005, Warner Brothers, accessed June 1, 2015, <http://www.rte.ie/radio/mooneygoeswild/competitions/marchofthepenguins.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> "March of the Penguins," IMDB, accessed April 4, 2010, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0428803>; "Happy Feet," IMDB, accessed September 1, 2014, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0366548>; "Mr. Popper's Penguins," IMDB, accessed September 1, 2014, [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1396218/?ref=mv\\_sr\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1396218/?ref=mv_sr_1); "The Penguins of Madagascar," IMDB, accessed September 1, 2014, [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1911658/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1911658/?ref=fn_al_tt_1); "Madagascar," IMDB, accessed September 1, 2014, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0351283/>; "Planet Earth," IMDB, accessed September 1, 2014,

Moreover, penguins' popularity in the realm of wildlife film and television has extended into a broader cultural celebrity, emerging as penguin-themed consumer products and as stories and characters in newer forms of media. In the marketing world – as I'll discover in the vast gift shop in Stanley in the Falkland Islands at the end of our expedition – penguin-themed merchandise has appeared as everything from penguin-shaped ice cube trays to stuffed animals to calendars to apparel, such as the “I Just Gotta Be Me” penguin t-shirt currently a popular seller from National Geographic.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, penguins have penetrated far and wide on the Internet and through a variety of online media, serving as the subjects of popular Internet memes on websites such as BuzzFeed or blogs like the once-popular, anti-cute-animal blog *F U Penguin* that spawned a book of the same title.<sup>18</sup> In short, penguins have not only achieved a newfound celebrity they did not have even 20 years ago, but storytellers and marketers have found them adaptable to the demands of multiple media formats, conquering a vast and diverse swath of the modern mediaverse.

As so often seems to happen when animal stories and characters become commodified, penguin celebrity has elided over specific details of their natural history, perpetuating certain misconceptions by generalizing all penguins into an *ur*-penguin – a black-and-white flightless

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[http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0795176/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0795176/?ref=fn_al_tt_1); “Frozen Planet,” IMDB, accessed September 1, 2014, [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2092588/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2092588/?ref=fn_al_tt_1).

<sup>17</sup> See: <http://shop.nationalgeographic.com/ngs/product/clothing/t-shirts-and-logo-gear/animal-themed/i-just-gotta-be-me-penguin-t-shirt>. It is not clear if this is a riff on the popular Far Side cartoon by Gary Larson that features the same punch line for a penguin that looks like all the others standing amid a massive rookery, which itself was also featured in Far Side-related consumer products like coffee mugs.

<sup>18</sup> For examples, see: “Fuck You, Penguin,” Undated website, accessed April 10, 2010, <http://www.fupenguin.com/>; Marie Telling, “22 Reasons Penguins Deserve Your Love,” BuzzFeed Animals, June 11, 2014, accessed September 1, 2014, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/marietelling/penguiiiiiinnnnnnss#3hkfwj>.

bird walking upright like a tuxedoed little human who lives in a polar climate.<sup>19</sup> But, as naturalist George Gaylord Simpson cautions, “there is no such thing as *the* penguin.”<sup>20</sup> There are actually 17 or 18 (scientists debate the classification of one subspecies) penguin species worldwide, ranging in size from the two-pound Little blue penguin (*Eudyptula minor*) to the 65-pound Emperor penguin (*Aptenodytes forsteri*). Moreover, despite popular stereotypes, penguins actually dwell in a range of habitats from the Galapagos Islands near the equator to rookeries 50 miles inland from the coast of Antarctica, with only three species – the Emperor, the Adélie (*Pygoscelis adeliae*), and the Chinstrap (*Pygoscelis antarctica*) – found exclusively in the Antarctic region and only eight species found there period. The remaining penguin species, including the most endangered – the Yellow-eyed penguin (*Megadyptes antipodes*) and Black-footed penguin (*Spheniscus demersus*) – live in New Zealand, South Africa, South America, and Australia, often in harbors and on beaches near people and human settlements.<sup>21</sup> As biologist and wildlife filmmaker Lloyd Spencer Davis reminds us, “penguins are not the fluffy creatures that toy manufacturers would have us believe; rather, they are plastic creatures – at least in terms of their behavior” – adaptable to a variety of physical environments.<sup>22</sup>

But despite this diversity and physical adaptability of penguins, it is the socially constructed *ur*-Penguin that is the penguin celebrity – a celebrity that dialectically creates and is

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<sup>19</sup> Even the name “penguin” hides a misconception, as the term was originally coined for the now-extinct northern hemisphere species also known as the Great auk (*Pinguinus impennis*), a genetically unrelated species that shares a nominally similar appearance to some penguins, whom later explorers of the southern hemisphere assumed were related to the auk. Stephen Martin, *Penguin* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 20, 23-34; George Gaylord Simpson, *Penguins: Past and Present, Here and There* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 22-23. The term itself is of disputed origin – deriving either from Welsh *pen gwyn* (meaning “white head”), English *pin wing* (referring to the birds’ short wings), or Latin *pinguis* (meaning “fat”).

<sup>20</sup> Simpson, *Penguins*, 29.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid; Lloyd Spencer Davis, *Penguins* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Martin, *Penguin*; Dyan DeNapoli, *The Great Penguin Rescue* (New York: Free Press, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Spencer Davis, *Penguins*, 160.

created by the *ur*-Penguin's *digital adaptability* to so many different kinds of stories. So it is worth unpacking what features of this *ur*-Penguin (combined though they may be from multiple species) make it so useful for telling stories. First, penguins' physical traits make them attractive visual choices to stand in anthropomorphically for humans in stories. Second, their lifestyles lend themselves to telling specific types of moralistic or educational tales about human society, from domestic fables of family care to heroic narratives of endurance against the elements. Finally, their relative historical lack of interactions with people (at least in the Antarctic region) allows them to serve as an easy *tabula rasa* for projections and fantasies in stories without the encumbrance of historical context – an especially useful trait for stories told through recent online media that so often prize “shallow” engagement and the ability for a story, image, or character to be sampled, repurposed, and transformed effortlessly.

First, consider penguins' physical anthropomorphic “cuteness,” which makes them appealing choices for animal storytelling seeking attractive protagonists that visually mimic humans.

When I asked a German dinner companion on my expedition one evening: “Why do you want to see penguins on this trip?,” the reply I received was quite telling:

[In a mock affected voice:] “Because they're so cute. They walk upright just like people.” While his self-mocking attitude was not necessarily common among other travelers I encountered, his basic underlying impression of penguins definitely was. In another conversation, an American tourist agreed she wanted to see penguins “because they're cute” and she wished she could take one home with her – preferably a chinstrap penguin – to let it play with her cat!

Similarly, while standing on the bow of the ship one day, an Australian traveler summed it up: “whoever said cute – it’s really the right word.”

Indeed, when our assistant expedition leader asked at a debriefing one evening how many trip participants secretly wanted to cuddle a “cute” penguin, nearly everyone raised a hand.

The Australian traveler I had spoken to identified one of the chief reasons why she thought penguins are cute, noting that penguins’ awkward bipedal locomotion on land makes them resemble human toddlers and thus engenders a protective response when viewing them. Several scholars, including historian Stephen Martin and zoologist Desmond Morris, have backed her analysis of this being the primary source of penguins’ “cuteness.”<sup>23</sup> Although studies of neoteny I discussed in the Introduction usually focus on *appearances* of animals, in this case it might be accurate to say that neotenous *locomotion* contributes to penguins’ celebrity appeal.

Beyond their neotenous movement, other reasons penguins might seem “cute” include their human-like upright posture (at least sometime on land) and their black-and-white coloration, which makes them look akin to humans dressed in tuxedos (although this is more true for certain species like the Adélie penguin than others). Especially when viewed as an ironic contrast of being debonair and urbane in a harsh polar environment, this tuxedo coloration scheme further adds to penguins’ storytelling appeal – attractive as subjects in narratives focused on “quirky” characters or in tales focused on odd-men-out in particular environments.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Martin, *Penguin*, 12-16; Morris quoted in Collin Wills and Sophie Walker, “Why p-p-p penguins take the biscuit; We give them our hearts . . . They waddle off with our wallets; The penguin is now the most loveable creature on television as shown by advertisers,” *The Daily Mirror*, October 15, 1995, accessed February 4, 2014. (LexisNexis Academic).

<sup>24</sup> Indeed, this notion of an individual who is at odds with one’s surroundings and social class is part of the origin story and identity of the Batman comic book villain “The Penguin.” This character is also a rare twist on the celebrity of penguins, focusing on a tuxedo-clad human that looks like the animal rather than the animal that looks like a tuxedo-clad human.

Read as “cute” anthropomorphic humans, penguins make attractive choices for storytelling in visual forms of media – especially in stories where they serve as a proxy for a human entertainer or clown.<sup>25</sup> For example, some of the earliest documentary film footage of penguins – Herbert Ponting’s 1933 film *90 Degrees South*, which was re-constructed from expedition footage of Robert Scott’s second Antarctic expedition in 1910 – casts penguins as comedic relief. The film shows a game the explorers invented called “The Penguin Trot” in which they chase and herd a group of Adélie penguins awkwardly toddling and running back and forth across the ice. The narrator punctuates the light-hearted scene by saying the penguins seemed to “enjoy the game as much as we [the expedition] did.”<sup>26</sup> The film scores the footage with circus-like musical themes and Charleston dance music to reinforce a focus on penguins’ movement and their roles as dancing clowns.

More recently, *Happy Feet*, the blockbuster animated film of 2006, has also used penguins as the equivalent of cute human entertainers in an anthropomorphic story. In this case, the plot centers on the theme of challenging societal convention (which supposedly for penguins involves joining in communal singing) and daring to be different, as the young protagonist Mumble, an emperor penguin, does by expressing himself through tap dance.<sup>27</sup>

Penguins’ comedic reputation and casting as “cute,” entertaining animal versions of humans have also appeared in non-cinematic media. For example, on television Jim Henson’s popular *Muppet Show* capitalized on penguins’ “tuxedoed” appearance to turn them into epitomes of a Fred Astaire-like dancer, deployed perhaps most memorably and ironically when

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<sup>25</sup> Martin, *Penguin*, 140.

<sup>26</sup> *90 Degrees South*, directed by Herbert Ponting, (1933; Riverbanksy, YouTube, 2011), online video, accessed June 1, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKBttUMKND4>.

<sup>27</sup> *Happy Feet*, directed by Judy Morris, Warren Coleman, George Miller (2006; Los Angeles: Warner Home Video, 2007) DVD.



serving as Miss Piggy's backup dancers during a re-enactment of Marilyn Monroe's classic "Tropical Heatwave" performance.<sup>28</sup> From 1986 to 2006, televised penguins starred in the stop-motion animated children's cartoon *Pingu* – so popular worldwide it was the basis of toys in Japanese fast food kids' meals and the focus of a Nintendo video game. In *Pingu* the associations with entertainers subtly derived not so much from *Pingu*'s toddler-like motion or tuxedoed appearance as from the penguins speaking in a nonsense language that combined penguins' squawking sounds with a traditional European clown "language" known as "Grammelot."<sup>29</sup>

Even in non-visual media, cute penguins sometimes serve the role of anthropomorphic entertainer. For example, in Richard and Florence Atwater's Newberry Award-winning children's book, *Mr. Popper's Penguins*, a housepainter builds a penguin vaudeville act. The story depicts the penguins as supposedly quite eager to perform and popular with audiences who enjoy seeing them re-enact human military battles onstage.<sup>30</sup>

The second reason penguins are so adaptable for telling stories is their lifestyle while on land. A frequent trope in animal stories is to highlight a particular animal as embodying a "natural" exemplar of some human behavior or virtue – a model we, the human audience, supposedly would do well to emulate. These moralistic narratives have a long history and tradition in animal storytelling for children dating back to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (and even earlier

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<sup>28</sup> *The Muppets Go to the Movies*, directed by Peter Harris (1981; Lumrunner, YouTube, 2008), online video, accessed October 10, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y2he3gF5uSM>. The Astaire-like connection of tap dancing penguins also appears in the fantasy sequence in the animated chalk drawings of Disney's classic film *Mary Poppins* (1964).

<sup>29</sup> Tony Thorne, "Pingu's Lingo, or How to Get By in Penguinese," last modified 2004, King's College London, accessed October 1, 2014, <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/study/elc/resources/tonythorne/newlanguagearticles.aspx>.

<sup>30</sup> Richard and Florence Atwater, *Mr. Popper's Penguins* (New York: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 1988), 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition. The book is only *very* loosely the basis of the later Jim Carey film.

if one considers fables like those of Aesop).<sup>31</sup> In using animals to tell these stories, the more parallels that can be drawn between an animal community and human communities, the more useful that animal is for telling educational tales. Penguin communities make attractive doubles for human societies because they physically nest in large communal rookeries on land that are relatively stable and gridded, similar to human towns or cities (at least more so than many other animal species that aggregate in groups – like herding game animals or schools of fish – whose location and geography continually changes). Moreover, from a sheer practical standpoint, the fact that these stable penguin rookeries can be approached by humans quite closely and easily (since many penguins lack innate fear of humans) allows these animal “cities” to be photographed for visual stories more easily, at least again compared to other large aggregations of wildlife.

Meanwhile, another frequent subject for moralizing by many animal stories has been the nature of human families and domestic relations. At least superficially, penguins’ lifestyles lend

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<sup>31</sup> Indeed, educational and moralistic anthropomorphism is one of the oldest types of animal tales. Starting in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century with the rise of the Romantic movement, the growth in America and Europe of sentimentalism, and a greater emphasis placed on childhood instruction, children’s books increasingly became popular. Educational animal tales since then have comprised a major component of children’s literature.

And since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the moral lessons taught by animal tales, such as Ernest Thompson Seton’s *Wild Animals I Have Known* (1898), increasingly have derived from descriptions of the natural behaviors of the animals themselves. Highly popular animal stories such as Jack London’s *White Fang* (1906) and Rudyard Kipling’s *The Jungle Book* (1894) also began a trend of telling more tales of animals set in the wild itself, providing commentary on the supposedly corrupting aspects of human civilization and urbanity in the process. For a discussion of animals in children’s literature, see: Margaret Blount, *Animal Lands: The Creatures of Children’s Fiction* (New York: W. Morrow, 1975); Christine Kenyon-Jones, *Kindred Brutes: Animals in Romantic Period Writing* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2001); Mary Allen, *Animals in American Literature* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983).

It is important to remember that not all authors have used animals the same way and for the same morals in animal tales. For example, as Mary Allen points out, British authors like Kipling tended to cite wild nature as a place to find civilizing order; American authors like London tended to cite it as a place to find liberating disorder.

themselves well to this genre for storytellers seeking animal analogues to certain modern Western ideals of the nuclear family as comprised of monogamous male and female parents focused on the upbringing of their offspring. Penguins have a reputation for caring for their eggs and chicks for long periods of time each mating season, engaging in personal risk for the parental investment in the survival of their young, and sharing parenting duties jointly between males and females.<sup>32</sup> But this is actually another example of the *ur*-Penguin reputation glossing over reality. As Leslie Roberts and others have noted, not only is the “naturalness” of any particular model of human families problematic, but the notion that penguins strictly adhere to norms of monogamous co-parenting is false since recent evidence has emerged in biological studies of penguins stealing each other’s eggs and chicks as well as engaging in mating outside bonded pairs.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the use of penguins to illustrate morals for human society involves a selective interpretation of “naturalness.” Nevertheless, penguins still remain attractive candidates for storytelling about families because even these many selective interpretations make them adapted for many different types of stories of familial behavior and interactions.

For example, of the almost eight minutes devoted to penguins in *90 Degrees South*, the majority of the time highlights the courtship, nesting, and chick-rearing of a pair of Adélie penguins. Throughout the scene, the narrator admiringly emphasizes the challenges penguin parents overcome from snow, neighboring penguins, and predatory skuas ready to steal their eggs and chicks.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, the film frequently plays up these challenges for humorous effect, mocking social conventions among middle-class human families of the 1930s by observing the domestic “squabbles” of “newlywed” penguins and chiding a guilty penguin

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<sup>32</sup> Martin, *Penguin*, 31-32.

<sup>33</sup> Leslie Carol Roberts, *The Entire Earth and Sky: Views on Antarctica* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2008) 268.

<sup>34</sup> Ponting, *90 Degrees South*.

husband who toddles home to the nest knowing “he’s stayed out too late” and who will be in trouble with his wife at home, as is the prerogative of her sex.<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, *March of the Penguins* deserves a great deal of credit for driving recent interest in penguins as exemplars of family by showing the intensive 8-month period required to mate, incubate, hatch, and fledge a baby emperor penguin, with the parents taking turns holding the egg or chick on their feet and under their feathers while the other parent marches up to 75 miles to sea to feed and bring back food for the chick.<sup>36</sup> Even the film’s producers saw the film as a moral about the value of marital and parental love, describing the emperor penguin in their press notes as a “model of sobriety and endurance,” “model of tolerance,” and “model of faithfulness.”<sup>37</sup>

Other recent media stories since have followed this lead in focusing heavily on penguin rookeries and chick rearing, despite this being a comparatively brief component of the overall life cycle of most penguins, who spend the majority of their time alone feeding and traveling at sea. For example, television documentaries like the BBC’s *Life in the Freezer* and Nature’s *Penguins: Spy in the Huddle* have also largely emphasized penguin breeding and parental efforts to rear chicks and seem implicitly to value penguins as model stories of parental engagement.<sup>38</sup>

And many audiences have clearly appreciated these interpretations of penguins as models for human families. In America, conservative religious commentators especially hailed *March of the Penguins* as a natural model of proper “family values” and arranged numerous screenings for

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> This long time from egg laying to chick fledging is unique among penguin species to emperor and king penguins. Other penguin species have a shorter cycle of chick rearing and begin incubation in the spring rather than the late fall.

<sup>37</sup> “*March of the Penguins* Production Notes,” last modified 2005, Warner Independent Pictures, accessed January 5, 2011,

[http://wippub.warnerbros.com/movie/march/MOP\\_Press\\_Notes\\_FINAL.doc](http://wippub.warnerbros.com/movie/march/MOP_Press_Notes_FINAL.doc).

<sup>38</sup> *Penguins: Spy in the Huddle*, BBC.

organized church groups.<sup>39</sup> In so doing, they focused on the film's images of penguins as dedicated, seemingly monogamous parents as the model for how human families *should be*.

But since, as mentioned, penguin family relationships are actually quite malleable, other people have deployed them as proxies in modern culture wars to illustrate the “naturalness” of other models of human relationships. For example, in 2005, the publication of the children's picture book *And Tango Makes Three* provoked a public firestorm because it told the true story of two male penguins at the Central Park Zoo who pair bonded and eventually hatched an egg given to them by zookeepers, raising a female chick named Tango. Because it seeks to naturalize homosexual families, the book has emerged as one of the more frequently targeted books for banning in school libraries.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Jonathan Miller, “March of the Conservatives: Penguin Film as Political Fodder,” *The New York Times*, September 13, 2005, accessed May 1, 2010, [http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/13/science/march-of-the-conservatives-penguin-film-as-political-fodder.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/13/science/march-of-the-conservatives-penguin-film-as-political-fodder.html?_r=0).

Additionally, some creationists highlighted the story as evidence against evolution, arguing that natural selection could not have produced such incredibly complex parenting arrangements. In turn, critics countered these arguments by suggesting that a benevolent or intelligent designer would not have produced such a tedious lifestyle, implying that only heartless evolution could create the emperor penguins' form of procreation with its multiple dangerous hikes to and from the sea. C. Desrets, “Liberty University disputing evolution.” *The News & Advance* (Lynchburg, VA), February 15, 2009, accessed January 5, 2011. (Google News); Andrew Sullivan, “Not-so-picky penguins muddy the morality war,” *The Times Online* (London, UK), September 18, 2005, accessed May 6, 2010. (Google News Search).

<sup>40</sup> Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell, *And Tango Makes Three* (New York: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing, 2005). For the controversy surrounding the book, see: Dinitia Smith, “Love That Dare Not Squeak Its Name,” *The New York Times*, February 7, 2004, B7, accessed May 4, 2010. (LexisNexis Academic); also, M. Reiss, “Imagining the World: The Significance of Religious Worldviews for Science Education,” *Science & Education* 18 (2009): 783-796.

Of course, same sex behavior is common not just in penguins but in a great many other species, as scientists discovered once they started looking for it. As evolutionary biologist Olivia Judson has noted, scientists have observed same-sex behaviors in many animals – such as dolphins, manatees, macaques, bonobos, and even snakes – and are constantly re-evaluating the role of sex in all species beyond biological procreation. Olivia Judson, *Dr. Tatiana's Sex Advice to All Creation* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002).

And this use of penguins to tell stories about human family dynamics has only increased their celebrity – which in turn has made the battles over the stories told about penguins all the more pitched (which only further perpetuates penguin celebrity in a positive feedback loop) – as advocates on all sides of the culture wars seek to claim the popular penguins as standard-bearers for their own cause of what constitutes “natural” families. Thus, beyond the Central Park Zoo example profiled in *And Tango Makes Three* (where the two male penguins in real life eventually separated and paired with female penguins, but Tango, the female chick, soon pair bonded with another female!), arguments about same-sex behavior in penguin couples have recently re-emerged at the Toronto Zoo, with gay rights advocates vehemently protesting the zoo’s decision to split apart a same-sex pair (the zoo doing so in hopes of encouraging breeding among a population of endangered black-footed penguins). The zoo’s move (which ultimately led to both males bonding with other females and even later fighting with each other over nesting space) was protested by a worldwide petition on the website Change.org, garnered several stories on the gossip website Gawker.com, spawned backlash from Facebook groups set up in support of the two males – Buddy and Pedro – and even merited a jibe in one of the late night comedy monologues of comedian Jimmy Kimmel.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, clearly part of the reason penguins have emerged as celebrities has been their usefulness as proxies for telling many different stories about human relationships that allow society to work through its debates about social norms. While other birds of the Antarctic region like skuas may demonstrate a similar fortitude in rearing young in the extreme polar climate,

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<sup>41</sup> Vincent Donovan, “‘Gay’ penguins Buddy and Pedro turn their attention to the ladies,” *The Toronto Star*, December 13, 2011, accessed February 4, 2014, [http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2011/12/13/gay\\_penguins\\_buddy\\_and\\_pedro\\_turn\\_attention\\_to\\_the\\_ladies.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2011/12/13/gay_penguins_buddy_and_pedro_turn_attention_to_the_ladies.html). See also: Brian Moylan, “Separating Gay Penguin Duo Buddy and Pedro Turned Them Straight,” *Gawker*, December 13, 2011, accessed February 4, 2014, <http://gawker.com/5867621/separating-gay-penguin-duo-pedro-and-buddy-turned-them-straight>.

penguins' malleable family dynamics and communal rookeries (especially when coupled with their anthropomorphic upright posture and motion) make them the more effective visual emblems for storytelling that seeks to stand in for human families and social dynamics.

Certainly for us tourists to the Antarctic, penguins' communal lifestyle lent itself to viewing penguins as akin to characters in thousands of overlapping and adjacent human-like dramas. Indeed, during my expedition, people frequently recounted encounters with penguins not in a mode of scientific observation but as a polar edition of *As the World Turns*. Most memorably, one day I passed a British woman animatedly recounting to her companions a scene she had seen earlier among neighboring chinstrap penguin nests: "So he dropped that pebble and she tried to steal it. But he was having *none* of that!"<sup>42</sup>

Antarctic penguins' lifestyles also make them well adapted for use in animal narratives that comment on the precariousness of life and adaptation to surroundings. Lacking a native human population, penguins are the closest things to "locals" for Antarctica and so they are the largest charismatic symbol of the continent, especially since the region's few other large animals – seals and whales – can be found worldwide and not just exclusively in the Antarctic. Thus, visually penguins can serve as *the* symbols of place (or at least *ur*-penguins can, if one ignores the penguins native to Australia, Africa, and South America). They can play the role of geographic synecdoche, shorthand instantly signifying Antarctica. This in turn associates

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<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, this was actually one of the few times I heard passengers differentiate among penguin sexes. Since there is very little physical difference between male and female penguins and both participate in incubating and parenting, it can be very difficult to tell an individual's gender. Yet it was striking how reflexively almost all the passengers referred to penguins as male. At various times over the course of the voyage, I overheard comments directed at or about the penguins such as: "Hey there, big boy;" "Come on, guys. Let's go;" "He doesn't look like much of an emperor with his little ice floe;" and "There you are, guy." Never once did I hear passengers talk about "girls" or resort to a generic "she" to describe penguins.

penguins with all the harsh features of the Antarctic landscape that most impress themselves on human visitors – like the fact that it is the coldest, driest, and windiest continent on the planet.

Moreover, the very peopleless-ness of Antarctica has encouraged popular media to conjure the place as hostile and alien.<sup>43</sup> The survival of penguins in what is perceived to be a forbidding landscape makes them seem all the more heroic – their existence in Antarctica a useful metaphor for fragility and resilience against nature.<sup>44</sup> As a result, many popular narratives, especially those focused on Antarctica itself, turn penguins and their resilient symbolism as the objects of quests to be sought and appropriated for the protagonists' own stories.

For example, perhaps the most famous and popular book about Antarctic exploration, *The Worst Journey in the World* (1922) by Apsley Cherry-Garrard, recounts efforts by men on one of Robert Scott's expeditions to collect emperor penguins' eggs, with these embryonic forms of an Antarctic species becoming a holy grail for scientific acquisition and the penguins' mere existence (in a landscape that nearly killed the expedition's men) a measure of the birds' worth.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> In popular culture this is quite often literal. One of the most popular movies to watch among denizens of Antarctic research bases is *The Thing* (1982) about an alien shapeshifter that invades Antarctic bases. Many other stories and films, including John Campbell's "Who Goes There?" (1935) and Christian Nyby's *The Thing from Another World* (1951) also play with this notion of Antarctica and alien-ness. For a further interpretation of this connection with Antarctica, see: Elena Glasberg, "Who goes there? Science, fiction, and belonging in Antarctica," *Journal of Historical Geography* 34 (2008): 639-657. As Glasberg argues, these works serve as satirical critiques of the work of and reason for scientists being in the Antarctic as well as of imperialism and the quest by many countries to lay claim to the blank space of Antarctica.

<sup>44</sup> As historian Adrian Hawkins argues, the most dominant cultural perspective on Antarctica is one of "not going." The sense of foreboding surrounding the continent adds emotional weight to everything connected with popular understanding of the continent and gravitas to all (human or animal) who do go there. Adrian Hawkins, "'have you been there?' Some thoughts on (not) visiting Antarctica," *Environmental History* 15 (2010): 514-519.

<sup>45</sup> Having been encouraged by Joseph Hooker, Dr. Edward Wilson was convinced the emperor penguin was an evolutionarily ancient form of bird and therefore that the eggs might reveal earlier stages of evolution in the transition from scales to feathers during the embryonic development. In the end, not only was the theory incorrect but the specimens retrieved during the expedition for the British Museum were improperly handled and not sectioned until the embryos



Similarly, in his book chronicling his personal Antarctic travels, *End of the Earth*, renowned naturalist and author Peter Matthiessen noted of his personal experience in Antarctica that “there [was] something missing or unfinished, if only because we failed to see the emperor penguin” and, thus, somehow in his view hadn’t really witnessed the quintessential heroes of the Antarctic.<sup>46</sup> Hence, just as with telling stories about human families, penguins and their lifestyles are useful for many storytellers who wish to tell Antarctic stories of heroism or resilience.

The final reason why penguins have been so popular and useful for storytelling is the history and geography of human-penguin encounters – Antarctic penguins offer as unblemished a *tabula rasa* for people’s projections as almost any large animal known on Earth. Indeed, there is good reason why Americans’ celebrity *ur*-Penguin today selectively excises the history of people interacting with non-Antarctic penguins and focuses only on penguins in frozen climes lacking human neighbors. While people have actually had a long history with non-Antarctic penguins, Antarctic species only became well-known with humans’ arrival in the Antarctic region – an event that happened first in 1820 and not in earnest until the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>47</sup> Thus, the

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inside were no longer useful. Apsley Cherry-Garrard, *The Worst Journey in the World* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005).

<sup>46</sup> Peter Matthiessen, *End of the Earth: Voyages to Antarctica* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2003), 85.

<sup>47</sup> The first sighting of the continent itself, as opposed to nearby islands, is a disputed matter, taking place in 1820 either by the Russian Fabian Gottlieb von Bellingshausen, the British Edward Bransfield, or the American Nathaniel Palmer. But the first confirmed landing on the continent did not happen until 1894. James Cook had circumnavigated the area where the continent was in the 1770s, but only managed to disprove the existence of a long-rumored mythical temperate continent, Terra Australis Incognita. A.G.E. Jones, *Antarctica Observed: Who Discovered the Antarctic Continent?* (Whitby, Yorkshire: Caedmon of Whitby, 1982). See also: *The United States in Antarctica: A Report of the U.S. Antarctic Program External Panel* (Washington, DC: National Science Foundation, 1997), 17.

In terms of non-Antarctic penguins, New Zealand’s penguins played a role in traditional Maori lore – known as “Korora” – and penguins also appeared to a much lesser extent in early South American native traditions. The first European contact with non-Antarctic penguins may date as early as the twelfth century A.D., although the first documented European encounter

discovery of Antarctic penguins neatly coincided with the arrival of several forms of modern mass media and also with the popular celebrity of Antarctic expeditions as one of the last theaters of earthbound exploration.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, many media storytellers may have focused on Antarctic penguins to enjoy the opportunity to tell new animal stories not shaped by centuries of narratives of previous encounters with humans. There is no Aesop of the Antarctic, so the traits and morals anthropomorphically storytellers wish to impart upon penguins remain malleable – a useful feature for a media industry desperate to invent and manipulate new characters for popular consumption. Ironically, while elephants’ celebrity emerged in part because of their long history with humanity, as I discussed in the last chapter, the penguin’s recent celebrity has grown precisely because it has had so little history with humanity.

Moreover, Antarctic penguins live in areas with no native human populations – a geographic blank space on maps, or the “white continent,” as Antarctica is frequently dubbed – which further enhances their storytelling appeal. There are no countervailing narratives of locals for visitors of the Antarctic to understand, overcome, or explain away. The region’s “traumatic humanlessness,” as Antarctic scholar Elena Glasberg calls it, allows visitors to feel “ethically unencumbered” while projecting and living out their fantasies and narratives on the landscape and its inhabitants.<sup>49</sup> And as mentioned earlier, because Antarctic penguins largely lack an innate fear of humans – similar to many island species that evolved in isolation from land predators –

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occurred when Vasco da Gama sighted black-footed penguins (also known as African penguins) in southern Africa in 1497. Penguins started appearing in scientific texts as far back as Linnaeus’ *Systema Naturae* in 1758. Martin, *Penguin*, 9, 53; Simpson, *Penguins*, 2-16.

<sup>48</sup> For more on celebrity of Antarctic expeditions, see: Roberts, *The Entire Earth and Sky*; also Sara Wheeler, *Terra Incognita: Travels in Antarctica* (New York: Random House, 1996). An incisive parody of overhyped media coverage of these expeditions to the polar region occurs in: Wolcott Gibbs, *Bird Life at the Pole* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1931).

<sup>49</sup> Elena Glasberg, “Refusing History at the End of the Earth: Ursula Leguin’s ‘Sur’ and the 2000-01 Women’s Antarctica Crossing,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 21(1) (2002): 114.

visitors to the Antarctic can walk right up to large penguin rookeries. Encountering a landscape teeming with wildlife that seemingly welcomes (or at least tolerates without fear) humans' presence – for many visitors, this is a geographic vision of Eden, a place to project and act out narratives of wildlife encounter seemingly without complication from cultural baggage. And this vision offers a landscape with fewer flaws to be explained away when constructing Eden compared to the imagined Edens of Africa with elephant narratives.

Thus, Antarctic penguins' place (or perhaps more accurately lack of place) in human history and geography has made them attractive candidates for media representations and storytelling. And this is especially true in newer forms of media – indeed, their *it* status in early 21<sup>st</sup> century popular culture may also stem in part because they are so well adapted to the emerging forms of the 21<sup>st</sup> century's dominant digital forms of media. In the current online media environment, context not only can get lost amid bite-sized (or byte-sized) transmissions of narrative, it can also be a hindrance, since the more you accommodate context the longer you make your stories, pages, or web videos – potentially taxing the ever-waning attention span many of us now have for web-based information. An animal (or really any character) that has lots of historical baggage attached to it is thus not as digitally adapted to this mediaverse of constant sampling and sharing.

So a protagonist like a penguin that lacks historical or geographical context becomes the perfect animal for incorporation into an era of web “memes” and other nuggets of ideas and stories conveyed through blogs, Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, as well as the various web entities that hope to have their content re-shared through these transmission channels. Penguins can be adapted and reframed quite easily in this realm, as seen, for example, on pop culture sites like BuzzFeed – a recent search of which elicited a multitude of penguin posts such as “Underwater

Farting Penguin,” “11 Penguins With Attitude Problems,” “18 Penguins Falling Over,” “22 Reasons Why Penguins Are Hands Down the Best Animals on Earth,” “Just Some Penguins Being Penguins,” “21 Penguins That Are More Awkward Than You,” etc. Penguins are the epitome of seemingly context-less celebrities perfect for web sharing – even though, as discussed above, much of our understanding of penguins has been very strongly grounded by place – just a place that happens to have a relative dearth of human stories.

### “The Once-in-a-Lifetime Experience You Came For”

The narrative adaptability and anthropomorphic qualities of penguins help to explain why storytellers like to tell stories with penguins and thus why penguins *could* become a celebrity. But the process of becoming a celebrity involves additional steps – it requires the commodification of these animal narratives into a celebrity brand and the consumption of that brand by an interested public. And one of the best places to see both steps quite clearly is in the field of wildlife tourism – an industry that, as Susan Davis describes, is a “machine that profits by selling people’s dreams back to them.”<sup>50</sup>

Given that the industry is premised on helping people live out and re-enact stories, wildlife tourism operations must be quite alert to the narrative conventions surrounding animals in media and adept at packaging these stories for tourists to purchase and consume as a ready-made commodity. And an examination of Antarctic tourism marketing reveals just how successfully tourist operators have incorporated common narrative conventions of penguins. For starters, most every operator has latched onto penguins as *the* synecdoche or shorthand symbol of the Antarctic – a visual image that both conveys the place and also (due to penguins’ upright

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<sup>50</sup> Susan Davis, *Spectacular Nature: Corporate Culture and the Sea World Experience* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 244.

anthropomorphic appearance) might suggest to a potential tourist's imagination what it would be like to be a human in Antarctica. In a survey of all the full IAATO members' websites in the spring of 2010, I found, for example, that Adventure Associates; Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris; Crystal Cruises, Inc.; Fathom Expeditions, Inc.; G.A.P. Adventures; Hanse Explorer Gmblt and Co.; Heritage Expeditions; Hurtigruten ASA; Orion Expedition Cruises; Quark Expeditions; Rederij Bark EUROPA B.V.; Sterna Corporation; Waterproof Expeditions; Xplore Expeditions; and Zegrahm Expeditions all featured penguins in their website mastheads and/or company logos – almost always either a standing emperor or king penguins, often with their chicks standing next to them.<sup>51</sup> Abercrombie and Kent meanwhile featured penguins in 21 of the 23 photos in its online photo gallery and had penguin pictures on every page of its website mentioning an Antarctic expedition – with emperor penguins with their chicks, reminiscent of *March of the Penguins*, as the main homepage picture.<sup>52</sup> The 2008 *Lonely Planet* travel guide *Antarctica* used for its cover photo – the single image to summarize the continent for potential readers – a picture

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<sup>51</sup> “Adventure Associates,” Undated website, accessed March 24, 2010, <http://www.adventureassociates.com>; “Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris,” Undated website, accessed March 25, 2010, <http://www.cheesemans.com>; “Crystal Cruises, Inc.,” Undated website, accessed March 25, 2010, <http://www.crystalcruises.com>; “Fathom Expeditions, Inc.,” Undated website, accessed March 24, 2010, <http://www.fathomexpeditions.com>; “G.A.P. Adventures,” Undated website, accessed March 24, 2010, <http://www.gapadventures.com>; “Hanse Explorer Gmblt and Co. KG,” Undated website, accessed March 26, 2010, <http://www.oceanstar.de>; “Heritage Expeditions,” Undated website, accessed March 24, 2010, <http://www.heritage-expeditions.com>; “Hurtigruten ASA,” Undated website, accessed March 26, 2010, <http://www.hurtigruten.com>; “Orion Expedition Cruises,” Undated website, accessed March 24, 2010, <http://www.orioncruises.com.au>; “Quark Expeditions,” Undated website, accessed March 27, 2010, <http://www.quarkexpeditions.com>; “Rederij Bark EUROPA B.V.,” Undated website, accessed March 27, 2010, <http://www.barkeuropa.com>; “Sterna Corporation,” Undated website, accessed April 24, 2010, <http://www.expeditionsail.com>; “Waterproof Expeditions,” Undated website, accessed April 25, 2010, <http://www.waterproof-expeditions.com>; “Xplore Expeditions,” Undated website, accessed April 26, 2010, <http://www.xplore-expeditions.com>; “Zegrahm Expeditions,” Undated website, accessed April 26, 2010, <http://www.zeco.com>.

<sup>52</sup> “Abercrombie + Kent USA, LLC,” Undated website, accessed March 24, 2010, <http://www.abercrombiekent.com>.

of an emperor penguin chick huddled next to its parent (a scene that while quite familiar from *March of the Penguins* is highly unlikely for the average Antarctic tourist using the guide to encounter, since visits to emperor rookeries occur on only a single company's voyages).<sup>53</sup>

Beyond this visual commodification of penguins to entice potential tourists, Antarctic tourism companies have also succeeded in incorporating common penguin narratives into their text when describing the promised experience of the expeditions. Thus, their marketing literature presents penguins as heroic protagonists to be sought as the object of one's quest – objects who will offer a tourist nothing less than cute and comedic spectacles, cuddly opportunities to witness familial love in the wild, and visions of brave fortitude against the cruelties of nature.

Consider, for example, how advertising prose reifies penguins' reputations as cute, anthropomorphic creatures. Some websites simply describe Antarctic penguins as “raucous” and “endearing.”<sup>54</sup> But others get more florid in their prose:

“The Antarctic is nature's playground; there is nowhere else in the world quite like it. We will visit crowded rookeries, abuzz with penguins going about their affairs.”<sup>55</sup>

“Denizens of penguin rookeries will amuse you.”<sup>56</sup>

“Penguins populate the land with their comical little offspring.”<sup>57</sup>

Antarctic travel websites also reify the idea of penguins as exemplars of familial care:

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<sup>53</sup> Jeff Rubin, *Antarctica* (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications Pty. Ltd., 2008), 4<sup>th</sup> edition.

Interestingly, the 2012 edition of the Lonely Planet guide uses for its cover photo a gentoo penguin – which, perhaps not coincidentally, is the species of penguin featured in the 2011 live-action Jim Carrey film *Mr. Popper's Penguins*. Alex Averbeck, *Antarctica* (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications Pty. Ltd., 2012), 5<sup>th</sup> edition.

<sup>54</sup> For example: Zegrahm Expeditions website; Hurtigruten ASA website.

<sup>55</sup> “Polar Star Expeditions,” Undated website, accessed March 24, 2010, <http://www.polarstarexpeditions.com>.

<sup>56</sup> Quark Expeditions website.

<sup>57</sup> “Hapag-Lloyd Kreuzfahrten,” Undated website, accessed March 24, 2010, <http://www.hl-cruises.com>.

“Amidst whole colonies of [king penguins] that look like they are wearing tails, you will spot their cute young, which still have their brown downy plumage and are so lovingly protected and fed by the parents.”<sup>58</sup>

“Experience a genuine miracle – the beginning of new life amidst the inhospitable ice world of Antarctica . . . you will be able to watch parent birds looking after their chicks. The roles are clearly defined: one looks after the chick and the other goes fishing.”<sup>59</sup>

And finally many companies adopt the tropes of penguin narratives being about heroic resilience:

“. . . we are greeted by Adelie penguins which, unimpressed by our curiosity, brave the snow and the ice.”<sup>60</sup>

“The existence of the Emperor Penguin is more that [sic] a story of survival and endurance. It is the triumph of life itself.”<sup>61</sup>

Having weaved together all these common narrative tropes about penguins, tourism operators complete their commodification of penguins’ celebrity by promising that consuming the penguin experience is a vital, almost necessary experience for those truly seeking to commune with nature:

“One of the great wildlife experiences is to see emperor penguins and hear their haunting call.”<sup>62</sup>

“Few people have had the privilege to stand surrounded by the lords of Antarctica, emperor penguins . . . .”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Cheesemans’ Ecology Safaris website.

<sup>62</sup> “Aurora Expeditions,” Undated website, accessed March 25, 2010, <http://www.auroraexpeditions.com.au>.

“To ‘march with the penguins’ is a rare experience that very few people are fortunate to share” and an encounter with emperor penguins is “the once-in-a-lifetime experience you [the tourist] came for.”<sup>64</sup>

Perhaps Quark Expeditions best captures all these narratives in a succinct mother lode of penguin commodification, urging travelers to book an expedition “if you want to experience Antarctica as explorers did a century ago, or see fluffy Emperor Penguin chicks tended by adults marching to and fro” – both alluding to *March of the Penguins* and its imagery of familial penguins while seemingly conflating modern tourism on luxury, GPS-equipped icebreakers with the experience of a heroic journey by past Antarctic explorers.<sup>65</sup>

Beyond the language and imagery of tourist promotions, the actual tourist experience itself offered by companies has changed in the last decade in response to (but perhaps also dialectically driving) penguin’s recent fame and further cementing penguin’s celebrity status as a narrative commodity to be experienced. For example, my analysis of the landings made by tourist expedition ships in Antarctica found that, in the four years following the release of *March of the Penguins*, landings where the primary attraction is wildlife like penguins increased in relative proportion to landings where the attractions are more historical (usually sites related to whaling or polar exploration history). In some cases, the differences have been quite stark. For example, the Snow Hill Emperor Penguin colony (the northernmost and most accessible of any Emperor Penguin rookery), which did not even register visitors in the years prior to *March of the Penguins*, exceeded 500 visitors in each of the two tourist seasons after the film came out.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Zegrahm Expeditions website.

<sup>64</sup> Cheesemans’ Ecology Safaris website.

<sup>65</sup> Quark Expeditions website.

<sup>66</sup> There are several caveats to this analysis. First, ship landings in Antarctica are affected by numerous conditions outside the control of the tourist operator, including highly variably



So through promoting and appropriating penguin narratives for promotions and for tours themselves, tourist companies have helped commodify the story and fame of penguins into a product – full-fledged celebrity to be consumed by an eager public. But what does “consumption” of animal celebrity mean to the people involved? What do they want to get from their encounter with penguin celebrity and what do they actually do when going on a penguin-based wildlife tour? These are the questions that brought me as a participant-observer aboard an expedition offered by one of the major tourist outfitters operating tours to Antarctica.<sup>67</sup>

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weather and sea conditions that can prohibit landings and international conventions that limit multiple ships from landing in the same day at certain popular sites. Yet since this random variability should affect all ships and sites equally, the fact that overall wildlife-oriented sites became more popular seems significant. Second, the classification of a site as primarily “wildlife-oriented” or “historical” comes from my analysis of the descriptions of landing sites as taken from the Lonely Planet’s guide to *Antarctica* and thus it is possible that expeditions might offer other narrative framing and experiences for passengers when visiting particular sites.

Jeff Rubin, *Antarctica*; “Antarctica 2008-2009: Number of Tourists per Site/per Vessel” (IAATO, 2009), accessed February 8, 2010, [http://iaato.org/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=eec63a10-c2d5-48bc-ae48-267ae9abdb75&groupId=10157](http://iaato.org/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=eec63a10-c2d5-48bc-ae48-267ae9abdb75&groupId=10157); “Antarctica 2007-2008: Number of Tourists per Site/per Vessel” (IAATO, 2008), accessed February 8, 2010, [http://iaato.org/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=745dd4cb-1b96-4878-a0e3-b33ace40d84b&groupId=10157](http://iaato.org/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=745dd4cb-1b96-4878-a0e3-b33ace40d84b&groupId=10157); “Antarctica 2006-2007: Number of Tourists per Site/per Vessel” (IAATO, 2007), accessed February 8, 2010, [http://iaato.org/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=f1da0263-f550-4e52-b7c9-ca2e84b9e3de&groupId=10157](http://iaato.org/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=f1da0263-f550-4e52-b7c9-ca2e84b9e3de&groupId=10157); “Antarctica 2005-2006: Number of Tourists per Site/per Vessel” (IAATO, 2006), accessed February 8, 2010, [http://iaato.org/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=a2a543ef-bbca-4cd4-84d7-c417efb8ccee&groupId=10157](http://iaato.org/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=a2a543ef-bbca-4cd4-84d7-c417efb8ccee&groupId=10157); “Antarctica 2004-2005: Number of Tourists per Site/per Vessel” (IAATO, 2005), accessed February 8, 2010, [http://iaato.org/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=887b4e90-1995-468a-ae5f-fd0940ee176a&groupId=10157](http://iaato.org/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=887b4e90-1995-468a-ae5f-fd0940ee176a&groupId=10157); “Antarctica 2003-2004: Number of Tourists per Site/per Vessel” (IAATO, 2004), accessed February 8, 2010, [http://iaato.org/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=81e44f54-563f-4903-b0b6-c54608519f0f&groupId=10157](http://iaato.org/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=81e44f54-563f-4903-b0b6-c54608519f0f&groupId=10157).

<sup>67</sup> As mentioned earlier, on this ship I was one of 107 passengers. We hailed from the U.S., Canada, Australia, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, France, and Japan. As is true for Antarctic tourists generally, most of the passengers seemed to be middle-aged or elderly, although there was a strong contingent in their 30s and 40s. Most clearly seemed to be comfortably middle class. The demographics of our ship in general matched those of Antarctic

## Candid Camera?

Overall, what I found was in part an interesting confluence of animal celebrity with tourism scholar Edward Bruner's observation that travel as we live it differs from travel as we re-tell it, with the re-telling of the experience eventually shaping how we remember it.<sup>68</sup> As Bruner aptly notes: "The quest for stories changes the experience of the tour, for the tourists are not just living in the moment, but are directing their actions toward encounters that will form the basis of future stories."<sup>69</sup> In short, when traveling on our expedition we tourists are writing two stories simultaneously – one we experience and one we plan to re-tell when we get back home.<sup>70</sup> So even as the reality may not meet our preconceptions, often times we will re-shape the narrative of our travel in ways that conform to our original preconceptions. I found this to be especially

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tourism for the season (although Americans were not a plurality on our ship). In 2011-2012, Americans (34 percent), Australians (11 percent), Germans (9 percent), British (8 percent) and Canadians (6 percent) made up the majority of Antarctic tourists (these relative rankings have remained largely constant over the years, with the exception of a rising proportion of Chinese visitors recently). "2011-2012 Tourists by Nationality" (IAATO, 2012), accessed October 15, 2014, [http://iaato.org/documents/10157/91866/touristsbynationality\\_total.pdf](http://iaato.org/documents/10157/91866/touristsbynationality_total.pdf).

<sup>68</sup> Edward M. Bruner, *Culture on Tour: Ethnographies of Travel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 19, 27.

The idea that memories can be altered is well-documented. Forensic psychologist Elizabeth Loftus has found she can induce at least partial false memories in people based on suggestions about benign childhood events, like getting lost in the supermarket or spilling punch at a wedding. Kathryn A. Braun, Rhiannon Ellis, and Elizabeth F. Loftus, "Make My Memory: How Advertising Can Change Our Memories of the Past," *Psychology & Marketing* 19(1) (2002):1-23.

In an article highlighting Loftus' work, *Slate* found that nearly 15 percent of its readers could "remember" events suggested by doctored photos, another recent field of research. "George Orwell's 1989," *Slate*, May 27, 2010, accessed September 11, 2014, [http://www.slate.com/articles/health\\_and\\_science/the\\_memory\\_doctor/2010/05/george\\_orwells\\_1989.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/the_memory_doctor/2010/05/george_orwells_1989.html).

<sup>69</sup> Bruner, *Culture on Tour*, 24.

<sup>70</sup> As Gabriel Josipovici notes, we know things not just by what we experience but also by how we react to them. We later remember our reactions to the experience as much as the experience itself. Gabriel Josipovici, *Touch* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 7. Thus, photographs can become a way of re-directing our reactions to the experience of seeing wildlife.

true for how people approached their encounters with penguins – many of us lived one experience with the animals during the journey but seemed prepared to re-tell a different narrative after the journey that would make the experience match the imagery and tropes of penguins familiar to us from celebrity media. In a sense, to borrow Kenneth Little's phrasing we tourists lived out a "mass-mediated visualization" of penguins.<sup>71</sup>

The primary way this bifurcated experience of penguin consumption came about, as should perhaps not be a surprise in our modern, hypervisualized world, is through photography. Often on the trip I discovered that what people photographed was only a narrow slice of what they actually saw and they frequently sought images that reinforced the images and narratives they already knew of penguins through popular sources like *March of the Penguins* or *National Geographic* – even as my fellow travelers said that they were eager to be surprised by the unexpected. This phenomenon, which seemed to be quite common among most passengers, clearly was exacerbated by recent changes in the technology of photography. Just as the introduction of Internet and digital media technologies has changed the forms of animal narratives told by society, the introduction of digital cameras to replace film cameras may have changed the ways in which individual wildlife tourists have consumed and re-produced those narratives for themselves. Digital cameras allow for a more comprehensive, but perhaps more indiscriminate, capturing of images – encouraging people to be more selective about which few are used to represent the whole experience when retelling their journeys.

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<sup>71</sup> Kenneth Little, "On Safari: The Visual Politics of a Tourist Representation," in *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses*, ed. David Howes (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 148-163.

To begin to explore these phenomena, consider two episodes from my journey that illustrate the differences in lived versus photographed consumption of the penguin experience and the impacts of photography on re-producing narratives of penguins.

\* \* \*

I'm standing at the top of the gangplank waiting my turn to board one of the inflatable rafts with outboard motors, known as zodiacs, which allow us to reach shore from our expedition vessel. Since early this morning we have caught glimpses of various sub-Antarctic islands passing by at a distance on the horizon. Now, right in front of us sits the heavily snow-covered low ridges of Half Moon Island, home to a well-known rookery of chinstrap penguins and a part-time Chilean research base (unoccupied when we visit).

Our expedition leader that morning had given us a briefing about the landing, reminding us that proper penguin etiquette should be followed even when the penguins themselves don't follow the IAATO guidelines about maintaining a minimum distance between wildlife and people. "They don't know the rules and they don't have to obey them."

The second the briefing was over people dashed back to their cabins to ready for the landing. Cameras, memory cards, and binoculars were double-checked and placed in waterproof backpacks and dry bags. Waterproof pants, gloves, hats, scarves, sunglasses, and sunblock came on (we are in a region of the globe with a thinned ozone layer courtesy of decades of anthropogenic chlorofluorocarbon releases). The waterproof boots loaned to passengers by the expedition were retrieved from the hallways where they had been stuffed between the walls and the hand rails so as not to take up the limited floor space of our cabins.

For this landing site, unlike some of the later ones we encounter, there are no IAATO restrictions on the size of landing parties that would require us to stagger our visits ashore.<sup>72</sup> So rather than wait for pre-assigned landing groups to be called (each group is named after a different penguin species – for the voyage I’m assigned to the Chinstrap landing group), it’s first-come-first-served at the zodiacs. Despite having dashed at a near run through the ship after the briefing, I find myself twentieth in line at the boot-washing station at the top of the gangplank.

But soon enough I’m sitting on the rubbery edge of the zodiac, my backpack clutched between my knees since I can’t wear it during the ride for fear it will interfere with my lifevest (thin tubular collars that inflate automatically if they touch water). A Russian crew member fires up the outboard motor and we zoom away from the ship, circling under the bow, and rocket across the slate gray water toward our landing site, a rocky beach at the foot of a 40-foot snow-covered slope. You can feel the eagerness and anticipation among the ten passengers on board, as everyone leans forward a little bit as we get closer to shore. This is it – we’re landing in Antarctica (well, actually a sub-Antarctic island, but no one is being technical at the moment).

And then we’re there. Awkwardly trying to roll over the sides of the raft as we’ve been taught and stepping down upon the rocky ground amid shallow waves of icy water. Pausing to take it all in, we stagger up the beach and immediately fulfill the predictions of our expedition leader, who had assured us at the briefing that everyone would become so enamored with the very first penguins we encountered that we would barely move off the beach. Sure enough, the handful of Gentoo (*Pygoscelis papua*) and chinstrap penguins standing on the beach are instantly

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<sup>72</sup> At every site, IAATO rules limit landings to 100 passengers at a time (but due to some passengers opting out of shore excursions this was never really an issue for our ship with its 107 passengers). But certain well-visited and/or fragile sites are limited more strictly in terms of the number of visitors at any one time. IAATO also has rules limiting to two the number of ships that can visit a site in a 24-hour period in order to reduce stress placed on wildlife from repeated human interactions.

besieged by the tourist paparazzi. No matter that a rookery with hundreds, if not thousands, of chinstraps is a five-minute walk up the hill. These three gentoos and five chinstraps are the first penguin celebrities we've encountered and we're not letting them leave the beach without getting a few pictures – indeed, for me it only takes a mere 22 shots before I'm ready to move on.

Almost no one stops and just sits without their cameras in hand. On later landings I will observe people take fewer pictures whenever they encounter sights similar to ones they have already seen at earlier stops, but this will often just mean they seek out whatever is novel and previously unphotographed of the wildlife or wildlife behaviors at the latest landing rather than fully put their camera down. On the entire trip, rarely will I see a passenger simply take in a scene for a long period of time without the mediation of at least a pair of binoculars or, much more frequently, a camera. The main exceptions will be some of the hard-core birders, who occasionally sit and watch a single bird or nest within a rookery (although many of the birders have the largest camera lenses and are the most fanatical about getting professional-looking wildlife shots), and a group of younger male British tourists (joined occasionally by some of the younger Dutch and Australian tourists) who will take relatively few pictures over the course of the trip (fewer than 500 each versus the 2,000 to 5,000 each that many other passengers I talked to seemed to take over the course of the trip) and who seem more interested in hiking and “adventure travel” rather than wildlife watching.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> These latter will usually, when a landing site has an option, hike up a glacier or explore the geology of a place – as when we went to the relatively unexplored Seymour Island – rather than spend a great deal of time among the penguins.

Meanwhile, only at sites explicitly framed as focused on historical sites during our landing briefings will the majority of passengers focus on anything but the penguins or other wildlife. For our trip, these historical sites include a stop at an abandoned whaling/research station on Deception Island and the remains of a cabin at Paulet Island, along with a visit to the current Argentinean research base Esperanza. And even then, penguins (and other wildlife) at these sites almost always cause people to stop and take pictures.

After walking up the hill, passengers break into smaller groups: some head out onto the flat snowy plains to the right where several Weddell seals (*Leptonychotes weddellii*) are sleeping; some photograph a small splinter of the chinstrap rookery that is nesting in a patch of bare ground at the top of the hill at the base of a lichen-covered rock formation; and several hasten on a 15-minute walk to the left where the main chinstrap rookery is located. There is time to see all three areas, but few tarry very long just to take in the landscape or the views from the top of the hill – wildlife is beckoning in too many directions. Along the walk to the rookery, the expedition staff sets up stakes to try to direct passengers away from sensitive, snow-lined travel routes traversed by the penguins – known as “penguin highways” – imploring people to remember that the tired penguins returning to shore have just swum hundreds of kilometers and should not have their access to the colony impeded. While people generally try to be respectful, it’s clear that people will not be denied getting the photographs they want, even if it means bending the guidelines about distance from the penguins or encroaching upon their walkways.

After all, when it comes to getting pictures we all want them all. When people hear that a lone macaroni penguin is nesting among the chinstraps and is so well-known to the ship’s guides they know exactly where to look for him, passengers jostle for position lining every available inch of space around the rim of the rookery, pushing their cameras past the stakes to try to capture the lone yellow-feathered head amid a sea of black heads.<sup>74</sup> On the zodiac ride back to the ship, people will start comparing shots on their cameras, discussing their desire to capture all the different types of penguin motion – waddling upright, tobogganing on their bellies, and

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<sup>74</sup> At the evening debriefing that night, our expedition naturalist will show a picture of all the passengers intently staring through their camera lenses in a solid line separated just a feet from a long line of chinstrap nests. As he laughingly teased: “Who is looking at who [sic]?”

“porpoising” (leaping repeatedly while swimming and looking for all the world like a bowling pin-shaped torpedo) in the water.

When we get back to the ship, a sense of triumph is in the air – we have seen penguins, stepped on shore, and started to claim Antarctica and its wildlife as our own. After a quick wash of the boots and removal of all the outer layers in people’s cabins, almost everyone heads to the ship’s lounge – to compare photos of the experience we have all just shared.

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It’s Thanksgiving Day. Our eco-cruise has just entered the Weddell Sea, and everyone is in fine spirits. Amazingly for Antarctic conditions, the sun is out, there is a blue sky, it is warm enough one can operate a camera or binoculars without wearing gloves, and the seas are relatively calm. Earlier that day, having finally landed on the Antarctic continent proper at Brown Bluff, as opposed to visiting sub-Antarctic islands, we spotted the fourth penguin species of our trip: the “classic” Adélie penguin, which most fits that stereotyped vision of penguins as simple black-and-white tuxedo-clad figures. Now, in honor of the American passengers among the group, the ship is serving a Thanksgiving-themed lunch of turkey and cranberries while people happily chat about our expedition’s good fortune.

Despite the ostensible main goal of our trip being to try to see all eight sub-Antarctic and Antarctic species of penguin, recently our expedition leader had warned us the chances of this occurring are highly remote. Indeed, the ship’s naturalist explained at his briefing that in 10 years of voyages to the Antarctic Peninsula, personally he had only seen emperor penguins twice – both times juveniles heading out to sea for the first time. Without access to helicopters that can fly passengers inland to their rookeries (a service offered as part of only one Antarctic expedition company’s cruises for the bargain price of \$15,000 to \$62,000 per person, double occupancy),



our only chance of spotting emperor penguins will be coming upon a random adult or juvenile pausing on an ice floe or swimming in the water.<sup>75</sup> This revelation has been a disappointment to several passengers who had not realized the probability of “failure” before booking the trip – especially for two of the three passengers (out of the 107 total) who had been to Antarctica before but had returned specifically because, as they said to me at one point, they felt they would not really “see” Antarctica without encountering an emperor penguin. Essentially we’re searching for a four-foot tall needle in a vast semi-frozen haystack (the Weddell Sea alone is 2.8 million km<sup>2</sup> and individual emperor penguins will swim as much as 900 kilometers from their colonies through open water).<sup>76</sup>

Then, just as lunch ends, news spreads like wildfire across the dining room – one of the hard-core birdwatchers has spotted an emperor penguin! The ship’s intercom broadcasts the sighting throughout every hallway, as the captain pulls the ship alongside a large chunk of floating sheet ice and everyone, passengers and crew, rush outside without bothering to waste time re-applying sunblock or pulling on much of their outerwear. No matter that we have already seen amazing rookeries comprised of tens of thousands individuals from other penguin species or that even die-hard birders have already added several never-before-seen species to their life lists. If this is an emperor penguin, star of *Happy Feet* and *March of the Penguins*, this trip will have delivered on its promise.<sup>77</sup> And, indeed, when we all get outside, there standing on the ice next to the ship is a single adult emperor penguin.

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<sup>75</sup> Quark Expeditions website.

<sup>76</sup> John May, *The Greenpeace Book of Antarctica*; A. Ancel, et al., “Foraging behavior of emperor penguins as a resource detector in winter and summer,” *Nature* 360(6402) (1992): 336-339.

<sup>77</sup> Our extreme interest in emperors beyond all other penguins is interesting and definitely seems to have been stoked by repeated exposure to them in mainstream media. Though it may be the largest penguin and hard to spot on a typical voyage, the emperor penguin is by no means the

The ship pulls to a halt, with passengers and crew lining every available inch of railing along four portside decks. Few people watch with binoculars; most (including many crew members like the dining room staff and laundry staff who normally remain far removed from passengers' sight) instantly break out their digital cameras and start firing away. For more than two minutes the penguin stands there seemingly unperturbed, preening its feathers and bobbing its head but mostly . . . just standing there. Aside from an occasional heated whisper, no one says anything. The only sound is the drone of the ship's diesel-electric engines below and the repeated clicking of camera shutters.

Finally, the penguin starts to . . . slightly move. After slowly waddling a few steps forward, it eventually falls forward on its belly. Instantly, everyone is on alert: the anticipation audible in hisses of caught breath. A soft crescendo of excited "Ahhhs" builds as the penguin begins tobogganing itself forward on the ice, legs pinwheeling, before seamlessly diving into the water and swimming away just below the surface to sounds of delight and general chatter from the onlookers. During the penguin's entire nine-second exit from the ice floe, the sound of camera shutters becomes so loud it almost drowns out the engines. Now we have not only witnessed an emperor penguin: we have witnessed it doing something!<sup>78</sup> And to the amazement of our expedition leaders – who later took to calling our voyage "the cruise of good luck" – we

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rarest globally. Indeed, the IUCN only categorizes it as "near-threatened," with an estimated global population of near 400,000 breeding pairs. "*Aptenodytes forsteri*," Version 2014.2, The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, BirdLife International 2012, accessed October 18 2014, <http://www.iucnredlist.org>.

<sup>78</sup> Having satisfied this need to see the emblem of the Antarctic, the wife of one birder who had returned to the Antarctic specifically to try to see the emperor penguin commented that it was such a great "relief" for the hard-core birders to add this bird to their birding life lists that there might well be some "emperor penguin babies" born among the birders nine months later!

spot two more emperor penguins that day (and eventually at least a dozen total – always solitary adults – over the remaining nine days of our 14-day trip).<sup>79</sup>

That evening before dinner, as on most nights, the passengers gather in the lounge to socialize and talk over the events of the day. The lounge – a large, warm room with 180-degree views over the ship’s bow – also has a bar, a library with Antarctic guidebooks, a continually updated map of our voyage, computers for sending email, and rows of couches and benches around which people can mingle. Sitting at one of these couches, I begin to upload my photos and observations from the day onto my laptop.<sup>80</sup>

When we had stopped to observe the emperor penguin, I had decided to film mainly in video mode. My camera, a high-end “Super Zoom” camera with a 35x optical, rather than digital, zoom (the equivalent of an 840-mm telephoto lens), has the ability to shoot high-definition (HD) digital video. I had captured a two-minute clip that, while somewhat choppy due to the ship’s motion and my lack of tripod, offered a close-up view of the penguin, including its tobogganing departure from the ice floe.

Reviewing this video on my laptop, I am soon surrounded by almost a dozen other passengers hovering over my computer, asking me to replay the clip. A few ask if I would mind sharing the video, allowing them to load it onto their media cards. Word soon spreads through the ship’s grapevine I have videos and I’m willing to share. Suddenly, I am a mover and shaker

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<sup>79</sup> Indeed, sightings became so normal that in the final few instances the ship’s crew no longer informed the entire ship, with most people just hearing over lunch or dinner that someone else had spotted yet another emperor.

<sup>80</sup> Having needed a place to collect all my field observations, photos, and notes, I was one of the only passengers who had risked bringing along my personal laptop computer on the journey. And with the ship at times slamming into 25-foot seas and 50-knot winds during our return crossing of the Drake Passage (which severely curtailed my plans to interview passengers for this project), there was real reason to worry about damaging any equipment one brought along.

on this trip – a player in the photographic realm – and a few new people approach me on most subsequent evenings about loading my pictures and videos onto their digital media cards.

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What was going on here? Sure, my video offered movement and more of an up-close image than many other people had been able to obtain with their still cameras. But, especially in the case of the first emperor sighting, everyone on board the ship had a near-identical opportunity to view the penguin for the same amount of time, from roughly the same distance, and without any obstructions to their view. So our experience of the penguin was the same.

But what clearly mattered to so many people on board was the story they would tell about the encounter after the trip – their personal experience with penguin celebrity turned into an act of re-production of celebrity penguin narratives. For this purpose, people wanted the best possible photos of their emperor penguin encounter to share as a trophy with friends or family back home. In so doing, they were (perhaps unconsciously) taking their unique experience and transforming it into a narrative of penguins less original and more closely matching what other people already think they know about penguins through popular media, which almost always illustrates their narratives with close-up imagery. Thus, many of the other passengers apparently found it acceptable to “cheat” and use images that were not their own, as long they documented a phenomenon that they personally experienced.

To be fair, this thinking was not true of everyone on my trip. For some people, especially some of the hard-core birders with the best camera lenses, the trophy element of proving one’s skill with the camera mattered so much they refused even to show their photos to other passengers, let alone ever offer to share them. And plenty of the passengers did prize their own photos for their documentary value rather than for narrative value. As one Australian woman told

me, she'd be "devastated" if she lost her own photos, even if she could share the other passengers' photos, because there was something about her photos being "hers" that gave them added value.<sup>81</sup> But in general, even as most people did value their own photos to an extent as uniquely theirs, they also valued having photographs for their ability to tell stories with rather than their ability to serve as an accurate personal documentary record.

This selective way of consuming the penguin experience through wildlife tourism was not limited to borrowing souvenir photos that were not one's own. Even with their own picture-taking, most people were particular about what they documented of their wildlife experience during the expedition. And the choices they made of what to photograph quite often reified the commodified narratives and imagery of penguins people already knew through media.

Indeed, when asked in conversations at meals or in interviews sitting in the ship's lounge about what they hoped to accomplish on the expedition, most other people spoke to me in an acquisitive tone of wanting to see "Antarctica" – implying that the ideal experience would capture the apotheosis of the continent as well as many different experiences as possible. True, there were a few exceptions. One passenger said she was mainly just interested in observing the different ice formations in the Antarctic.<sup>82</sup> The group of hardcore bird watchers said they were

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<sup>81</sup> It should be worth noting, though, that she gladly ended up trading photos with multiple people and collected the best shots from many other passengers towards the end of the trip.

<sup>82</sup> The ship, like several of the Antarctic ships, had an "open bridge" policy, which allowed passengers access to the bridge 24 hours a day, except in bad weather or where otherwise ordered by the captain. While most passengers enjoyed an occasional visit to the bridge to see the ship's navigational instruments or chat with the crew, a few passengers spent long hours each day there, enjoying the panoramic view to spot icebergs, whales, or other wildlife and sometimes as a means of trying to forestall seasickness by aligning their gaze with the horizon.

The one passenger who said she liked the ice formations was one of the more elderly passengers and spent most of her time on the bridge, rather than moving about the ship. Interestingly, she was also the most frequent tourist to Antarctica, having taken so many trips with the company the entire crew onboard knew her by name and treated her as a semi-permanent feature of the ship.

there primarily to expand their life lists of species spotted (including many of the petrels and albatrosses observed during the crossing of the Drake Passage that otherwise provided only fleeting distractions for most other passengers). But still, the dominant goal for the trip seemed to be to have as complete a sensory experience of landscape, wildlife, historical features, and exploration as possible, with many people describing the trip similar to the promotional literature as a “trip of a lifetime.”

But people’s documentary record from their cameras contradicted these avowed goals for their experience, or at least suggested the experience they planned to re-tell and re-produce after the trip was over differed significantly from the experience as they actually lived it during the journey. In fact their documentary record suggested that what mattered was experiencing the wildlife of Antarctica (especially the penguins) and experiencing it in ways quite familiar from popular media stories about Antarctic wildlife.

Having shared my videos and photos with other passengers as a form of “narrative currency,” several other people eventually were willing to let me download their pictures in return. In this way, I was able to examine how people visually constructed their travels and photographic record of their trips. The record I gathered was certainly a patchwork, as I waited for people to approach me for photos before I asked for theirs.<sup>83</sup> And I was interested only in the raw collection of photos, without seeing people’s culled selections based on aesthetics of the photos or additional layers of preference – I wanted to see what they were most interested turning their camera lenses towards in the moment as lived (even if they were already thinking

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<sup>83</sup> I found most people seemed slightly uneasy if I outright asked for all their photos, nervous for fear perhaps of sharing intimate moments or that I would be judging their photographic skills. But it was easier to obtain their complete photographic record when I offered all my photos in return as trade. While I accepted when people offered me selections of just a few of their favorites, I discounted these from my evaluation of the photographic record.

about the moment as re-produced when initially making those choices). Ultimately, several people agreed to trade photos but unfortunately did so at different times throughout the trip and it was not always possible to get their complete records at the end of the journey. Other people edited their photo collections throughout the trip to save space on their memory cards, so I could only get a complete set of raw photos for particular days, as other days' photos had already been edited. Moreover, a few people's photographic cards became corrupted and certain days of their photos were lost. Unfortunately, all of this meant that I ended up with only partially overlapping photographic records from different days for different people.

In the end, I obtained partial photographic records from eight passengers: one male Australian student traveling with his family; two Australian female businesswomen, each traveling separately; one American female social worker, traveling with her family; one retired German male businessman traveling with his family; one younger Dutch male professional traveling with a group of friends; one British female professional traveling with the group of hardcore birdwatchers, although she would not describe herself as being one herself; and one American female student traveling alone. Collectively, they shared with me 6,980 digital photographs, with each person's contribution covering anywhere from two to ten days of their 14-day voyage (plus in a few cases a couple of days in our departure city of Ushuaia, Argentina before boarding the ship).

In considering their photographic record, it is worth remembering a few cautions from other research of this type. MacKay and Cauldwell note it can be difficult for an outside observer to discern the intended *subject* of a photo just by examining it. So it is important to consider everything in the field of view of a photograph rather than try to weigh the relative importance of things in the image based on their placement in the foreground or background or based on how in

focus they are. And without directly asking, it can be even harder to discern the *reason* someone took a photo.<sup>84</sup>

At the same time, the rise of digital photography and handheld camera phones has changed the frequency and rationale behind people's decisions to take pictures, as the photographic image has become so cheap, instantaneous, and ubiquitous in our social relations that the act of taking a picture has become reflexive and impulsive. So it is possible photography from wildlife tourism in general may be less purposeful than it once was. Thus, overall it is important not to draw too firm a conclusion about people's mindsets from any one image. Even so, collectively these photographs are suggestive – implying that the process of editing one's lived experience of wildlife and a wildlife trip begins while people are living it. In a sense, the biases of popular media narratives about penguins and other celebrity wildlife change our gaze upon our lived experiences, encouraging people to frame experience through what John Urry calls a homogenized “mediatised gaze.”<sup>85</sup>

For starters, while people may have truly been interested in everything on this “trip of a lifetime,” their pictorial record employed an outward lens – focused primarily on documenting the places and exotic wildlife rather than their own or any other human's presence in those places. People only appeared in 970 (less than 14 percent) of the photos and most of those were people appearing in the background or on the edges of a landscape shot. In fact, only 265 photos (less than four percent) involved people “posing,” or looking directly at the camera, as they might either in a traditional “Wish You Were Here” vacation photograph, the “selfie”

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<sup>84</sup> Their studies found that a sense of nostalgia and a desire to capture the aesthetics of tourist sites visited were among the most common rationales that people gave for taking pictures. Kelly J. MacKay and Christine M. Cauldwell, “Using Visitor-Employed Photography to Investigate Destination Image,” *Journal of Travel Research* 42 (2004): 390-396.

<sup>85</sup> John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage Publications, 2002), Second Edition, 151.



photograph that has become a recent cultural phenomenon, or the traditional “trophy shot” of people with conquered animals from safari expeditions. And of those posed pictures, 135 took place either onboard the ship while at sea or at the launch or conclusion of the voyage, with another 27 of the posed pictures taking place at a visit to an Argentine base in Antarctica. Thus, within this admittedly incomplete record of people’s trips, it is striking that pictures of people posing anywhere near scenery or wildlife accounted for fewer than two percent of the pictures I collected from other passengers.

Of course, some of the avoidance of including tourists in people’s pictures may stem from people’s self-consciousness about being a tourist. As Alec Gillespie has found in his research on tourism, tourists are often acutely aware of being perceived by others as being out of place and so try to use their picture-taking to show that they are not “just another tourist.”<sup>86</sup> So people may have been trying to show they were somehow ‘more serious’ wildlife photographers and not mere tourists by having their photos exclude people from the pictures.<sup>87</sup>

And yet even when they did photograph themselves or other people, people separated themselves from wildlife. In posed shots where people clearly were meant to be in the frame, wildlife of any kind only appeared in 54 pictures, 19 of which came from a single encounter with albatrosses where the passengers were standing up to their necks in tussock grasses while birds swooped within less than a meter overhead – part of a colony of 200,000 black-browed albatross (*Thalassarche melanophrys*) breeding pairs on Steeple Jason Island in the Falkland Islands.

When people did pose in pictures with wildlife present, penguins were the most common species

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<sup>86</sup> Alec Gillespie, “Tourist Photography and the Reverse Gaze,” *Ethos* 34(3) (2006): 343-366.

<sup>87</sup> More bluntly, tourism scholar Peter Phipps argues that tourists simply engage in denial – pretending that other tourists do not exist. Peter Phipps, “Tourism and Terrorism: An Intimate Equivalence,” in *Tourists and Tourism: A Reader*, ed. Sharon Bohn Gmelch (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 2004), 84.

to appear, showing up in 29 of the 54 posed photos. Thus, even though the opportunity to get close to penguins in the wild is what is marketed as a unique feature of Antarctic wildlife tourism, people generally did not take pictures of themselves standing near wildlife.

And yet it was wildlife that people clearly came to see, or at least tried to capture for their photographic re-telling of their journeys. Wildlife appeared in some way in over 64 percent of all photographs, including 65 percent of pictures taken looking out from the ship (either at sea or towards shore) and 73 percent of shots taken while on shore landings – with people and wildlife almost never in the same frame.<sup>88</sup> Penguins appeared in 588 shots or more than eight percent of all pictures, more than any other single type of animal – aside from indistinct flying seabirds that often appeared on the distant margins of landscape shots.<sup>89</sup> And in 434 of those 588 shots (74 percent), the penguins largely filled the frame in close-up, to the exclusion of much scenery or many nearby animals. People clearly wanted to frame penguins similar to the images so often seen in wildlife films and television – a framing that penguins, rare among many popular wildlife species, actually allow amateur photographers to be able to capture without extreme zoom lenses because of their relative lack of fear of humans allowing close proximity.

So here we have the clear suggestions about what stories these tourists' photographic records will tell of their experiences once they return home. Their pictures will largely exclude

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<sup>88</sup> Heeding MacKay and Cauldwell's warning not to intuit too much about a photographers' intentions from the content of a photo, I counted a photo as including wildlife if animals (or evidence of animals – carcasses, footprints, etc.) were visible at any point in the foreground or background – including flying skuas, gulls, albatross, and other seabirds that might be far in the distance or barely visible in the shot.

<sup>89</sup> Had I a more complete or at least matching set of photos from my sample of passengers then this number of penguin would certainly have been even higher. Our visits to sites with large penguin rookeries – Half Moon Island, Brown Bluff, and Paulet Island – appeared in only four, three, and three, respectively, of the photo records I received from the eight other passengers. Of those passengers' records that did contain images from those three places, penguins appeared in 67, 49, and 88 percent, respectively, of the photos taken at each place.

people, including themselves, and instead show they visited the “white continent” – a people-less Antarctic Eden of wildlife abundance. Their pictures (and the ones they borrowed from me and other people) will show animals in close-up, similar to what their friends and families back home may have already seen in wildlife films and other media. And their pictures will largely show Antarctica as a “natural playground” of wildlife, since wildlife (and particularly penguins) will be the primary image depicted in their photographs. In short, the photographic record will allow people to tell stories that reify the dominant media narratives about celebrity Antarctic penguins (and to a lesser extent other wildlife) they think they already know.<sup>90</sup>

Indeed, the shots we passengers tried to gather specifically seemed to aim to re-produce many of the common visual tropes of penguin media. Thus, as I had overheard many times throughout the trip, people clamored in their pictures to capture as complete a set as possible of “classic” penguin movements that the media says make them so cute – toddling, tobogganing, porpoising, and nesting.

Similarly, an abundance of the penguin photos focused on penguins either sitting on eggs (or hatched chicks, in the case of gentoo penguins we encountered on Steeple Jason Island in the Falkland Islands that were further along in the nesting season compared to penguins we saw farther south in Antarctica) or engaged in nest-building procedures, emphasizing the familial elements of penguin life.<sup>91</sup> To be fair, we were visiting Antarctica at the start of the summer breeding season for many species and it was simply easier to take pictures of penguins on land (when the rookeries are their primary focus) than at sea or on ice floes where they spend the

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<sup>90</sup> Granted, I did not follow up with passengers afterwards to find out which of their raw photo sets they selected as the images they printed, saved in albums, and/or shared with other people. So it is possible that their narrative retellings of their experience with Antarctica and its wildlife ultimately differed from the impressions I inferred from their raw photo set.

<sup>91</sup> Penguin males bringing pebbles and rocks to females to build nests were among the most popular and talked about images throughout the trip.

majority of their lifecycle without engaging in familial activities. So some of this bias may simply reflect differing opportunities to see penguins engage in different behaviors. But the net effect was still to reify the sense of penguins as devoted family creatures.

To a certain extent, the photographs of penguins also captured the sense of penguins as living a perilous existence heroically in an unforgiving landscape. Thus, one of the most popular pictures passengers asked to share was a set taken by the Australian student and his grandfather at Brown Bluff where they caught on film a leopard seal's attack upon and consumption of an Adélie penguin (with one shot showing the disembodied penguin head popping into the seal's mouth). Leopard seals are significant predators of penguins, as portrayed in both *March of the Penguins* and *Happy Feet*, and thus these photos helped portray the dangers and perils for penguins popular from mass media portrayals.<sup>92</sup>

Many of the passengers' landscape images also reified the narrative of the Antarctic as an extreme and foreboding place (even though by all accounts from our guides our trip was quite possibly the most charmed they had ever taken in terms of beautiful weather and relatively calm sea conditions). Thus, photographs of icebergs, ice floes, and sea ice were very popular, as were shots that could frame penguins within these elements. For example, one day during a zodiac cruise near Ross Island, our craft came alongside a lone Adélie penguin standing on an ice floe

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<sup>92</sup> Far harder to capture as subjects of pictures are the more diffuse, less narratively compelling but far more real threats to penguin mortality – such as freezing eggs or eggs broken through chance and predation; starvation from shifting food and ice sources in the Antarctic Ocean; and climate change. Interestingly, I captured a series of images of a skua who stole an albatross egg at Steeple Jason Island. But when I shared the shots of the egg being cracked open and the embryo being eaten, they generally elicited a negative and disgusted look among other passengers, few of whom seemed interested in borrowing these images for themselves – unlike the leopard seal and penguin incident. Whether this was because the egg was of an albatross rather than a penguin; because the images showed an egg being eaten, as opposed to an adult penguin; or because the predator involved was a small bird rather than a large seal, for some reason people were less interested in seeing these narrative images of predation.

silhouetted with large mounds of snow behind it and a fellow passenger eagerly called out to everyone on the raft: “There’s your Christmas card photo!”

Overall, the photographic record I collected suggests that even as wildlife tourists proclaim they want a smorgasbord of experiences – unique experiences and journeys they can share with others – the narrative record they collect of their trips largely conforms to the popular media branding of celebrity species like penguins and the “destination image” of Antarctica.<sup>93</sup> People seem to want the privilege of witnessing and experiencing the branded narrative of animal celebrities like penguins but they don’t want to challenge or disrupt that celebrity brand. By reifying the dominant media images and narratives of penguins and Antarctica, they maintain these narratives’ cultural potency while also elevating their own status by associating their personal travel narratives with the prestige and cachet of the widely-known narratives of penguins and Antarctica. Thus, this type of travel constructs and relies upon a tenuous balance of both *exclusivity* – “we few got this once-in-a-lifetime experience in person” – and *celebrity* – “we got this experience that everyone else knows well.”

But if, ultimately, this balance is the premise of consuming animal celebrity through wildlife tourism, it raises serious questions about the long-term viability and sustainability of any animal-based tourism venture. Specifically, what happens if the exclusivity of the experience is lost – if too many people are able to experience the animal in the wild? Does that mean the

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<sup>93</sup> *Destination image* refers to “the expression of all objective knowledge, impressions, prejudice, imaginations, and emotional thought an individual or group might have of a particular place.” Even when these images are based on faulty conceptions, it is the image rather than the reality that drives tourists’ decisions to see them. While this term has been applied to places, I think it can be useful to think of wildlife’s “destination image” as being the commodified media “brand” that drives interest in seeing animals. Olivia H. Jenkins, “Understanding and Measuring Tourist Destination Images,” *International Journal of Tourism Research* 1 (1999): 1-15.

celebrity status of the experience will be lost, too? And if it does, will the popularity of the experience fade – to be replaced by some other animal celebrity experience instead?

### **The Next Big Thing**

Towards the close of our expedition, people on the trip debated whether they'd ever come back. As one American woman said: “. . . it is worth it [to visit Antarctica. But] there are just so many other places to see.” An Australian woman complained that Antarctica was getting to be too popular and trendy – she wanted to go somewhere that hadn't been “discovered” yet, like Bhutan. A British-Indian man said that while he liked to see wildlife in places like Antarctica, he had enjoyed more his previous trip to the Galapagos because there were fewer people on that tour and so it was easier to be alone with the wildlife.<sup>94</sup> And later, as I sat interviewing one of the British birders just before we boarded our respective planes home, he chuckled that the time of penguin popularity would soon come crashing down, once people realized just how many of the popular media tropes about penguin monogamy or their sweet disposition were actually myths. In the end, he was sure the media, with the wildlife tourists right behind them, would be looking for their next celebrity animal that could serve as a model for people.

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<sup>94</sup> This transactional view of nature experiences challenges some prevailing data about Antarctic wildlife tourists. Chilla Bulbeck found in a study of the “nature dispositions” of tourists at various sites – wild and captive – where human-animal encounters occur that Antarctic tourists had the highest levels of “ecotouristic/conservation” orientation (borrowing from Stephen Kellert's typology of views on wildlife) – being predisposed to see animals as embedded in ecosystems and expressing an appreciation for themes of “deep ecology.”

And yet my encounters with fellow tourists on my trip suggested that for all they may have received a sense of spiritual and educational uplift from their trips, their attitudes were still primarily about consuming experiences with wildlife. Thus, it is worth considering if Kellert's well-known typology of values about wildlife (and Bulbeck's conclusions) should reconsider whether or not ecotouristic/conservation views of animals might also hide a utilitarian motive as well. Chilla Bulbeck, “The ‘nature dispositions’ of visitors to animal encounter sites in Australia and New Zealand,” *Journal of Sociology* 35(2) (1999): 129-148. For a description of his typology of different ways of viewing animals, see also Stephen Kellert, *Kinship to Mastery* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1979).

Many tourists traveling to see penguins clearly have been affected by the framing of penguins made popular by wildlife films and television – one that shows them existing in “the wild” far from people.<sup>95</sup> As will be discussed even more in the next chapter, this commodified dream of nature leaves little room for co-existence of people and animals in the same frame, except perhaps for people as transient consumers of celebrity via tourism. And even there, as my examination of people’s photographs has shown, we frequently try to excise ourselves and other tourists from our memories and re-productions of the tourist consumptive experience.

If celebrity animals are like other commodities, however, then they face the same need to grow continually the market for their consumption. But the celebrity commodity of penguins and of any celebrity species confronts two particular challenges to growing consumption, at least as far as consumption through wildlife tourism is concerned. First, if the celebrity of animal species does depend in part on a narrative of people-less landscapes, then the consumption of that celebrity through wildlife tourism may reach a tipping point if tourists feel too many other people are also sharing in the exclusive experience of visiting wild animals. At that point,

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<sup>95</sup> Scholars have longed critiqued this framing of wildlife by popular media. They argue this approach leads to a declensionist view of loss regarding wildlife (i.e. the idea that anytime when people are present animals automatically disappear or go extinct) and creates a “populist utopianism” surrounding nature that excludes humans from any positive role in nature, suggesting the most appropriate relationship between humans and animals involves separation and boundaries to preserve untrammelled wilderness from the effects of mankind. Jonathan Burt, *Animals in film* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002); David Whitley, *The Idea of Nature in Disney Animation* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008), 9-11.

Vivanco also notes that this portrayal of nature may lead to a worldview “where wilderness conservation is the pinnacle of Western modernity” and the only appropriate form of conservation is to create exclusionary parks. L. A. Vivanco, “Seeing green: Knowing and saving the environment on film,” *American Anthropologist* 104(4) (2002): 1199.

Of course, Ingram cautions that cinematic constructions of animals and places are rarely ideological or argumentative in themselves – it all depends on the context of the films and the histories and cultural perspectives that individuals viewers will bring to their experiences with these images. David Ingram, *Green screen: environmentalism and Hollywood cinema* (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2000), 34.

consumers may choose to move on to a new favorite species – in the Galapagos, Bhutan, or someplace where a celebrity species narrative hasn't even yet begun.<sup>96</sup> The particular animal and its narratives may matter less than the ability to enjoy a sense of exclusive experience connecting one's own personal narrative to those privileged narratives of a celebrity species.<sup>97</sup>

A second challenge for growing the market for consuming celebrity species through wildlife tourism is that tourism is currently entering into a phase scholars describe as “hypertourism,” “extreme tourism,” or “post-tourism” – an era characterized by volatile consumer demand, rapid turnover of the popularity of destinations, and by more segregated and individualized tourist markets catering to more active forms of leisure. Jansson argues this is due to the media's creation of hypervisual spectacles and its treatment of places as mere raw material for “commercially customized media representations.”<sup>98</sup> Commodification turns places into

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<sup>96</sup> In her ethnography of Earthwatch tourist volunteers at an orangutan sanctuary, Constance Russell agrees this seems to be a critical part of thinking for wildlife tourists, noting the “rarer the animal the more dear the experience” with it becomes. For wildlife tourists, “part of the thrill of membership in this club is its exclusiveness; we [tourist volunteers are] safe in the knowledge that relatively few people have had this experience.” Constance L. Russell, “The Social Construction of Orangutans: An Ecotourist Experience,” *Society and Animals* 3(2) (1995): 161.

Similarly, Urry notes on there being a “perceptual carrying capacity” of ecotourism sites – where scarcity of other tourists is a positive value and leads to a zero-sum game of tourist visits. This carrying capacity is not true in all forms of tourism, but only for those, like wildlife tourism, where most tourists employ what he calls a “romantic gaze” that tends towards nostalgia. John Urry, *Consuming Places* (London: Routledge, 2002), 136-139.

<sup>97</sup> As Edward Bruner observes, this fickle taste to re-discover the familiar in the new is common to tourism generally, not just wildlife tourism: “Tourism is not that innovative in inventing new narratives, but rather seeks new locations in which to tell old stories, possibly because those stories are the ones that the tourist consumer is willing to buy.” Bruner, *Culture on Tour*, 22.

<sup>98</sup> Andre Jansson, “Spatial Phantasmagoria: The Mediatization of Tourism Experience,” *European Journal of Communication* 17(4) (2002): 431-432. See also: Dirk H.R. Spennemann, “Extreme Cultural Tourism: From Antarctica to the Moon,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 34(4) (2007): 898-918.

As David Humman notes, almost all tourist advertising presents worlds of “plentitude,” nature, and leisure that transcends the reality of urban, everyday life. They are experiences of place being sold as a commodity to consumers. David Humman, “Tourist Worlds: Tourist Advertising, Ritual, and American Culture,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 29(2) (1988): 179-202.



“mediascapes” – mediated texts upon which people both consume place and species as an experience and impose atop it the spectacular visions/images/representations they know from the media.<sup>99</sup> The result, Jansson argues, is that people are demanding a more intensified form of tourism – activities that try to make the actual lived experience of travel exceed the virtual ways people know places through mass media.<sup>100</sup> So tourism has to expand beyond mere looking to touching and doing – at least, more touching and doing than is already inherent in the general act of traveling to see a place and its denizens. In a sense, if modernity was defined by “voyeurism,” then the post-modern world is being defined by “experience” that transcends the mere visual.<sup>101</sup>

Indeed, tourism scholars have long argued the driving impetus for many (if not most) modern Western tourists is a quest for “authenticity.”<sup>102</sup> And yet in the highly visualized media world of modern society with its abundant spectacles, vision is easily tricked or manipulated; so vision is in some sense inauthentic. As Gabriel Josipovici argues: “Sight is free and sight is irresponsible.” Since looking costs a person nothing, going to something (and gaining the physical proximity of touch) imparts greater authority – exertion equals authenticity.<sup>103</sup> The authenticity arises because, as Anne Cranny-Francis notes, touch is a dialogue – when we touch we also experience “being touched,” which helps to confirm the reality of things.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Jansson, “Spatial Phantasmagoria.”

Caroline Scarles argues that this turns tourists into “semioticians”: “seeking pre-established signs that offer pre-determined ways of seeing destinations.” Caroline Scarles, “Mediating landscapes: The processes and practices of image construction in tourist brochures in Scotland,” *Tourist Studies* 4(1) (2004): 44.

<sup>100</sup> For a similar argument, see: Little, “On Safari: The Visual Politics of a Tour Representation.”

<sup>101</sup> Robert D. Romanyshyn, *Technology as symptom and dream* (London: Routledge, 1989), 60.

<sup>102</sup> See Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), New edition.

<sup>103</sup> Josipovici, *Touch*, 9. See also *Ibid.*, 2, 16-17, 58.

<sup>104</sup> Of course, how we personally evaluate that contact depends upon our specific cultural position of gender, race, nationality, etc. Anne Cranny-Francis, “Semefulness: a social semiotics of touch.” *Social Semiotics* 21(4) (2011): 467.

For wildlife tourism and animal celebrity, what this era of hypertourism may mean is that tourism operators will have to expand consumer markets of existing celebrity wildlife by adding new sensory experiences.<sup>105</sup> And this has certainly happened to an extent, with many new wildlife tourism ventures now emphasizing opportunities for close physical contact with wild and semi-wild animals – touch offering a supposedly more authentic knowledge of celebrity species and a chance to engage in what Desmond calls the fantasy of “cross-species merging.”<sup>106</sup>

For example, the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding in Sichuan, China offers tourists the opportunity to hold baby panda cubs (and have pictures taken with them) for a mere 2000 yuan (~US\$328) for two minutes of contact.<sup>107</sup> The Monkey Mia Shark Bay World Heritage Area in Western Australia offers three supervised daily encounters with wild dolphins that come into the shallows, encouraging tourists to vie to be among the chosen few allowed to wade into the water to hand feed raw fish to the dolphins.<sup>108</sup> In Botswana, a niche market of

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<sup>105</sup> True, visiting wild animals, as we did on my Antarctic expedition, represents an active form of consumption that transcends the merely visual – demanding a much greater level of exertion than the consumer of celebrity species who only clicks on web links about animals, watches wildlife television or films, or buys animal-themed products while staying at home.

<sup>106</sup> Jane Desmond, *Staging Tourism: Bodies on Display from Waikiki to Sea World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 236-237.

Interestingly, Desmond offers a counter-example to this trend emphasizing touching animals, with Sea World trying to subvert visitors’ attempts to feel corporeal proximity to captive wildlife. She notes that during Sea World’s main killer whale Shamu show, the narration actively encourages visitors to frame the “spy-hop” movement of whale and trainer as a cinematic encounter with their cameras. Similarly, she notes Sea World parks increasingly use jumbo-tron videos of orcas as part of their performing shows. In both cases, the parks de-emphasize the physical presence of the animals (even though that is presumably what visitors came to experience) and turn them back into hyper-visual spectacles, which may make the animals seem more like representative images and less like embodied individuals – potentially forestalling audiences’ ethical criticisms of keeping orca whales and dolphin in captivity.

<sup>107</sup> “Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding,” Undated website, accessed February 15, 2014, <http://www.panda.org.cn/english/>.

<sup>108</sup> “Monkey Mia,” Undated website, accessed February 15, 2014, [http://www.sharkbay.org/Monkey\\_Mia\\_FAQs.aspx](http://www.sharkbay.org/Monkey_Mia_FAQs.aspx). For the story of the evolution of the site, see: Rachel Smolker, *To Touch a Wild Dolphin* (New York: Doubleday, 2001).

“elephant-riding” safari tours has emerged to cater to high-end tourists willing to pay at least \$150 per person per hour for a “back-to-nature” experience of observing other animals by sitting atop a captive, trained elephant moving through the “wild” of a managed game reserve.<sup>109</sup> There are even “swim with the pigs” opportunities now available in the Bahamas for those seeking an experience that scrambles notions of wild and domestic species and contact!<sup>110</sup> But while wildlife tourism is proving adaptable to the demands of hypertourism so far, there are limits. If tourists continue to seek more up-close encounters with “wild” animals, eventually the ability of animals and fragile habitats to absorb the impacts of intensive contact may be compromised.

In the end, if the consumption of celebrity species through tourism depends on growing the number of tourists (while also maintaining the illusion of wildlife existing in people-less landscapes) and growing the intensity of contact between tourist and animal, the long-term viability of wildlife-based tourism becomes extremely suspect. This is problematic, not just in terms of celebrity narrative consumption but because this is a form of consumption – *ecotourism* – that many conservation advocates frequently have cited as the potential holy grail for sustainable conservation that mutually benefits wildlife and people, protecting species and their habitats while also developing local economies.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Rosaleen Duffy and Lorraine Moore, “Neoliberalising Nature? Elephant-Back Tourism in Thailand and Botswana,” *Antipode* 42(3) (2010): 742-766.

<sup>110</sup> Ella Morton, “The Swimming Pigs of the Bahamas.” *Slate*, June 9, 2014, accessed June 9, 2014, [http://www.slate.com/blogs/atlas\\_obscura/2014/06/09/the\\_swimming\\_pigs\\_of\\_big\\_major\\_cay\\_in\\_the\\_bahamas.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/atlas_obscura/2014/06/09/the_swimming_pigs_of_big_major_cay_in_the_bahamas.html).

<sup>111</sup> *Ecotourism* has many, not entirely synonymous, definitions. Fennell offers one of the most comprehensive and prescriptive: “*ecotourism* is a sustainable, non-invasive form of nature-based tourism that focuses primarily on learning about nature first-hand, and which is ethically managed to be low impact, non-consumptive, and locally oriented (control, benefits and scale). It typically occurs in natural areas, and should contribute to the conservation of such areas.” David Fennell, *Ecotourism* (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 24. However, since (as Fennell notes) there is such a broad range of definitions for ecotourism and

True, plenty of scholarship has already cast doubts on ecotourism, noting that economic benefits from ecotourism quite often accrue to international companies that do not actually supply local economies with jobs that offer career advancement or capital and that ecotourism can lead to the degradation of resources it ostensibly means to protect through habitat alteration, pollution, and erosion.<sup>112</sup> But the trends in celebrity wildlife tourism and hyper-tourism suggest ecotourism also has the potential to fail in its role as protector of wildlife. For example, Tisdell notes that wildlife tourism attracts both generalist and specialist wildlife tourists who push for different types of amenities that, combined, place added stress on wildlife.<sup>113</sup> Similarly, Kerley's research has suggested tourist fixation on encountering Africa's "big five" celebrity species referenced at the end of the last chapter has not led to expected "umbrella species" protection of less charismatic species in the same habitat, since the pressure to accommodate tourist demands to see the celebrity species distort wildlife management priorities away from other species.<sup>114</sup>

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general lack of agreement among scholars, for the purposes of this paper I choose to use "ecotourism" in its most inclusive sense of referring to any form of nature-based tourism (see Fennell, *Ecotourism*, 19-27 for further discussion of the range of ecotourism definitions).

For a full discussion of the potential benefits (and limitations) of ecotourism for sustainable development and conservation, see Stephen Wearing and John Neil, *Ecotourism: Impacts, Potentials and Possibilities* (Oxford: Elsevier, 2009), 2<sup>nd</sup> edition online, accessed July 21, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-7506-6249-9.00011-7>; Nigel Leader-Williams, "Animal Conservation, Carbon and Sustainability," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London Series A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences* 360 (2002): 1787-1806; Stefan Gössling, "Ecotourism: a means to safeguard biodiversity and ecosystem functions?," *Ecological Economics* 29 (1999): 303-320; and Harold Goodwin, "In pursuit of ecotourism," *Biodiversity and Conservation* 5 (1996): 277-291.

<sup>112</sup> For an analysis of nearly 200 case studies of ecotourism that highlight the potential downsides of ecotourism, see: Oliver Krüger, "The role of ecotourism in conservation: panacea or Pandora's box?," *Biodiversity and Conservation* 14 (2005): 579-600.

<sup>113</sup> Clem Tisdell, "Economic Aspects of Ecotourism," *Sri Lankan Journal of Agricultural Economics* 5(1) (2003): 83-95.

<sup>114</sup> Graham Kerley et al., "Jumbos or bust: do tourists' perceptions lead to an under-appreciation of biodiversity?," *South African Journal of Wildlife Research* 33(1) (2003): 13-21.

Despite these limitations, some defenders of ecotourism argue its net effect on conservation might still be positive if it serves to create animal “ambassadors” – tourists whose newly personalized relationships with species in the wild lead them to return home as advocates for policies and funding that preserve those species.

Indeed, IAATO and many of its operators promote exactly this sort of role as a benefit for Antarctic tourism with respect to penguins and global climate change’s impacts on the Antarctic. And a study has found that Antarctic tours do increase passenger’s knowledge of the Antarctic region to a statistically significant degree. However, while the study found that Antarctic tourism increased self-reported behavioral intentions to support conservation campaigns, a follow-up study three months later found Antarctic expedition passengers actually did very little to change their behaviors with regards to conservation as a result of their travels.<sup>115</sup>

To be fair, the authors of the study noted most nature-based tourism is not set up to provide immediate opportunities for people to change their behavior or to contribute to conservation campaigns. And the one Antarctic tour in their study that offered presentations on the effects of long-line fishing on albatrosses and held a collection immediately following the presentation to support conservation efforts was successful in meeting its funding goals.<sup>116</sup> Thus,

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<sup>115</sup> Robert B. Powell, Stephen R. Kellert, and Sam H. Ham, “Antarctic tourists: ambassadors or consumers?,” *Polar Record* 44 (230) (2008): 233–241.

This finding correlates with similar findings in other wildlife tourism settings. For example, surveys suggest direct viewing of turtles at a turtle sanctuary can lead to moderately increased support for wildlife conservation – at least according to self-reported surveys. But the authors noted that since visitors to a sanctuary were pre-disposed to be pro-conservation these reported changes in behavioral intentions may have led to little additional pro-conservation behavior. Moreover, they also noted changes in visitors’ intentions largely depended on how much facilitated interpretation of the experience was actually offered by an eco-tour facility. Clem Tisdell and Clevo Wilson, “Perceived Impacts of Ecotourism on Environmental Learning,” *Environment, Development, and Sustainability* 7 (2005): 291-302.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

it is not that wildlife tourism is inherently incapable of contributing positively to conservation outcomes; it is just that many wildlife tourism ventures are not explicitly set up to do so.<sup>117</sup>

And then there is also the problem for Antarctica, and other landscapes, of whether the pressures of continued, more intensive tourist practices will disrupt the very species and landscapes the tourists are ostensibly there to celebrate. In particular, researchers have found evidence of tourist visitations stressing penguins and increasing their heart rates, even when tourists remain at a great distance; introduction by human visitors of bacteria and other pathogens like *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* into penguin rookeries; drops in breeding near sites of high human activity like plane overflights; and shifts in breeding and feeding locations in response to human presence.<sup>118</sup> Again, to be fair, IAATO and its members are aware of these

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<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, Amanda Stranza argues there is a significant gap in research “analyzing the incentives ecotourism offers to tourists to change their own perspectives and behaviors.” Amanda Stranza, “Anthropology of Tourism: Forging New Ground for Ecotourism and Other Alternatives,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30 (2001): 261-283. Thus, it is possible there are less concrete and more diffuse impacts of ecotourism that create some form of lasting conservation “ambassadorship.”

<sup>118</sup> Vincent A. Viblanc, et al., “Coping with continuous human disturbance in the wild: insights from penguin heart rate response to various stressors,” *BMC Ecology* 12(10) (2012), accessed November 18, 2013, <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1472-6785/12/10>; C.H. Curry, et al., “Identification of an agent suitable for disinfecting boots of visitors to the Antarctic,” *Polar Record* 41(216) (2005): 39-45; Ian Anderson, “With people come plagues,” *New Scientist*, September 5, 1998, accessed February 4, 2014. (LexisNexis Academic); Colin M. Harris, “Aircraft operations near concentrations of birds in Antarctica: The development of practical guidelines,” *Biological Conservation* 125 (2005): 309-322; H. Ratz and C. Thompson, “Who is watching whom? Checks for impacts of tourists on Yellow-eyed penguins *Megadyptes antipodes*,” *Marine Ornithology* 27 (1999): 205-210.

Snyder cautions that without a more thorough study of Antarctic tourist behaviors it is impossible to gauge accurately the full impact of Antarctic tourism and can be too easy to assume harm without proof. He notes that as certain sites become more popular, just the perception of congestion and tourist traffic can make people assume the natural integrity they were seeking in Antarctica has somehow already been destroyed.

When the signatories to the Antarctic Treaty conducted a full review of tourism in 2008, they noted a significant lack of longitudinal studies of human disturbance that could definitively evaluate whether there were problems and noted difficulty in generalizing about impacts that vary significantly by species, by type of human disturbance, and by time of year that human-

negative impacts and actively take some steps to mitigate them. On our voyage, all passengers received a copy of the IAATO guidelines for respecting wildlife prior to the voyage and there was a mandatory briefing on wildlife etiquette during the Drake Passage crossing. At the start of the voyage, passengers were required to vacuum the inside and outside of any bags we planned to take ashore to reduce the likelihood of distributing seeds or other materials that could alter the compensation of local microbes. Furthermore, the ship had a boot washing station at the top of the gangplank leading to the inflatable zodiac rafts that contained disinfectant and water. All passengers and crew were required to use it before and after any trips ashore.

Moreover, beyond the negative or neutral impacts of ecotourism, there are also examples of positive wildlife tourism experiences that enhance local economies and successfully seem to protect wildlife and their habitats. Perhaps the pre-eminent example of such a venture is the highly managed tours offered through the Mountain Gorilla Project to visit habituated wild mountain gorillas (*Gorilla beringei beringei*) in Rwanda. Within 15 years of the project's development in the late 1970s, the ecotourism venture transformed protection of gorillas and the local economy while adhering to stringent controls and management to protect the gorillas themselves. Only four of 29 mountain gorilla groups in Rwanda were habituated to tourists. Tourists had to enter protected areas with a local guide in groups limited to eight people at a cost of \$200 per person. These tight controls helped mitigate – although not eliminate – negative impacts of tourists on the gorillas and ensured the experience retained an exclusive feel while also perhaps allowing tourists to maintain a fantasy about animals living in relatively un-peopled

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wildlife encounters take place. See: Snyder, *Tourism in the Polar Regions*, 23-25; *Human Disturbance to Wildlife in the Broader Antarctic Region: A Review of Findings*, Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research, Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting, Kyiv, Ukraine, June 2-13, 2008, accessed February 14, 2014, [http://www.scar.org/treaty/atcmxxxi/Atcm31\\_wp012\\_e.pdf](http://www.scar.org/treaty/atcmxxxi/Atcm31_wp012_e.pdf).

wilds. By the mid-1990s, gorillas helped make tourism one of the top three economic sources of foreign exchange in Rwanda. By 2008, nearly 20,000 tourists were visiting habituated groups in Rwanda annually, generating approximately \$8 million in revenue.<sup>119</sup> Meanwhile, gorilla populations in the protected Virunga region grew from fewer than 300 in 1981 to an estimated 359 in 2000 and an estimated 480 in 2010, more than 50 percent population growth over 30 years, despite the major disturbance of Rwandan civil war in the mid-1990s.<sup>120</sup>

Thus, wildlife tourism to visit celebrity animal species may have the potential to assist in conservation, but it is not automatically guaranteed to do so and requires significant oversight and commitment to be effective. Even then, wildlife tourism may still fail to make a dent in the mass extinctions of the Anthropocene as long as it maintains at its core a dependence on the myth of wilderness and wildlife being found only wherever people are not.

Certainly there are plenty of celebrity species that many people are excited to see whether in or the wild. And highly successful and desirable wildlife tourism ventures have formed around seeing celebrity species in captivity, such as those to see elephant sanctuaries in Sri Lanka where elephants paint with brushes or the aforementioned panda breeding reserves in China. Usually, though, underlying the promise of these captive celebrity species tourist destinations is the promise that their captivity supports species in the wild.

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<sup>119</sup> Martha M. Robbins, et al., “Extreme Conservation Leads to Recovery of the Virunga Mountain Gorillas,” *PLOS ONE* (2011), accessed February 15, 2014, <http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0019788#pone.0019788-Nielsen1>; Jonathan Adams and Thomas McShane, *The Myth of Wild Africa: Conservation without Illusion* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 184-206.

<sup>120</sup> Jose Kalpers, et al., “Gorillas in the crossfire: population dynamics of the Virunga mountain gorillas over the past three decades,” *Oryx* 37(3) (2003): 326-337; Maryke Gray, et al., *Virunga Massif Mountain Gorilla Census – 2010 Summary Report* (2010), accessed April 30, 2015, [http://www.igcp.org/wp-content/uploads/VirungaMountainGorillaCensus2010\\_final-report.pdf](http://www.igcp.org/wp-content/uploads/VirungaMountainGorillaCensus2010_final-report.pdf).



But in the Anthropocene, during which the human population is estimated to plateau around 10 billion people and where demands for resources will only grow as more people globally obtain higher standards of living, preserving a people-less “wild” for the sake of maintaining the narrative fictions that underlie celebrity wildlife tourism will become even more difficult to sustain. Conflicts between the dreams of wealthy tourists and the needs of local economies and cultures will only be exacerbated. Even in places like Antarctica, where there is no local population, there will be increasing conflict over how to prioritize land use and management in balancing desires of tourists against those of countries eager to exploit the Antarctic for minerals and other resources.<sup>121</sup>

So the challenge becomes – how can those who advocate particular species’ survival change the narratives surrounding celebrity wildlife? Is it possible to create dreams of celebrity wildlife in our media that put people in the same frame as wildlife? And can the wildlife tourism business parlay such narratives into attractive tourist experiences? Certainly, as my expedition to Antarctica shows, even when tourist presence is significant, wildlife tourists rewrite their own stories to excise themselves and other people from their narrative and photographic retellings of their journeys. So even when people and wildlife share the same space, denial and fantasy remain possible after an encounter with celebrity animals. The question is whether tourists need

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<sup>121</sup> The Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) that governs use of Antarctica was signed in 1959 by 12 original signatory nations. Since that time, an additional 17 nations have agreed to abide by the treaty and achieve consultative status based on research conducted on the continent. Twenty-one additional nations agree to abide by the treaty, which currently forbids any commercial mining. But the prohibition against mining is up for renewal in 2048 and many nations have recently started adding research bases on the continent in what observers suggest is a preamble for territorial assertions to exploit resources at that time. The full text of the treaty is available online at: [http://www.ats.aq/index\\_e.htm](http://www.ats.aq/index_e.htm). See also: Joshua Keating, “The Scramble for Antarctica,” *Slate*, February 10, 2014, accessed February 15, 2014, [http://www.slate.com/blogs/the\\_world\\_/2014/02/10/china\\_s\\_new\\_antarctic\\_base\\_get\\_ready\\_for\\_the\\_scramble\\_for\\_antarctica.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_world_/2014/02/10/china_s_new_antarctic_base_get_ready_for_the_scramble_for_antarctica.html).

a fantasy narrative of people-less wild before they travel to motivate their journey in the first place. Until they don't, the march of people seeking idealized encounters with animals will continue to consume and may press on distractedly for the next *it* animal and the next imagined landscape – not content to appreciate the wonders already available to them for what they are.

In the next chapter, I shall again consider this question of people and wildlife occupying the same spaces – both physical and virtual – and why the myth of the wild is so important to animal celebrities and our eco-colonial and eco-cosmopolitan conflicts over their conservation.

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I am lying on a beach in the sun . . . on an Antarctic cruise. Needless to say, this was not the end to the trip I expected. Granted, we are no longer in Antarctica, as we have crossed back over the Antarctic convergence and so technically are again in the southern Atlantic Ocean. But still I'm on the same expedition that a few days ago was passing towering tabular icebergs taller than the ship and seeing rookeries on rock- and ice-strewn shores with 100,000 breeding pairs of penguins. Now I'm looking at penguins, but from the comfort of a warm sandy beach.

The last full day of our expedition has found us on Saunders Island in the Falklands. Here we have stopped to see a colony of King penguins (*Aptenodytes patagonicus*), the more brightly-colored and slightly smaller relatives of emperor penguins and the last of the eight sub-Antarctic and Antarctic penguin species yet to be seen. Once again, our hopes for success are met, as we find a group of kings largely standing around – seemingly waiting for someone to take their picture – including some yearling chicks old enough to wait alone while both parents seek food at sea. The chicks look vastly overdressed for the warm day in their puffy brown coats of down.

To add to the excitement, there is also a nearby colony of gentoo penguins with young chicks being fed by their parents. The chance to photograph parenting behaviors and downy

chicks sticking out from underneath parents' rumps has the tourist paparazzi on high alert once again, as we add more novelties to our photographic collections and tales for back home.

Further down the beach is a wide, flat curve of sand where the entire expedition fans out and sits down to relax in the sun. Groups of penguins porpoise in the distance in the water before splashing up onshore and casually strolling by in pairs and small groups – gentoos mixed with Magellanic penguins mixed with kings. A pair of kings strolls by a few yards in front of me, looking for all the world like they've popped out of Seurat's *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* as they take their afternoon constitutional.

Permeating all the passengers is a general sense of satiation. Aside from blue whales, there isn't a species people had hoped to see that we have not had the good fortune to see yet at some point during this trip. Earlier, one of the elderly German passengers had started to become choked up talking to me about his experience of the trip: "I can't speak any more. It's fine for me as an old man . . . Very beautiful place . . . I am an old man, so it's good for me to see such places. I only wish my son can see someday, too."

For most everyone, the rapacious sense of desire to see new spectacles has been replaced for the moment by a more relaxed sense of nostalgia reflecting on what we have already seen. Here we are among penguins – the stars of the trip. But rather than hunger for them, we amiably pass them by – actors and audience milling about outside the theater after the main performance. Penguins are still celebrity stars and exciting to be around. But the story has been experienced and we now merely wait until we can re-tell it to those back home.

The next morning – as our expedition crew says goodbye to us in Stanley, the Falklands' capital – our assistant expedition leader observes to me this is quite common for almost any Antarctic expedition. He observes that passengers on the ships head to Antarctica as

“consumers” and sail back as “vacationers.” Having scratched our Antarctic itch to consume a narrative of cute and heroic penguin families, along with seals, whales, and ice, we now simply enjoy the ride. But only until many of us go marching off to dream of our next trip to that next “once-in-a-lifetime” encounter with another celebrity species and “wild” place.

## CHAPTER THREE – A Binary Star

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*In Wildness is the preservation of the world.*<sup>1</sup>

-- Henry David Thoreau, "Walking"

*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.*

-- Matthew 4:1, King James edition

*Grand old outlaw, hero of a thousand lawless raids, in a few minutes you will be but a great load of carrion. **It cannot be otherwise.***<sup>2</sup> [emphasis added]

-- Ernest Thompson Seton, *Wild Animals I Have Known*

### Don't Stop Believin'

Like so many other stars, he really made his name only after heading to California. Now his Twitter followers number more than 2,300. For a while, the paparazzi tracked his every move until he finally left the state. Some fans were so besotted they retraced his footsteps as a sort of quasi-spiritual pilgrimage. Other fans obsess over his love life and romantic partners. And, boy, is he a wolf. Literally.

The title for most celebrated wolf alive today almost assuredly belongs to Journey, a male Gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) also known as OR-7.<sup>3</sup> The seventh wolf to be fitted with a tracking-collar by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (hence his original name), this male dispersed from the Imnaha Pack of northeastern Oregon in 2011. After a trek of several months and thousands of miles – presumably in search of a mate and new territory to establish a pack –

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<sup>1</sup> Henry David Thoreau, "Walking," in *Walden and Other Writings*, ed. William Howarth (New York: Modern Library, 1981), 613.

<sup>2</sup> Ernest Thompson Seton, *Wild Animals I Have Known and 200 Drawings* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2000), 41.

<sup>3</sup> For news media accounts of Journey/OR-7, see: Malia Wollan, "Lone Wolf Commands a Following," *The New York Times*, January 28, 2012, accessed November 14, 2014. (LexisNexis Academic); Laura Clark, "World's Loneliest Wolf Is No Longer So Lonely," *Smithsonian.com*, January 15, 2015, accessed March 16, 2015, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/worlds-loneliest-wolf-no-longer-so-lonely-180953908/?no-ist>; Joe Donnelly, "Welcome to Wolf Country," *Orion Magazine*, January 2015, accessed March 15, 2015, <https://orionmagazine.org/2015/01/welcome-wolf-country/>; Peter Frick-Wright, "Underdog," *Sierra Magazine*, January-February 2015, 34-39.

OR-7 arrived in northern California in September 2011, the first wolf in the state in nearly a century. And unlike many neighboring states, California rolled out the welcome mat for him.

For a time, the Department of Fish and Game offered regular online tracking updates, allowing anyone in the world to map the wolf's criss-crossing of northern California.<sup>4</sup> Oregon Wild, a conservation group, created a naming and artwork contest for schoolchildren that received over 250 entries from six continents and produced the name Journey.<sup>5</sup> Several mock Twitter accounts emerged, the most prominent of which, WolfOR7, still remains an active poster – having sent out more than 2,000 Tweets as of April 2015 and having thousands of followers, including many news and conservation groups who ask him to weigh in on subjects such as the full moon and the proper way to spell a wolf's howl.<sup>6</sup> A feature-length documentary about his story, *OR-7 The Journey*, premiered in 2014 and was a featured film at the 2015 Wild & Scenic Film Festival and its national tour.<sup>7</sup> And a group interested in wolves was so inspired by the story they created the Wolf OR-7 Expedition, which re-created his 1,200-mile trek across Oregon, in

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<sup>4</sup> Although the state made clear to note on its website that the updates were not in real time for fear of giving away OR-7's precise location to wolf opponents who might want to kill him.

<sup>5</sup> The name refers to the wolf's travels, documented by the tracking collar to be more than 3,000 miles over the course of his dispersal into his ultimate territory back in southern Oregon.

<sup>6</sup> Journey's tweets, while often linking to news about wolf management, usually aim for humor, such as: "Looking for ungulates in all the right places," "Well-behaved wolves seldom make history," or "With the continued fascination with my love life, maybe it is time for my own reality show: Bachelor Wolf." WolfOR7 (WolfOR7), "Looking for ungulates in all the right places," January 9, 2015, 5:45 p.m., Tweet; WolfOR7 (WolfOR7), "Well-behaved wolves seldom make history," February 26, 2015, 11:10 a.m., Tweet; WolfOR7 (WolfOR7), "With the continued fascination with my love life, maybe it is time for my own reality show: Bachelor Wolf," February 11, 2014, 8:05 a.m., Tweet.

And he isn't kidding about people's interest in his mating patterns. News of his finding a mate and fathering pups was a hot topic throughout the community of wolf advocates. Defenders of Wildlife declared: "OR-7's new family is thrilling for wolf advocates . . . We're glad we won't be losing track of you, OR-7 – your life is just too exciting." Melanie Gade, "Wolf Weekly Wrap Up," Defenders of Wildlife Blog, August 29, 2014, accessed November 1, 2014, <http://www.defendersblog.org/2014/08/wolf-weekly-wrap-47/>.

<sup>7</sup> "OR-7 The Journey," Undated website, accessed March 14, 2015, <http://www.or7themovie.com/>.

order “to explore human & wolf coexistence” – with a blog, documentary and “educational products” to follow.<sup>8</sup>

Journey is clearly a modern day animal celebrity, adapted thanks to his tracking collar to stardom in many media platforms and known to fans worldwide. And he’s not alone. There have been other well-known individual wolves recently with global followings. The wolf known as 832F, at one time the alpha female of one of the primary wolfpacks in Yellowstone National Park, was so well-known and beloved globally that when she was shot after wandering outside the park boundaries in late 2012 she received the near-equivalent of an obituary in *The New York Times*.<sup>9</sup> And fans of wolves were elated and then heartbroken when a wolf – dubbed “Echo” by another global naming contest – was spotted on the north rim of the Grand Canyon in 2014, only to be killed this February by a hunter who allegedly mistook her for a coyote.<sup>10</sup>

This phenomenon of wolves as *beloved* celebrities is a quite recent development. Wolf celebrity itself, however, is not. Certainly wolves have always been among the most well-known creatures, at one time having ranged across almost the entire northern hemisphere and showing up in historical records of many cultures – wolves are mentioned eight times in the Old Testament alone.<sup>11</sup> But wolves also have met a modern definition of celebrity – famous characters in mass media serving as commodified shorthand for ideas – for at least a century.

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<sup>8</sup> “Wolf OR-7 Expedition: Awareness through Adventure,” Undated website, accessed March 14, 2015, <http://or7expedition.org/>.

<sup>9</sup> Nate Schweber, “Mourning an Alpha Female,” *The New York Times*, December 10, 2012, accessed January 20, 2015. (LexisNexis Academic).

<sup>10</sup> Christopher Ketcham, “Grand Canyon Wolf That Made Epic Journey Shot Dead in Utah,” *National Geographic News*, February 13, 2015, accessed April 21, 2015, <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2015/02/150212-gray-wolves-grand-canyon-animals-science-rockies-dead/>.

<sup>11</sup> Most iconically, wolves appear in Isaiah in the prophecy about the coming of the Messiah: “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the

Consider one of Journey's celebrity wolf forebears – Lobo, the King of Currumpaw. This male wolf lived in New Mexico until he was allegedly shot by Ernest Thompson Seton on January 31, 1894, as described in Seton's famous *Wild Animals I Have Known* – one of the first popular books of “realistic” animal stories in the United States.<sup>12</sup> According to Seton, Lobo was widely known and despised by the local New Mexican population, who saw him as “despotic,” “wily,” and a “diabolic” – a terror wreaking “wrath and despair” among local livestock herds. He was apparently so wily he could detect and avoid all forms of strychnine poison and leg traps put out in response to a government and private bounty of \$1,000 for his capture. In the end, Seton supposedly captured Lobo by booby-trapping the body of Blanca – Lobo's mate – who Seton had earlier caught and strangled by nooses pulled by four horses.<sup>13</sup>

The veracity of this particular tale is hard to gauge – a wolf skin attributed to Lobo is displayed at the Seton Memorial Library.<sup>14</sup> But an online search of New Mexican newspapers available from this era yields no mention of Lobo or his capture, even though a wolf with a bounty as large as \$1000 would definitely qualify as newsworthy. However, even if Seton's particulars about Lobo are part of a pattern of his stretching the truth – John Burroughs and Theodore Roosevelt famously accused him in the “nature fakers” debate of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century of misrepresenting animal behavior in his narratives – the idea that certain terrorizing wolves

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calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.” Isaiah 11:6. King James Edition.

As Marvin points out, much of the Bible emerged from pastoralist societies, so that early Christian metaphor frequently saw Jesus and God as shepherds to the flock of the church, with the wolf as a useful metaphor for threats to faith, whether symbolizing the devil or false prophets. Garry Marvin, *Wolf* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 40-45.

<sup>12</sup> Seton, *Wild Animals I Have Known*, 8.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 15, 16, 25, 29, 36.

<sup>14</sup> “Lobo, The King of Currumpaw,” Undated Website, Philmont Scout Ranch, Boy Scouts of America, accessed April 21, 2015, <http://www.philmontscoutranch.org/Museums/SetonMemorialLibrary/lobo.aspx>.



were well-known local celebrities is clear from these same newspapers.<sup>15</sup> Witness headlines such as: “Famous Wolf Dog Scourge of Flocks Has Cashed Checks;” or “Bore the Scars of Many Battles: Veteran Lobo Run Down After Long Chase in the Capitan Mountains, With Long String of Crimes to His Credit.”<sup>16</sup> (Pithy headline writing apparently being a more modern media development.)

The transition from Lobo – villainous scourge of society – to Journey – movie star hero to millions – is an interesting story of evolving celebrity. But it represents only a partial evolution, as wolves today have managed to become just binary stars – popular with some segments of society but still loathed by others. Yet as either hero or villain they are still animal celebrities. And wolves’ celebrity actually is even more complicated because the dueling viewpoints of wolf advocates and adversaries ultimately remain rooted in the same narrative long entrenched as part of wolves’ celebrity “brand”– wolves as representatives of the wild. For wolves’ advocates, the wild represents a conflation of wilderness and ideas about the meaning of the wild that have become almost a spiritual cause to be celebrated. For wolves’ longstanding opponents, the wild of wolves sits across the boundary from civilization and any encroachment of that boundary is to be feared and repelled. But, interestingly, for wolves themselves, these competing viewpoints repeatedly deflect our gaze from the animals, so that we always seem to

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<sup>15</sup> For more on the nature faker controversy, see: Gregg Mitman, *Reel Nature: America’s Romance with Wildlife on Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> “Famous Wolf Dog Scourge of Flocks Has Cashed Checks,” *Albuquerque Morning Journal*, May 12, 1910, accessed April 7, 2015. (NewsBank); “Bore the Scars of Many Battles. Veteran Lobo Run down after Long Chase in the Capitan Mountains, with Long String of Crimes to His Credit,” *Albuquerque Morning Journal*, May 2, 1907, accessed April 7, 2015. (NewsBank).

Bounties mentioned in the papers of the era generally were *much* smaller than \$1,000, with more typical cases being like this one: “The farmers near Roswell have signed a notice offering \$60 reward for the carcass of a certain very large Lobo wolf, known as the wolf that has been depreddating on the live stock of said farmers.” In “Territorial Items,” *Mesilla Valley Democrat*, December 28, 1888, accessed April 7, 2015. (NewsBank).

be looking at the landscape around them and wolves' effects on it instead. And this may have real consequences for wolves' long-term survival and celebrity.

One set of wolves in particular – those reintroduced to Yellowstone National Park in 1995 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the political and social battles across the Northern Rockies they touched off – illustrate how current producers and consumers of wolf celebrity so often deflect attention from wolves themselves. Yellowstone wolves offer a useful contrast with the production and consumption of animal celebrity seen in the case studies of elephants and penguins in previous chapters.

In particular, this chapter considers how the muscular opposition to wolves' reintroduction has made more visible questions of political power inherent in conservation. Indeed, it highlights an uneasy current of *eco-colonialism* in all conservation – where conservation can become a means of interests geographically far removed from an area exerting political control over local economies and political decisions. With the wolves in and around Yellowstone, many local residents have forced this conservation subtext into the open, making it far more unavoidable for wolf advocates to reckon with than eco-colonialism often is for Americans interested in conservation of foreign animal celebrities like African elephants.

At the same time, this chapter also considers the wolf as an example of animal celebrity that is *not* well-adapted digitally. As I have said before, *digital adaptation* refers to the ease with which an animal can meet differing narrative and graphic demands from various media. Since wolves, unlike penguins, are not easily filmed, they are not as adaptable to visually-dependent media. Moreover, since the battle over wolves has become so dependent on talking about wolves in particular places, it may be harder to adapt them to online media formats that prize celebrity decontextualized from historical or narrative contexts – placedness creates details and details

clutter web content where users typically are browsing on the timescales of seconds rather than minutes or hours.

In the end, the Yellowstone wolf story suggests the future celebrity of wolves remains very much in doubt. As Yellowstone's wolf population has succeeded, ironically the media stardom of its individual wolves has diminished. Meanwhile, smaller populations of Mexican wolves (*Canis lupus baileyi*) and Red wolves (*Canis rufus*) as well as individual gray wolves like Journey dispersing into states without wolves are currently attaining the greater celebrity once enjoyed by Yellowstone's wolves. But for all wolves, the challenge to their long-term celebrity may ultimately be their celebrity brand itself. If both proponents and opponents agree the celebrity of wolves is connected to the "wild" as a place where people and wolves are incompatible, there may not be room in our future digital or physical environments for wolves.

### **My, Grandma, What Big Teeth You Have**

The United States Department of Agriculture funds a program called Wildlife Services whose entire mission is to kill predator and nuisance animals on behalf of farmers and ranchers to improve their yields. Far from being a forgotten anachronism of early frontier days, in 2013 Wildlife Services was still going strong with a budget of \$84 million. And as part of its control efforts that year it killed 321 wolves. It also killed over 75,000 coyotes.<sup>17</sup>

While some animal rights and pro-wolf groups regularly lament the entire mission of Wildlife Services, most Americans have never heard of the agency. But to the extent there is any public attention to the agency's work, the killing of the 321 wolves seems to attract attention; the

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<sup>17</sup> Elliott D. Woods, "Wolflandia: The Fight Over the Most Polarizing Animal in the West," *Outside Magazine*, January 20, 2015, accessed March 15, 2015, [http://www.outsideonline.com/1928836/fight-over-most-polarizing-animal-west?utm\\_campaign=rss&utm\\_source=rss&utm\\_medium=xmlfeed](http://www.outsideonline.com/1928836/fight-over-most-polarizing-animal-west?utm_campaign=rss&utm_source=rss&utm_medium=xmlfeed).

deaths of 75,000 coyotes . . . not so much. What explains this discrepancy? Why did wolves, a canine species like coyotes and one that like coyotes historically was indigenous to the entire continental United States, come to meet such a heightened level of polarized public attention?

Wolves' polarizing American celebrity began in Europe. As mentioned above, wolves once inhabited most of the Northern Hemisphere and have a long history interacting with human civilization, especially since wolves are the wild ancestor of dogs, the first animal domesticated by humans, likely before the Agricultural Revolution between 11,000 and 16,000 years ago.<sup>18</sup> And not all civilizations have had negative views of wolves. Many Native American cultures have a long history of viewing wolves as gods or brothers. For example, the Navajo have a tradition suggesting that wolves taught humans their hunting skills. The Kokuyukon have a tradition that wolves were once humans and still do occasional favors for humankind.<sup>19</sup>

But negative views of wolves began in Eurasian societies who were organized around pastoral economies rather than hunting and gathering economies. In pastoral societies, wolf predation on livestock became a threat to the security and survival of the household and thus wolves became transgressors of boundaries between humanity and the wild. Wolves in essence represented the wild as place to be feared. These earliest human relations with wolves established some basic tropes of wolf narratives that have been repeated in almost all forms of media ever since – wolves as predators and wolves as symbols of the wild. And for a long time, both these ideas had negative connotations.

For example, in Europe in the Middle Ages, wolves' reputation worsened after the Black Plague when large quantities of human bodies buried outside the boundaries of communities

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<sup>18</sup> A.H. Freedman, et al., "Genome Sequencing Highlights the Dynamic Early History of Dogs," *PLoS Genetics* 10(1) (2014): e1004016. <http://doi:10.1371/journal.pgen.1004016>.

<sup>19</sup> Marvin, *Wolf*, 119-120.

attracted scavenging wolves, swelling their numbers and turning them into a menacing presence. Wolves were seen as both disrespecting the dead and terrorizing the living who needed to travel between towns. The Roman Catholic Church exploited these fears to turn wolves into the personification of the devil, prowling at twilight to threaten Christian civilization.<sup>20</sup>

Still, humans and wolves in Europe largely co-existed until the 1500s, when human population growth opened up so many lands to agriculture that human-wolf conflict became unavoidable. As historian Jon Coleman notes, the British began exterminating wolves in England in 1500, with wolves gone from Scotland by 1684, from Ireland by 1770, and from much of mainland Europe over the ensuing 150 years.<sup>21</sup> As a result, when European colonists arrived in the New World, many had no experience with wolves – making American wolves’ presence seem that much more menacing, since cultural narratives of wolves as evil had continued to persist in Europe even in the absence of actual wolves. As Coleman notes, Euroamerican settlers conceived of themselves as “besieged” rather than conquerors of the wild. And for America’s wolves, “the most dangerous animal on the planet was a livestock owner feeling surrounded, exploited, and impotent.”<sup>22</sup>

As a result, bounty programs became some of the earliest actions of colonial governments, with the first American bounty on wolves set in Boston in 1630 and 12 bounty legislative acts passed in the ensuing 18 years.<sup>23</sup> Wolf bounties spread with the expansion of the frontier, where wolves were seen not only as threats to livestock – a family’s property to be inherited by future generations – but as threats to game species valued as food and, at the start of

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<sup>20</sup> Barry Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 1<sup>st</sup> Scribner Classics edition, 208.

<sup>21</sup> Jon T. Coleman, *Vicious: Wolves and Men in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 8.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>23</sup> Marvin, *Wolf*, 90.

the twentieth century, as trophies for the gentleman sport hunter affirming his masculinity.<sup>24</sup> But what is striking is not just how widespread government-sponsored bounty programs became but how “vicious” the control of wolves was compared to control of other predators: trappers didn’t just shoot wolves but hung them, set out millions of pounds of strychnine to poison them, and strangled them with nooses – as Seton did to Blanca in the story of Lobo mentioned earlier.<sup>25</sup>

And this viciousness seems to be the result of the ways in which the wolf as a character in the human mind and human culture was passed down through the ages – from the earliest fables of Aesop in ancient Greece, such as the well-known “Boy Who Cried Wolf,” through the Middle Ages and into the modern era. Most all these narratives relied on recapitulating those two basic tropes about wolves – predation and wildness. And both predation and personification of wildness appeared in perhaps the most frequent character in wolf narratives – the *werewolf*.

Most civilizations have stories of creatures that transform their appearance, with werewolves, were-bears, and were-leopards among the many versions worldwide. These are liminal creatures, traveling across the boundaries of humanity and animality and threatening to disrupt the order of human society by preying on people and also by seducing them with the temptations of the Devil and leaving behind humanity. Stories of werewolves are ways of telling stories about humans’ dual nature – our battles between the good and evil inside all of us.<sup>26</sup>

But for much of history people did not see werewolves as mere metaphors; rather they believed them to be quite real. For example, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, published in 1487, was used during the Inquisition to prove the existence of werewolves in order that many heretics and

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<sup>24</sup> Valerie M. Fogelman, “Attitudes Towards Wolves: A History of Misperception,” *Environmental Review: ER* 13(1) (1989): 63-94.

<sup>25</sup> Coleman, *Vicious*.

<sup>26</sup> Montague Summers, *The Werewolf* (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1966), 20-22.

threats to the Church could be put to death.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, King James VI of Scotland published his *Daemonologia* in 1597, which talked of “war-woolfes” as real beings.<sup>28</sup> People feared werewolves as agents of witchcraft that could injure, contaminate, or convert other people.<sup>29</sup>

But whether real or metaphorical, werewolves have remained mainstays of narratives to the present day. As Frost notes, modern stories of werewolves often have Freudian undertones, exploring repressed animal desires fighting with human nature.<sup>30</sup> Certainly this interpretation underpins one of the older stories about wolves, that of Little Red Riding Hood, first written down by Charles Perrault in 1697. In the classic tale, a prepubescent girl meets a wolf who transforms into her grandmother and entices Little Red to get closer until he can devour her – a tale of dangerous sexual animality preying on the naiveté of women.<sup>31</sup>

Werewolves became even more common with the rise of serial stories in periodicals in the nineteenth century and pulp fiction novels and comic books in the twentieth century.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, much of early mass media celebrity for the wolf focused on werewolves. Interestingly, this form of celebrity did not adapt well to the stage or early film, however, since visually it was difficult to convey a realistic process of transformation between man and beast.<sup>33</sup> A few early films like *The Werewolf* (1913) and *The Wolfman* (1941) tried but only when make-up and special effect techniques later improved did werewolves grow in popularity in the cinema.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men*, 239-240.

<sup>28</sup> Summers, *The Werewolf*, 7-8.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27.

<sup>30</sup> Brian J. Frost, *The Essential Guide to Werewolf Literature* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 20.

<sup>31</sup> Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men*, 250, 263-266.

<sup>32</sup> Frost, *The Essential Guide to Werewolf Literature*.

<sup>33</sup> Summers, *The Werewolf*, 265.

<sup>34</sup> Marvin notes that the first Academy Award for Best Make Up went to a werewolf film: *An American Werewolf in London* (1981). Marvin, *Wolf*, 62.

And wolves have continued to appear up to the present day in popular media as antagonists and sinister threats to human safety. For example, wolves are villains in recent popular American movies like *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) and *The Grey* (2011). And the most popular advertisement during the last Super Bowl (as rated by *USA Today* readers) was a commercial in which a savage and menacing wolf threatens a lost puppy until his friends, the Budweiser Clydesdale horses, rescue him.<sup>35</sup>

Werewolves, too, have remained staples of popular media, arguably growing in popular stature as well-known celebrities even more. In particular, two of the biggest selling young adult book and film series of the last fifteen years feature prominent werewolf characters: Professor Lupin in the *Harry Potter* books and films and Jacob Black in the *Twilight* series of books and films. True, the context of their werewolvery has changed somewhat, so that creatures straddling the boundaries of humanity and animality are framed less as sinister villains and more as tragic heroes – torn by their uncontrollable urges but noble and even sexy for having urges that distinguish them from more sedate humans.<sup>36</sup> But still werewolves as transgressing the boundary between humanity and the wild are quite present in current popular culture.

### **The Call of the Wild**

Given this overwhelming history of European and Euroamerican culture fearing wolves well into the twentieth century, it is perhaps surprising that by 1995 the American government was trying to reintroduce wolves onto the landscape. But during the twentieth century a renaissance in wolves' cultural reputation occurred among some segments of society, who came

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<sup>35</sup> Alan Siegel, "The 10 best Super Bowl XLIX commercials according to Ad Meter," *USA Today*, February 1, 2015, accessed April 28, 2015, <http://admeter.usatoday.com/2015/02/01/10-best-super-bowl-49-commercials/>.

<sup>36</sup> J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (New York: Scholastic Books, 1999); Stephenie Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* (New York: Little Brown Books for Young Readers, 2010).



to adopt a more positive vision of wolves' literal and symbolic place in the world. To arrive at this vision did not require the creation of any new tropes in wolf narratives but instead a re-evaluation of the longstanding tropes – wolves as predators and wolves as symbols of the wild – deriving alternate values from them. In these new narratives and characterizations, wolves' hunting of game animals was a beneficial service providing balance to the ecosystem rather than a theft of god-given human rights to game or livestock. Similarly, wolves' association with the wild now became a symbol of nature's strength and resilience in opposition to the pollution and degradation of human society rather than something to be feared and overcome.

Of course, as noted above, the savage version of wolf celebrity has not disappeared from popular American media since the rise of the more heroic vision. Rather, the two have co-existed in tandem – a binary stardom offering opposing views on the meaning of the same tropes. In part, the positive version of wolves simply could not have occurred in Euroamerican, property-based cultures until recently because, as Coleman notes, only by the mid-twentieth century did most Americans' livelihoods no longer rely directly upon agriculture. And only without direct experience with livestock could Americans no longer “empathize with their meat” as vulnerable to predation or as property that is the source of future wealth.<sup>37</sup> Especially for urban Americans, meat gradually became something abstracted from animals themselves, found in the butcher shop or supermarket rather than being the product of a stock grower's labor and worry. Thus, wolf depredations on livestock no longer loomed as severe a problem for many American.

This allowed depredations to be satirized and laughed at. For example, in the 1950s and 1960s a well-known series of seven late Looney Tunes cartoon shorts featured the characters Ralph the Wolf and his counterpart Sam the Sheepdog. In the films, both the wolf and dog prey

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<sup>37</sup> Coleman, *Vicious*, 232-234.

on and protect sheep, respectively, but as 9-to-5 jobs rather than because of innate motivation. The wolf isn't evil and he exchanges pleasantries in the morning with the dog as both punch in for work. At the lunch whistle they immediately halt all competition over the sheep to enjoy coffee and a cigarette together. Wolf predation of livestock thus is presented as an inevitable job to be done rather than as a bloodthirsty attack on American values or wealth.<sup>38</sup>

But beyond growing urban indifference to livestock predation, the rehabilitation of wolves' reputations ironically resulted most directly from wolves' extirpation. It started, as mentioned at the start of this chapter, with the increasing laudation of wolves' cunning and persistence in early twentieth century narratives like Seton's "Lobo, King of the Currumpaw" – praise that in part served as justification for the continued need for government trapping and strychnine campaigns even in the face of plummeting wolf population numbers. By building up wolves' reputation as clever and worthy (if still bloodthirsty) adversaries, storytellers justified the continued control measures – in much the same way big game hunters praised elephants' might to confer greatness on the act of hunting them. So in addition to Seton's Lobo, the legendary American wolf tales of the early twentieth century included the Sycan Wolf in Oregon; the Snowdrift Wolf and the Ghost Wolf in Montana; the Pine Ridge Wolf, the Custer Wolf, and Three Toes in South Dakota; and Old Whitey in Colorado.<sup>39</sup>

Around this same time, there were also popular stories that turned wolves into emblems of the now vanquished wild frontier, perhaps most famously Jack London's 1903 novel *Call of*

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<sup>38</sup> For examples, see: "Don't Give Up the Sheep," directed by Chuck Jones (Burbank: Warner Brothers, 1953), Film; "A Sheep in the Deep," directed by Chuck Jones and Maurice Noble (Burbank: Warner Brothers, 1962), Film.

<sup>39</sup> Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men*, 191-192. Interestingly, as Lopez notes, the legends of many of these wolves had them as white wolves or as wolves born on Native American reservations. The former seems to have racial undertones while the latter also allows a further playing out of frontier narratives of taming and conquering the wild Indian.

*the Wild*, where a domesticated dog, Buck, eventually succumbs to the allure of a timber wolf pack in the wilderness, joining it after the death of his beloved human companion, Thornton.<sup>40</sup> Such stories built on then-popular American primitivist movement, with nature and wild places serving as places to restore self-reliance from emasculating and corrupting modern civilization.

Wolves' extirpation also led to their more positive reputation because of the narratives that came from scientists involved in predator control. As predator management became more bureaucratized and scientific, the government commissioned studies of wolf behavior to help plan more effective control programs. These studies led to the first sustained scientific observation of wolves that sought to understand their social structures and behaviors.

Adolph Murie completed one of the most famous early studies in Mount McKinley National Park (today known as Denali). Murie's report, published in 1944, is notable for his openness to the possibility wolves might play a positive role in ecosystems. For example, while careful to hedge his conclusions, Murie determined it was "probable" wolves preyed on weak and elderly Dall sheep and that "such predation would seem to benefit the species [sheep] over a long period of time."<sup>41</sup> Indeed, he saw wolves in the wild as actually being a natural part of the landscape, rather than a terror menacing the other wildlife, noting that "since the caribou and the wolf (and also the sheep and the wolf) have existed together for may centuries, it is not surprising that under wilderness conditions the two species are well adjusted to each other."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Jack London, *The Call of the Wild*, in *The Portable Jack London*, ed. Earle Labor (New York: Penguin Books, 1994).

<sup>41</sup> Adolph Murie, *Fauna of the National Parks of the United States: The Wolves of Mount McKinley*, Fauna Series No. 5 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1944), unpaginated online edition, accessed March 16, 2015, [http://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online\\_books/fauna5/fauna.htm](http://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/fauna5/fauna.htm).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

And in a foreshadowing of future wolf narratives that would individuate wolves as characters, even in a largely scientific report Murie could not resist anthropomorphic observations. For example, he called one wolf “the Dandy” because of the way his tail waved “jauntily” and the “sprightly spirit in his step.” In looking at wolfpacks and their relationships within the pack he observed: “the strongest impression remaining with me after watching the wolves on numerous occasions was their friendliness.”<sup>43</sup>

Murie’s work helped open a window onto a different understanding of wolves – one that inverted their characterization to make predation a virtue. Moreover, in looking at wolves, Murie saw a positive value in their connection to the wild and, indeed, saw wild places as having the same kind of inherent value that had started to emerge in American primitivist and romantic discourse about nature and the wild. Thus, Murie concludes of his study: “it was an inexhaustible thrill to watch the wolves simply because they typify the wilderness so completely.”<sup>44</sup>

Another scientist who had been involved in government predator control programs, Aldo Leopold, echoed Murie’s views of wolves in 1944. Early in his career Leopold had worked in the Southwest with the U.S. Forest Service. During that time he had been involved in predator control, stating in 1920 that: “It is going to take patience and money to catch the last wolf or lion in New Mexico. But the last one must be caught before the job can be fully successful.”<sup>45</sup>

But in the ensuing decades Leopold gradually had come to doubt the wisdom of predator extermination, especially after traveling to Mexico in 1936 on a pack trip and seeing what he characterized as “healthy” land versus the “sick” landscapes of the United States where predator

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in: Susan Flader, *Thinking Like a Mountain: Aldo Leopold and the Evolution of an Ecological Attitude Toward Deer, Wolves, and Forests* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1974), 93.

control had allowed irruptions of game species to far outstrip available resources.<sup>46</sup> In 1944, Leopold penned one of his most famous essays, “Thinking Like a Mountain,” which was published posthumously in 1949 as part of his classic book *A Sand County Almanac*.

The essay was his attempt to explain why predators were an important part of a balanced ecological system that improved the health of the land, advancing conclusions similar to those of Murie. In the essay, Leopold tells a quasi-fictional story of a sudden epiphany about this observation that supposedly occurred when he had been a young man and was hunting a female wolf cornered in a canyon. Upon shooting her, Leopold arrived in time to watch “a fierce green fire dying in her eyes,” which allowed him to know something previously “known only to her and the mountain” – that “a mountain live[s] in mortal fear of its deer.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, Leopold inverted the paradigm of game management – turning the deer into the villains and making wolves the heroes.<sup>48</sup> This essay became one of Leopold’s most popular after *Sand County Almanac* was widely rediscovered in the 1970s, with the “fierce green fire” imagery in particular becoming a popular characterization of valuable nature threatened by human ignorance.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), Special Commemorative Edition, 130, 132.

<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, Leopold scholar Susan Flader points out Leopold’s interest in wolves hinged not just on landscape health but on his interest in wilderness protection. Leopold’s vision of wilderness centered on roadlessness. But during his time in the Forest Service he had become frustrated that an area he wanted protected as wilderness had been opened up to roads to allow hunters access to the interior of land overrun by an irruption of deer. So in Leopold’s view there was a direct link between the extermination of wolves, which had allowed the deer irruptions to occur, and the destruction of wilderness. Flader, *Thinking Like a Mountain*, 100-102.

<sup>49</sup> For example, it has served as the basis of titles for two popular environmental documentaries in the last five years: *A Fierce Green Fire: The Battle for a Living Planet*,” about the history of the American environmental movement, and *Green Fire*, a documentary on Aldo Leopold and the legacy of his land ethic. *A Fierce Green Fire: The Battle for a Living Planet*, directed by Mark Kitchell (ZAP Zoetrope Aubry Productions, 2012), DVD; *Green Fire*, directed by Ann Dunsy, Steve Dunsy, and Dave Steinke (U.S. Forest Service, 2011), DVD.

Like Murie, Leopold was not advocating that wolves should always be protected and never culled. Rather, he was arguing wolves played a needed role in managing biological systems and should not be entirely eliminated – turning their reputation as predators into a virtue. Indeed, not only did Leopold think wolves played a needed role on the landscape, but by 1944 he became one of the first prominent voices to advocate that wolves should be intentionally reintroduced into the landscape. In his review of *Wolves of North America* written for the *Journal of Forestry*, Leopold chided the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for not considering the possibility of introducing wolves back into larger national parks and wilderness areas, going so far as to ask: “Why, in the necessary process of extirpating wolves from the livestock ranges of Wyoming and Montana, were not some of the uninjured animals used to restock the Yellowstone?”<sup>50</sup>

Aside from Murie and Leopold, the third scientist involved in government-funded wolf research who helped to create a more positive popular vision of wolves, which arguably did even more to alter public perceptions than the other two, was Farley Mowat. Mowat’s 1963 book *Never Cry Wolf* documented his experience investigating wolves’ impacts on caribou populations in the subarctic regions of Manitoba, Canada. The book became a worldwide phenomenon, translated into 20 languages, remaining in print for more than 50 years, and leading to an Oscar-nominated Disney cinematic adaptation in 1983.<sup>51</sup> In the book, Mowat went further than Murie in painting a portrait of wolves as having rich emotional lives as observed

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<sup>50</sup> Actually Leopold at the time assumed reintroduction to Yellowstone wasn’t even possible any longer because he believed the remaining gray wolves in Alaska and Mexico were a separate subspecies of wolf from the one that had inhabited the Northern Rockies – a belief later genetic science has shown to be wrong. Aldo Leopold, “Review: The Wolves of North America by Stanley P. Young and Edward H. Goldman,” *Journal of Forestry* 42(12) (1944): 928-929.

<sup>51</sup> For a complete evaluation of the book’s role in popular perception of wolves, see: Karen Jones, “Never Cry Wolf’: Science, Sentiment and the Literary Rehabilitation of *Canis lupus*,” *Canadian Historical Review* 84(1) (2003): 65-93.

through close field study of a wolf pair he named George and Angeline. For example, he described George as “conscientious to a fault, thoughtful to others, and affectionate within reasonable bounds,” while Angeline was “beautiful, ebullient, passionate to a degree, and devilish when the mood was on her.”<sup>52</sup> And like the two scientists before him Mowat reiterated the idea wolves were not harmful to the ecosystem.

Mowat’s book evoked a split reaction. Some, both laymen and scientists, took great issue with several of Mowat’s claims about wolf behavior, arguing Mowat had mischaracterized prey patterns and overly anthropomorphized wolves. But many members of the public embraced the book’s portrayal of wolves as misunderstood, loving and intelligent creatures of the wild.<sup>53</sup> Mowat himself became a defiant supporter of wolves, arguing any literary license taken on his part did not undercut the basic argument he had presented. In a new preface to his book on its thirtieth anniversary, he decried “the holy conspiracy of government ‘game managers,’ self-serving politicians, and self-styled conservation organizations devoted to ‘enhancing’ the supply of big-game targets” that still tried to threaten the annihilation of the wolf thirty years later.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, from the realm of popular scientific literature, a new version of wolf celebrity began to emerge. But the positive vision generally focused on wolves as beneficial to “wild” places seemingly without people in them – like the Arctic and national parks. And around the same time that this vision was spreading was also when popular support for protecting supposedly people-less places was reaching its critical mass. In 1964 the federal government

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<sup>52</sup> Farley Mowat, *Never Cry Wolf* (New York: Back Bay Books, Little, Brown and Company, 2001), 91.

<sup>53</sup> For examples of criticism, see: L. David Mech, “The Challenge and Opportunity of Recovering Wolf Populations,” *Conservation Biology* 9(12) (1995): 270-278; Jones, “Never Cry Wolf,” *Canadian Historical Review*.

<sup>54</sup> Farley Mowat, “Preface,” in *Never Cry Wolf* (New York: Back Bay Books, Little, Brown and Company, 2001), 1<sup>st</sup> Back Bay paperback edition, viii.

enacted the Wilderness Act, which defined wilderness “in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape . . . as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.”<sup>55</sup> With this emphasis on wilderness being where people are not and the simultaneous promotion of wolves as positive influences on such wild places, wolves became positively associated with salutary ideas of the wild and wilderness.

### **Rekindling a Fierce Green Fire . . .**

Thus, a less fearsome version of wolf celebrity had started to emerge in the United States by the start of the 1970s, but only after wolves had essentially been extirpated from most of the lower 48 states – no longer materially present in most Americans’ lived experience, except for some residents of Alaska and northern Minnesota. So if this view of wolves developed largely in their absence, what might their return to areas near people do for the celebrity of wolves? As noted above, Aldo Leopold had floated the idea of reintroducing wolves into the American West as early as 1944. But even after passage of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1973, listing of the gray wolf as endangered in the lower 48 states (wolves remained plentiful in Alaska) in 1974, and additional clarification of wolves’ protected status in 1978, the government’s efforts to restore wolf populations proceeded slowly, since wolves’ binary stardom meant restoration was far from universally desired by the public.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> “Wilderness Act,” Public Law 88-577 (September 3, 1964), 890-896, accessed April 29, 2015, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-78/pdf/STATUTE-78-Pg890.pdf>.

<sup>56</sup> “Endangered Wildlife,” *Federal Register* 39(3) (January 4, 1974), 1171-1177, accessed April 25, 2015, <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/wolf/FR01041974.pdf>; “Reclassification of the Gray Wolf in the United States and Mexico, with Determination of Critical Habitat in Michigan and Minnesota,” *Federal Register* 43(47) (March 9, 1978), 9607-9615, accessed April 25, 2015, <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/wolf/FR03091978.pdf>.



In deciding to try to restore wolves, the first priority was to find places for wolves where conflicts with humans could be minimized.<sup>57</sup> A 1970s National Park Service report on a study of Yellowstone National Park that searched for any possible remnant wolf population was the first that seriously suggested the possibility of re-introducing wolves there.<sup>58</sup> In addition, two other relatively unpopulated areas large enough to contain wolfpack territories and support sufficient wild prey were identified as possible recovery areas for the species in the Northern Rockies – northwestern Montana and central Idaho.<sup>59</sup> Yellowstone National Park was appealing because it was part of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, an area of land approximately 65,000 square kilometers in size, of which more than 75 percent was federal land, making restoration and

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Public opinion polls taken prior to wolves' reintroduction to Yellowstone found that a majority of the public either liked wolves or felt neutral about them (with neutral feelings actually holding a slight plurality over liking wolves in at least one poll). Interestingly, variations in sentiment had less to do with people's education or geographic proximity to proposed wolf reintroduction sites (for example, 47 percent of Wyoming residents liked wolves, more than the nationwide average) than with their group identification, which confounded all other factors. So belonging to groups like Defenders of Wildlife or the Wyoming Stock Growers Association was a greater determinant of personal opinion than anything else. Long term studies have suggested support for wolves has stayed relatively stable or slightly declined once people have more personal experience with them.

See: Alistair J. Bath, "Public Attitudes About Wolf Restoration in Yellowstone National Park," in *The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem: Redefining America's Wilderness Heritage*, eds. Robert B. Keiter and Mark S. Boyce (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 367-376; Alistair J. Bath and Thomas Buchanan, "Attitudes of Interest Groups in Wyoming Toward Wolf Restoration in Yellowstone National Park," *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 17(4) (1989): 519-525.

<sup>57</sup> Prior to the reintroduction in Yellowstone an earlier attempt in 1974 took place where a graduate student and Michigan state wildlife officials attempted to translocate four wolves from Minnesota to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Local opposition was so fierce all four wolves died in under a year – two killed by hunters, one killed by a trapper, and one hit by a car. Martin A. Nie, *Beyond Wolves: The Politics of Wolf Recovery and Management* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

<sup>58</sup> Douglas W. Smith and Gary Ferguson, *Decade of the Wolf: Returning the Wild to Yellowstone* (Guilford, CT: The Lyons Press, 2005); L. David Mech, "Returning the Wolf to Yellowstone," in *The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem: Redefining America's Wilderness Heritage*, eds. Robert B. Keiter and Mark S. Boyce (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 309-322.

<sup>59</sup> Jennifer Pate, et al., "Coloradans' attitudes toward reintroducing the gray wolf into Colorado," *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 24(3) (1996): 421-428.

management of any wolf population logistically and legally easier. Greater Yellowstone also contained a large population of over 95,000 ungulates, wolves' primary food source. Of course, with private lands and federal grazing permits in the area, Greater Yellowstone also had 412,000 livestock, which could present conflicts if re-introduced wolves started targeting humans' domesticated animals.<sup>60</sup> But all in all, the area seemed like an ideal candidate for relocating wolves from Canada – the option that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) ultimately decided to pursue in its Northern Rocky Mountain Recovery Plan for gray wolves in 1987.

Announcement of the plan provoked immediate public outcry and legal action, all of which caused the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and public comment process for the plan to drag on for over six years. Lawsuits about the options came from all sides, with the National Farm Bureau on one side suing over possible loss of livestock and the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund (not affiliated with the Sierra Club and later renamed Earthjustice) fighting on the other side to demand that any reintroduced wolves have full endangered species protections.<sup>61</sup>

But Congress, and surprisingly several Western legislators, pushed USFWS to persevere with the EIS process, throughout the public outcry. Indeed, some of the Western legislators who generally opposed wolves were eager to see the process move forward, even as they also represented a large proportion of constituents deeply fearful of wolves and resentful of their

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<sup>60</sup> *Final Environmental Impact Statement: The Reintroduction of Gray Wolves to Yellowstone National Park and Central Idaho* (Helena, MT: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1994).

Definitions of the boundaries of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem vary, but it includes the northwestern corner of Wyoming and parts of eastern Idaho and southwestern Montana. Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks, as well as parts of six national forests, three national wildlife refuges, Bureau of Land Management holdings, state lands, and private and tribal lands also make up the ecosystem. "Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem," in *Yellowstone Resources and Issues Handbook* (Yellowstone National Park, WY: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2014), 53-100, accessed April 21, 2015, [http://www.nps.gov/yell/planyourvisit/upload/ri\\_2013\\_ecosystem.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/yell/planyourvisit/upload/ri_2013_ecosystem.pdf).

<sup>61</sup> Smith and Ferguson, *Decade of the Wolf*.

impacts to livestock and hunting opportunities. Their reasoning was motivated by knowledge that wolves had already begun to return passively on their own into the Northern Rockies region. Indeed, by 1994 there were an estimated 65 wolves in northern Montana.<sup>62</sup> Wolves that passively dispersed into the lower 48 states without any human help had full protections under the ESA. But if the USFWS was allowed to relocate wolves into the region, then legal protections for wolves potentially might change, opening up the possibility of legal methods of lethal control.<sup>63</sup>

And indeed, among the five options the USFWS considered – ranging from actively preventing wolves from settling in the Northern Rockies to relocating wolves with full endangered species protection – the enacted alternative classified relocated wolves as an “experimental population.” This meant that outside the boundaries of national parks they could be subjected to lethal controls (within very strict guidelines) if they posed threats to livestock or human life.<sup>64</sup> It also meant that while the federal government would not provide compensation for lost livestock, it would work with the wildlife advocacy group Defenders of Wildlife to set up a private compensation fund for when scientists could confirm wolves caused livestock losses.<sup>65</sup>

Still passions ran so high over the proposed project that, when the USFWS published the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the wolf recovery plan in 1994, it had received more than 160,000 public comments – the most comments ever received by any proposed federal rule in history to that point. In addition, the USFWS held 68 open houses and nine formal hearings about the wolf recovery plan, with most held in the states immediately adjacent to the proposed

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<sup>62</sup> *Final Environmental Impact Statement*, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

<sup>63</sup> Smith and Ferguson, *Decade of the Wolf*.

<sup>64</sup> *Final Environmental Impact Statement*, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

<sup>65</sup> Over the first 15 years of the wolf project, Defenders of Wildlife would end up paying more than \$1 million in compensation for losses and in assistance to ranching operations trying to develop non-lethal wolf controls. William Stolzenburg, *Where the Wild Things Were: Life, Death, and Ecological Wreckage in a Land of Vanishing Predators* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2008), 211.

relocation sites – Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho – but also several held in major cities around the country, reflecting the national interest in wolves and sense of ownership over the Yellowstone region. Nearly 4,000 people attended these fora, with passions running so high armed law enforcement often guarded the proceedings. The majority of comments favored reintroduction; but a strong minority passionately resented the proposed plan.<sup>66</sup>

Finally, on January 12, 1995, the first wolves – of what would ultimately be 66 wild-caught in Canada and reintroduced over two years – arrived in Yellowstone National Park.<sup>67</sup> Depending upon your opinion about wolf reintroduction, it either succeeded or failed beyond everyone’s wildest expectations. The Yellowstone wolves recorded their first successful elk kill within a week of leaving the pens.<sup>68</sup> Four matings resulting in pups occurred in the park during that first season.<sup>69</sup> Over time while some wolves left the boundaries of the park, several stayed and set up new wolfpacks and territories. And while the USFWS’s initial goal for a recovered wolf population in the Northern Rockies was 300 wolves by 2002 – with 100 wolves and 10 successful breeding pairs in each of the three recovery regions (Greater Yellowstone, central Idaho, northwestern Montana) – today, according to recent estimates there are at least 1,700 wolves in the Northern Rockies.<sup>70</sup> Within Yellowstone National Park itself (not including the

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<sup>66</sup> *Final Environmental Impact Statement*, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

<sup>67</sup> Smith and Ferguson, *Decade of the Wolf*. Actually there were two re-introduction sites. The wolf project released 31 wolves in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem in Yellowstone National Park. The other 35 wolves were reintroduced into the Idaho recovery area that centered on a mix of forest service lands such as the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness Area.

<sup>68</sup> Stolzenburg, *Where the Wild Things Were*, 138.

<sup>69</sup> Smith and Ferguson, *Decade of the Wolf*.

<sup>70</sup> *Final Environmental Impact Statement*, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Woods, “Wolflandia.”

entire Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem), the wolf population peaked at 174 in 2003, although it has since fallen to 95 due to changes in prey populations and mange and distemper epidemics.<sup>71</sup>

### **. . . And Kindling a Fierce Debate**

Other threats aside from disease soon emerged for the Northern Rockies wolves – specifically killing of wolves that left protected park boundaries. Even after wolf hunting was legal in states surrounding Yellowstone by 2011, the ability to take wolves did not stifle local resentment of the reintroduction project. Instead, a few hunters and landowners seemed to target specifically the wolves collared as part of scientific research. For example, during 2012, hunters legally killed 10 wolves who normally spent time inside Yellowstone National Park but who had strayed outside the park borders. Of the 10, seven wore collars, a suspiciously high percentage given that only 30 percent of the park’s wolves are collared. Since some wolves had been the only collared members of their packs, these deaths meant researchers lost reliable means of tracking certain packs.<sup>72</sup>

Overall, the reintroduction reified the binary status of wolves’ stardom, with two opposing advocacy groups developing into full-scale producers and consumers of wolf celebrity – one perpetuating the idea of wolves as heroes, the other of wolves as villains.

The latter was comprised of many local residents and hunting and livestock groups who had resented the reintroduction as a threat to their livelihoods and soon positively hated the project because they viewed it as a series of illegal actions and broken promises by the federal

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<sup>71</sup> Douglas Smith, et al., *Yellowstone National Park Wolf Project Annual Report*. Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming: National Park Service, Yellowstone Center for Resources. Distemper killed two-thirds of the pups born in 2005 and all but 22 of the pups born in 2008. “Wolf Information Continued,” Undated website, National Park Service, accessed April 15, 2015, <http://www.nps.gov/yell/learn/nature/wolfinfo.htm>.

<sup>72</sup> Nate Schweber, “Research Animals Lost in Wolf Hunts Near Yellowstone,” *The New York Times Blogs*, November 28, 2012, accessed November 14, 2014. (LexisNexis Academic).

government. This started with their view that the original science had either been flawed or intentionally misrepresented estimations of wolves' impacts on ungulates and livestock. The Final EIS had estimated a recovered wolf population would kill an estimated 1200 ungulates per year, potentially reducing the elk populations by five to 30 percent. Scientists had argued this take could easily be absorbed, as the 95,000 ungulates in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem had already been subject to annual human harvests of 14,000 animals per year without any serious detriment to their long-term viability.<sup>73</sup> Yet within three years of wolves' reintroduction the elk herd in the Northern Range of Yellowstone had dropped by 50 percent – although scientists disputed whether the cause was entirely due to the wolves, since the population had started falling just prior to the reintroduction project.<sup>74</sup>

Similarly, the official narrative about wolves' potential impacts on elk herds had been that wolves would primarily prey upon the sick, weak, young, and elderly – thus improving the health of the overall elk herd. Many hunters and wolf opponents took this to mean wolves would not attack bull elk favored by trophy hunters.<sup>75</sup> And yet between 2000 and 2007, for reasons not fully understood, bull elk comprised 50 percent of the prey of the park's wolves.<sup>76</sup>

Meantime, the Final EIS had estimated a recovered wolf population in the Greater Yellowstone Region would take only an estimated 19 cattle and 68 sheep per year.<sup>77</sup> Of course, for many individual ranchers who had extremely small profit margins, the government

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<sup>73</sup> *Final Environmental Impact Statement*, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

<sup>74</sup> Stolzenburg, *Where the Wild Things Were*; Smith and Ferguson, *Decade of the Wolf*.

<sup>75</sup> A recent example of wolf opponents angry about wolves taking bull elk comes from the group Lobo Watch, which complained on its Facebook page that: "Wolves also kill the strongest bulls and most coveted trophy game animals in our herds. Loss to economy is great as sportsmen no longer hunt in states like Montana and Idaho and are going to states that don't have wolf populations." Lobo Watch's Facebook page, post modified April 20, 2015, 9:44 p.m., accessed May 1, 2015.

<sup>76</sup> "Wolf Information Continued," National Park Service.

<sup>77</sup> *Final Environmental Impact Statement*, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

intentionally adding *any* variable that might increase economic losses was unacceptable. But as occasional depredations of livestock occurred where wolves took multiple livestock from a single operation, these anecdotes became a focus of pushback and local animus. Indeed, a content analysis of American print media found that in the decade following the reintroduction of wolves, print media coverage about wolves became more negative both nationwide and especially in states with newly dispersing wolf populations, with news coverage focusing on discontent with wolves and a few wolf depredations that received disproportionate attention.<sup>78</sup> Proponents of wolves argued that depredations accounted for a miniscule proportion of national livestock losses – in 2014 the National Agricultural Statistics Survey determined wolves only accounted for a mere 0.2 percent of all annual cattle losses – but these averages were taken over the entire country, much of which does not have wolves.<sup>79</sup> And national averages were of little comfort to livestock operations suffering on the frontlines where reintroduced wolves did end up taking more livestock than predicted. In the Greater Yellowstone region, since 2002 when wolves met the USFWS definition for recovery, wolves have been responsible for depredations of anywhere from 33 to 100 cattle per year and anywhere from 30 to 477 sheep per year.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Melanie J. Houston, Jeremy T. Bruskotter, and David Fan, “Attitudes Toward Wolves in the United States and Canada: A Content Analysis of the Print News Media, 1999-2008,” *Human Dimensions of Wildlife* 15(5) (2010): 389-403.

<sup>79</sup> Woods, “Wolflandia.”

<sup>80</sup> U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Idaho Department of Fish and Game; Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks; Wyoming Game and Fish Department; Nez Perce Tribe; National Park Service; Blackfeet Nation; Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes; Wind River Tribes; Confederated Colville Tribes; Spokane Tribe of Indians; Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife; Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife; Utah Department of Natural Resources; and USDA Wildlife Services, *Northern Rocky Mountain Wolf Recovery Program 2014 Interagency Annual Report*, eds. M.D. Jimenez and S.A. Becker. (Helena: USFWS, Ecological Services, 2015), accessed April 25, 2015, <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/wolf/annualrpt14/index.html>.

Thus, all these deviations between predictions and actual circumstances raised suspicions among many wolf opponents about the capabilities and motivations of the government agencies carrying out the wolf project and of wolves' public supporters. But perhaps what most angered wolf opponents was the fact that wolves remained listed as endangered even after they far surpassed the target recovery numbers of 300 and 30 breeding pairs across the three recovery zones in 2002. Multiple efforts to de-list wolves and turn their management over to the states rather than the federal government repeatedly failed in the courts. A full accounting of all the legal actions over wolves in the Northern Rockies would be a dissertation unto itself, but in brief:

- in 1997 the entire re-introduction project was ruled in violation of the Endangered Species Act and a judge ordered Yellowstone's wolves be removed (though he stayed his own ruling through appeal, which the government won in 2000);
- in 2005, management of wolves outside of federal lands reverted to Idaho and Montana, although the wolves remained protected under the ESA;
- in 2008, the wolves were de-listed from ESA protection but returned to the list after a lawsuit;
- in 2009, wolves in Idaho and Montana were de-listed from ESA protection but again returned to the list after a legal challenge because the federal government had not approved Wyoming's management plan;
- in 2011, a rider on a fast tracked Congressional budget bill de-listed wolves in Idaho and Montana, with de-listing in Wyoming pending due to the state's lack of a federally approved management plan;
- in 2013 another Congressional directive led to the de-listing of wolves in Wyoming;



- but in late 2014 a federal district court ruling re-listed wolves as a protected experimental population in Wyoming.<sup>81</sup>

For wolf proponents, the fact that so many groups and governments tried to de-list the wolf and immediately open it up to hunting made little sense, since the whole point of the Endangered Species Act was to promote the growth of endangered wildlife populations.<sup>82</sup> And, indeed, reducing wolf populations has been the express management goal of the states surrounding Yellowstone National Park since they took over management of wolves. For example, since 2009 Idaho's wolf population has dropped by 23 percent and some state officials have indicated a desire to manage the population back down to the federally required minimum population size – which would mean killing 80 percent of the remaining wolf population in the state. Meantime in 2013, when hunting wolves was legal in Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming, hunters there killed a combined 598 wolves, more than a third of the known wolf population in the Northern Rockies.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, the reason Wyoming's wolf population was re-listed in 2014 was because the federal court was not satisfied the state of Wyoming would abide by its promises even to maintain the bare minimum legally required wolf population.<sup>84</sup>

For wolf opponents, the repeated legal battles and delays in de-listing only reified a belief the federal government had never intended to abide by its own targets for wolf recovery and

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<sup>81</sup> “Wolf Information Continued,” National Park Service; Woods, “Wolflandia,” *Outside Magazine*.

<sup>82</sup> For example, this past fall Defenders of Wildlife president Jamie Rappaport Clark bemoaned the latest hunting regulations in Idaho: “Never before in the history of this country has a state so forcefully acted to deliberately reverse – and essentially undo – a major milestone in American wildlife conservation.” Quoted in: “Ancient Wisdom,” *Defenders Magazine* 89(3) (2014), accessed November 1, 2014, <http://www.defenders.org/magazine/fall-2014>.

<sup>83</sup> Woods, “Wolflandia.”

<sup>84</sup> *Defenders of Wildlife, et al. v. Sally Jewell, et al. and The Humane Society of the United States, et al. v. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, et al.*, consolidated (US District Court for the District of Columbia, 2014), accessed April 20, 2015, [http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/wolf/Document68\\_NRM\\_WYOpinion.pdf](http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/wolf/Document68_NRM_WYOpinion.pdf).

could not be trusted to allow any management of wolves that threatened their livelihoods. Indeed, as many scholars have observed, for lots of wolf opponents the debates over their management have ended up being a proxy battle over larger questions about the role of federal control over the American West and use of its landscape.<sup>85</sup> As historian Karl Jacoby notes, conflicts over American conservation generally have arisen because ultimately it's not just a question of use of resources or ecology but of "how the interlocking human and natural communities of a given society [are] to be organized."<sup>86</sup> In the case of wolves in particular, sociologist Matthew Wilson notes that for many opponents "wolf-as-predator" was replaced as the basis for their opposition by a view of "'wolf-as-surrogate' for federal land lock-up," with many local residents believing they disproportionately lacked access to power over their own social organization.<sup>87</sup>

In a sense, from the perspective of local ranchers and hunters who have opposed the reintroduction of wolves, the debate is a question of what critic Lucy Lippard terms *eco-colonialism*.<sup>88</sup> Essentially eco-colonialism refers to using conservation and wildlife management as a means of exerting control from afar over local land use and economic and political decisions. The term obviously contains echoes of colonialism, and at the international level implies that conservation is a means of former imperial powers continuing to interfere with the

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<sup>85</sup> For a full accounting of the human dimensions of wolf management and the symbolism inherent in wolf politics, see: Nie, *Beyond Wolves*.

<sup>86</sup> Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 5.

<sup>87</sup> Matthew A. Wilson, "The wolf in Yellowstone: Science, symbol, or politics? Deconstructing the conflict between environmentalism and wise use," *Society & Natural Resources: An International Journal* 10(5) (2008): 457.

<sup>88</sup> Lucy Lippard, *On the Beaten Track: tourism, art, and place* (New York: The New Press, 1999), 146.

internal affairs of their former colonies using conservation as the opening to substitute their values and priorities for those of locals.

Many conservation initiatives contend with this undercurrent of eco-colonialism. Conservation actions frequently involve actors from different geographic regions and backgrounds, each with their own “knowledge sets,” as Martello and Jasanoff call them, as well as their own value sets. When outsiders’ knowledge and value sets end up trumping, or at least circumscribing, the “situated knowledge” and values of residents local to the conservation strategies, it can be cause for resentment.<sup>89</sup>

Consider, for example, the frustration of many scientists and residents from southern Africa, who have frequently argued their local elephant populations are more stable than elephant populations elsewhere and they should be allowed to manage the elephants and their ivory supplies with greater flexibility to meet local economic needs and to avoid elephants outstripping the carrying capacity of their protected areas and reserves.<sup>90</sup> Or consider the concerns of local residents in some parts of East Africa, where African elephant populations are dwindling, but they regularly raid crops and fields of villages abutting protected reserves, sometimes with lethal results for villagers.<sup>91</sup> Both of these are cases of local, situated knowledge of elephants that complicates the story of their conservation, but which rarely figure into the

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<sup>89</sup> Marybeth Long Martello and Sheilla Jasanoff, “Introduction: Globalization and Environmental Governance,” in *Earthly politics: local and global in environmental governance*, eds. Sheilla Jasanoff and Marybeth Long Martello (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

<sup>90</sup> Rosaleen Duffy, “The Ethics of Global Enforcement: Zimbabwe and the Politics of the Ivory Trade,” in *Elephants and Ethics: Towards a Morality of Coexistence*, eds. Christen Wemmer and Catherine A. Christen (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 451-467.

<sup>91</sup> Charles Siebert, “An Elephant Crackup?,” *The New York Times*, October 8, 2006, accessed April 15, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/08/magazine/08elephant.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/08/magazine/08elephant.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0); Winnie Kiiru, “Human-Elephant Conflicts in Africa: Who Has the Right of Way?,” in *Elephants and Ethics: Towards a Morality of Coexistence*, eds. Christen Wemmer and Catherine A. Christen (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 383-397.

celebrity elephant narratives being produced for Western audiences. The remoteness of elephant conservation action from American donors and audiences allows for them to engage in eco-colonial interference without recognizing or being confronted with it as such.

But in the case of reintroducing wolves to the Northern Rockies, many local governments, hunters, and ranchers have long expressed resentment over what they see as unacceptable levels of outside control about land use and resource management in their states. And since they are a domestic interest group with some access to the same media platforms as wolf supporters, they have a greater opportunity to make apparent their sense of urban Americans' and the federal government's eco-colonial control over their local economies.

Consider some of the rhetoric that anti-wolf groups deploy in their conversations about wolf management. For example, the pro-hunting group Friends of the Northern Yellowstone Elk Herd (FOTNYEH) outlines as one of its key lobbying priorities seeking "restitution for damages done to the environment, private property, ranching, hunting, county tax receipts [sic] and wildlife" by federal imposition of reintroduced wolves.<sup>92</sup> Save Western Wildlife, a pro-hunting and anti-wolf group, bemoans that "the wolf agenda, and for that matter, the predator agenda, has always been about control."<sup>93</sup> Meantime, Lobo Watch, another anti-wolf group based in the Northern Rockies, questions the motives of those running the wolf project, asking: "Is this science . . . or playing God?" [ellipses are part of the original text].<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> "Friends of the Northern Yellowstone Elk Herd," Undated website, accessed April 13, 2015, <http://www.fotnyeh.org>.

<sup>93</sup> Save Western Wildlife, Facebook post, April 6, 2015, 10:41 a.m., <https://www.facebook.com/SaveWesternWildlife/photos/a.661992970479397.1073741825.416023585076338/996781203667237/?type=1&theater>.

<sup>94</sup> Toby Bridges, "Updated. . . Of Wolves and Junk Science," *Lobowatch* Blog, August 24, 2012, accessed April 20, 2015, <https://lobowatch.wordpress.com/2012/08/24/updated-of-wolves-and-junk-science/>.

As another example, Thomas Remington, an anti-wolf author frequently cited internally among anti-wolf groups, summarizes feelings of eco-colonial resentment in his book *WOLF*:

*What's to Misunderstand?* by saying:

The world doesn't revolve around gray wolves or those that are in love with this vicious killer. This usurpation of human rights and disregard for private property rights, [sic] is but a small part of an overall existence in this world to destroy all things normal. [In his book] you'll learn of the global power structure that orchestrates things like the environmental movement, creating 'new knowledge' and changing the 'paradigm' and how we talk about wildlife management.<sup>95</sup>

Indeed, the questions of political power and local input in decision-making are often paramount in all the arguments of anti-wolf groups. In concluding an editorial about their point-of-view on the wolf debate, a contributor to FOTNYEH tries to make this clear by turning around the subject of the debate to imagine it happening in a different setting with grizzly bears. He notes that grizzlies are a symbolic animal of California formerly native to the Los Angeles basin and rhetorically asks why the federal government has not sought to restore grizzlies there. He concludes by asserting: "is the right explanation simply the theory that because we don't have many voters in Montana that we have no rights, some sort of plantation theory of Whites and Blacks where dominance may be asserted by overbearing political will regardless of rights?"<sup>96</sup>

One response by the pro-wolf side of the wolf reintroduction debate to these assertions might be to argue that wolf management isn't only a question of eco-colonialism but also one of Ursula Heise's concept of *eco-cosmopolitanism*. Eco-cosmopolitanism encompasses the notion that many people in our modern world of globalized travel and media now have developed multiple levels of "place-attachment" that tie together a deterritorialized and globalized sense of

<sup>95</sup> Tom Remington, "WOLF: What's to Misunderstand? About the Book," accessed April 20, 2015, <http://tomremington.com/tom-remington-e-books-library/wolf-whats-to-misunderstand/>.

<sup>96</sup> Gary Marbut, "Montana culture at stake with wolves," Friends of the Northern Yellowstone Elk Herd, accessed April 13, 2015, [http://fotnyeh.org/seattle\\_editorial.php](http://fotnyeh.org/seattle_editorial.php).

space and identity.<sup>97</sup> Thus, an urban resident of New York City, who follows news of Yellowstone wolves online via information from their tracking collars and who vacations regularly in Yellowstone to see the wolves, has some sense of attachment to Yellowstone as part of her identity – Yellowstone is part of her understanding of what she chooses to call home.

From the perspective of eco-cosmopolitanism, celebrity for animals like wolves is a global phenomenon. Thus interest groups from across the nation and around the world also have a legitimate knowledge set and claim to be incorporated into the decision-making process of conservation – even conservation that occurs far from their physical homes. In this view, they are not asserting eco-colonial control so much as asserting that these animals and decisions about them are imbricated in multiple scales of interest ranging from the local to the global. Thus, it does not matter if the conservation in question occurs domestically with wolves or internationally with elephants.

Rhetoric from pro-wolf groups, whether talking about reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone or other wolf conservation actions, reflects these sorts of eco-cosmopolitan sentiments. For example, the Wolf Recovery Foundation’s mission statement uses a universalizing *our* when talking about its mission being “to foster our heritage of wild wolf communities.”<sup>98</sup> Similarly, when talking about conservation decisions currently being made about Montana’s wolves, Defenders of Wildlife argues that all wildlife “is a public trust and the entire public deserves a say in decisions made by wildlife agencies.”<sup>99</sup> And a national “Speak for Wolves” meet-up being organized in Yellowstone this summer by several pro-wolf groups

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<sup>97</sup> Ursula Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>98</sup> “The Wolf Recovery Foundation,” Undated website, accessed April 16, 2015, <http://www.forwolves.org/index.html>.

<sup>99</sup> Melanie Gade, “Wolf Weekly Wrap Up,” Defenders of Wildlife Blog, August 22, 2014, accessed November 1, 2014, <http://www.defendersblog.org/2014/08/wolf-weekly-wrap-46/>.

includes as part of its political platform the argument that “it’s time for wildlife management to integrate the science of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the *ever-changing demographics and values of our citizenry*” [emphasis added].<sup>100</sup>

Thus, compared to discussions of many other animal celebrities where these issues are present but may remain unspoken (at least for international conservation supporters), the battle over wolves in the Northern Rockies has forced both wolf advocates and adversaries to speak more directly to questions of political control and power inherent in conservation.

But even as they acknowledge the competing power dynamics of wolf conservation, both sides in this debate continue to assume their own perspectives and values represent the more “natural” understanding of the Western landscape than those of their opponents. To explore this phenomenon in greater detail I examined wolf media produced by several groups who have concerned themselves with the reintroduction of wolves into the Greater Yellowstone Region and who try to perpetuate wolf celebrity – both hero and villain – on a national basis. These include the pro-wolf groups of Defenders of Wildlife, the National Wolfwatcher Coalition, Western Wolves, and the Center for Biological Diversity; the anti-wolf groups of Friends of the Northern Yellowstone Elk Herd, Lobo Watch, Save Western Wildlife, and the Idaho Anti-Wolf Coalition; some of the media produced by Yellowstone tourism and park-related groups like the National Park Service, the Yellowstone Association, and the Greater Yellowstone Coalition; and also three national centers for captive wolves – Wolf Haven, the International Wolf Center, and the Wolf Conservation Center. For each group, I examined their websites, blogs, YouTube videos, and Facebook pages, focusing in particular on what they produced or shared for the past

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<sup>100</sup> “About,” Undated website, Speak for Wolves, accessed April 17, 2015, <http://www.speakforwolves.org/about/>.

year, which included the twentieth anniversary of the re-introduction of wolves to Yellowstone when most wolf-related groups took stock of the national situation of wolves.

What I found was an interesting mix of rhetoric and imagery from each side of the debate that discuss the same issues but with entirely different foci. For example, as we'll see in the next section, while both groups talk about wolves and their effects on "health," wolf proponents talk about the health of the ecosystem while wolf opponents talk about the health of people and livestock. In the end, both sides use wolves as proxies in battles over any number of competing values from questions of naturalness to the concept of "the wild" to the framing of the American West. And all the time lingering in the background is what these values being attached to the celebrity of wolves mean for the living wolves themselves.

### **A Fierce Green Fire Meets Marlboro Country**

Too often society ignores or fails to realize how many cultural values and constructions intrude into our discourse and decision-making about conservation and other animals. To see what I mean, consider briefly a parallel example from across the Atlantic.

In 1998, in response to international pressure to protect declining White-headed duck (*Oxyura leucocephala*) populations, the government of the United Kingdom prepared to cull populations of Ruddy ducks (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) that were interbreeding and competing with white-headed ducks both in Great Britain and mainland Europe. People had intentionally introduced ruddy ducks to Great Britain from North America and thus they were officially an invasive species. But after decades of ruddy duck presence, many local residents considered them the equivalent of native ducks and opposed the culling.

As Kay Milton notes, this example exposes three common culturally constructed boundaries within the practice of conservation often left unarticulated: the boundary between



species (a human-defined construct made more obvious by the ability of ruddy ducks and white-headed ducks to interbreed); the boundary between native and invasive (a construct of selecting particular timescales and geographic boundaries as relevant); and the boundary between “culture” and “nature,” with processes initiated by humans (like the introduction of ruddy ducks) often implicitly labeled “unnatural.” On this last point in particular, Milton notes that choosing to cull the ruddy ducks meant officials assessed the “naturalness” of a landscape and its biota, despite the cultural construction of the definition, as a value important to conservation.<sup>101</sup>

Whether removing “invasive” ruddy ducks some view as natural or re-introducing “historically” native wolves some view as invasive, the act of conservation itself thus is an expression of values. And as with ruddy ducks, wolf re-introduction imposed both a definition of what a “natural” Greater Yellowstone Region landscape looks like and a determination that maximizing this is desirable. Yet since both the original extirpation of wolves and the later re-introduction of wolves were human actions, it could be equally valid to say both actions were unnatural. And yet this is not how either side in the debate has framed the situation.

Proponents of wolves consistently define and value the re-introduction of wolves as “natural,” or a positive restoration of “naturalness,” and decry the extirpation of wolves as “unnatural.” Thus, for example, the film *OR-7 The Journey* celebrates the return of wolves to landscapes they historically occupied as a “symbolic victory in the conflict between our natural environment and a constantly encroaching civilization,” generally placing humans (although not their actions in support of reintroduction, apparently) squarely outside the bounds of nature.<sup>102</sup> At the same time, one of the leading pro-wolf activist groups, Defenders of Wildlife, declares in its

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<sup>101</sup> Kay Milton, “Ducks Out of Water: Conservation as Boundary Maintenance,” in *Natural Enemies: People-Wildlife Conflicts in Anthropological Perspective*, ed. John Knight (New York: Routledge, 2000), 229-248.

<sup>102</sup> *OR-7 The Journey*, directed by Clemens Schenk (2014), Online video.

mission statement that it helps promote “the inherent value of wildlife,” as though conservation is automatically a moral imperative because there is only one inherently positive value associated with saving species.<sup>103</sup> But this framing makes it hard to acknowledge that conservation also is about choosing between species, since increasing populations of wolves means a decrease (although not necessarily an extermination, as wolf opponents would argue) in the populations of many species of wolves’ prey like coyotes and elk.

Indeed, not only does the rhetoric of most wolf advocates fail to acknowledge the element of human choice in conservation, it also fails to recognize that wolf opponents have their own equally human-constructed definition of a “natural” Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. In an inverse of British residents who saw “invasive” ruddy ducks as a natural part of the landscape, many wolf opponents see as natural the landscape that followed wolf extirpation, when elk and other ungulate herds were larger and behaved differently than prior eras when wolves had been present. Thus, even if they do not frame it in these terms, wolf opponents essentially argue the complexion of the ecosystem is ultimately a matter of human choice, and therefore the choice of bigger game species populations for hunting is as valid as re-introduction of a predator species.

For example, FOTNYEH offers as one of its principal website links an editorial comment by the president of the Montana Shooting Sports Association, explaining the value of large game herds unbothered by predators. In his view, many locals in the West consider these herds “a savings account for [their] children and grandchildren” and a means to pass along and reinforce a common cultural heritage.<sup>104</sup> Protecting the investment of game herds means valuing prey over their predators. Meantime, Lobo Watch declares: “good big game conservation begins with

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<sup>103</sup> “Mission and Vision,” Undated website, Defenders of Wildlife, accessed November 1, 2014, <http://www.defenders.org/mission-and-vision>.

<sup>104</sup> Marbut, “Montana culture at stake with wolves,” FOTNYEH website.

predator management.”<sup>105</sup> And without that control, as the group Save Western Wildlife opines, the reintroduction of predators means that: “Now, we only have memories of the once majestic elk herds, [which] have been reduced to wolf feces.”<sup>106</sup>

Of course, the rhetoric of wolf opponents also has blind spots with regards to cultural constructions embedded in the wolf debate. In particular, they fail to see the constructions Milton identified in the concepts of “invasive” and “native,” which rely upon human-defined geographic and temporal boundaries in order to establish distinct boundaries between species. In particular, many wolf opponents identify as a supposedly “natural” boundary differences in the sub-species of wolf the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service chose to re-introduce into the Greater Yellowstone Region in 1995. Many wolf opponents, such as Lobo Watch, argue these wolves are the “Canadian MacKenzie Valley Gray Wolf (*canis lupus occidentalis* – a subspecies that never existed in the lower 48).”<sup>107</sup> They resent these alien wolves as an “invasive species,” that is “the largest AND MOST AGGRESSIVE subspecies of Gray Wolf in North America” now compromising the natural genetics of wolves and dogs in the Northern Rockies.<sup>108</sup> Lobo Watch places blame for this squarely on the government, since it views the wolves as “injected artificially” onto the landscape.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> “Lobo Watch,” Undated website, accessed April 14, 2015, [www.lobowatch.org](http://www.lobowatch.org).

<sup>106</sup> Save Western Wildlife, Facebook post, April 18, 2015, 12:24 p.m., <https://www.facebook.com/SaveWesternWildlife?fref=ts>.

<sup>107</sup> “Lobo Watch,” Undated website.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid; “Compromised Wolf Genetics Result In Mongrel Dogs Inhabiting The Northern Rockies,” last modified December 20, 2013, Lobo Watch, accessed April 14, 2015, <http://www.lobowatch.org/adminclient/WolfFacts4/go>; Toby Bridges, “Northern Rockies Wolf Facts,” Lobo Watch, accessed April 14, 2015, <http://www.lobowatch.org/clients/adminclient/PDF/Northern%20Rockies%20Wolf%20Facts.pdf>

<sup>109</sup> Lobo Watch, Facebook post, April 20, 2015, 8:03 p.m., <https://www.facebook.com/213339158676640/photos/a.217782791565610.64005.213339158676640/968414933169055/?type=1&theater>.

Ignored in this nativist rhetoric is the fact that the “natural” divisions between sub-species are human cultural constructions invented only to help science make order when trying to describe and typify the world, especially considering that all North American wolf subspecies can successfully interbreed with each other if given the opportunity.<sup>110</sup>

Important as these questions of naturalness are to the rhetoric deployed by wolf proponents and opponents, they do not appear to be the core of their argument for or against wolves. Rather both those trying to make wolves heroes and those trying to make them villains tend to emphasize a broader canvas of issues when producing media that builds wolf celebrity. In doing so, they often focus on the same issues or ideas but in entirely different ways.

For example, proponents of wolves frequently raise the question of how wolves’ reintroduction to the Greater Yellowstone affects the ecological health of the landscape – an issue that hearkens back to Leopold’s arguments in favor of wolves. In particular, many wolf supporters have focused on evidence that the return of wolves to Yellowstone may be causing a *trophic cascade* to take place, changing the distribution and behavior of species up and down the food chain that makes it healthier or at least more diverse (and even these, of course, are actually human value judgments about which states of natural systems are preferable).

And at least initially, considerable evidence for this outcome did emerge, with studies showing that, for example, re-introduced wolves quickly hunted the coyote population to half its pre-reintroduction numbers, allowing in turn a rebound of pronghorn antelope populations. Similarly, wolf kills have increased the amount of available carrion as food sources for other

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<sup>110</sup> Indeed, while scientists once recognized 24 wolf sub-species in North America, more recent genetic work has revised the classification down to five sub-species that can all interbreed. L. David Mech, “Returning the Wolf to Yellowstone;” Smith and Ferguson, *Decade of the Wolf*.

species including foxes, bears, beetles, crows, eagles, and other birds.<sup>111</sup> But what most excited observers was the theory wolves had created “a landscape of fear” among the region’s elk, changing the behavior of the herds so they do not linger in riparian corridors for fear of predation. This in turn seemed to allow willows and other cottonwood trees to grow without being overbrowsed, in turn stabilizing the soil along banks of rivers and providing added resources for beavers, both of which changed the depth and flow of the rivers themselves.<sup>112</sup> However, some recent studies have cast doubts as to how widespread or lasting changes wrought by wolves on the Yellowstone ecosystem actually are, as few ecological interactions can ever be simply explained by a single cause. Moreover, it is possible the Yellowstone system shifted so significantly in the 60-year absence of wolves it can never achieve the same state as before, even if the same species distributions and behaviors were restored.<sup>113</sup>

Regardless of the ultimate extent of the effects on the ecosystem, proponents of wolf re-introduction generally have leapt upon trophic cascades as proof of the unquestioned benefits of wolves. For example, *The Wildlife News* blog affiliated with the Wolf Recovery Foundation took advantage of the twentieth anniversary of the re-introduction of wolves to Yellowstone to trumpet that wolves play a valuable role as “keystone contributors to a complete, healthy

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<sup>111</sup> Stolzenburg, *Where the Wild Things Were*, 142-143.

<sup>112</sup> John W. Laundré, Lucina Hernández, and Kelly B. Altendorf, “Wolves, elk, bison: reestablishing the ‘landscape of fear’ in Yellowstone National Park, U.S.A.,” *Canadian Journal of Zoology* 79 (2001): 1401-1409; William J. Ripple and Robert L. Beschta, “Wolf reintroduction, predation risk, and cottonwood recovery in Yellowstone National Park,” *Forest Ecology and Management* 184 (2003): 299-313; William J. Ripple and Robert L. Beschta, “Trophic cascades in Yellowstone: The first 15 years after wolf reintroduction,” *Biological Conservation* 145 (2012): 205-213.

<sup>113</sup> In particular, it seems the water table may have dropped so much in the last 60 years that willow roots cannot reach it to establish the same level of sustained growth as before, even with a greater than 60 percent reduction in elk population numbers in Yellowstone Park since the re-introduction of the wolf. Arthur Middleton, “Is the Wolf a Real American Hero?,” *The New York Times*, March 10, 2014, accessed August 18, 2014. (LexisNexis Academic).

ecosystem.”<sup>114</sup> On the same occasion, the Defenders of Wildlife released a video quoting wolf project leader Doug Smith as saying what wolf reintroduction really was about was “restoring nature.”<sup>115</sup> Similarly, the film *OR-7 The Journey*, after touting the trophic cascade caused by wolves in Yellowstone mentioned that dispersing wolves like Journey were a “harbinger of good news that our ecosystem, our forest was healthier” simply by wolves’ presence.<sup>116</sup>

In building up the villainous version of wolf celebrity, opponents of wolves have also regularly deployed rhetoric about health. And to a certain extent they focus on the health of the ecosystem, although they draw the opposite conclusion about wolves’ impacts. For example, FOTNYEH argues that far from helping the health of the landscape, wolves are overwhelming it, “pouring out of the Park ‘like locusts’ and turning the country they invade into a ‘biological desert.’”<sup>117</sup> Indeed, FOTNYEH argues there is a “biological train wreck coming” where the USFWS is “the engineer with their hand on the throttle when the train goes off the tracks.”<sup>118</sup>

But quite often, wolf opponents focus their attention on the health of individual wildlife, livestock, and people, rather than on the landscape as a whole. For example, advocates at Lobo Watch are convinced the alien wolf introduced from Canada is a carrier of tapeworms, with wolf scat tainting the outdoors so much that already “many outdoor oriented people [are] afraid to enjoy the harvesting and eating [of] wild berries and mushrooms, which could be covered with

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<sup>114</sup> Kathie Lynch, “Yellowstone wolf report on 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary,” *The Wildlife News*, January 12, 2015, accessed April 19, 2015, <http://www.thewildlifeneeds.com/2015/01/12/kathie-lynch-yellowstone-wolf-report-on-20th-anniversary/>.

<sup>115</sup> Defenders of Wildlife, Facebook post, January 28, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/DefendersofWildlife/videos/vb.5720973755/10153029212073756/?type=2&theater>.

<sup>116</sup> Liz Parrish quoted in: *OR-7 The Journey*, directed by Clemens Schenk.

<sup>117</sup> Marbut, “Montana culture at stake with wolves,” FOTNYEH website.

<sup>118</sup> Gary Marbut, “De-listing of wolves is a farce,” FOTNYEH website, accessed April 14, 2015, [http://fotnyeh.org/mssa\\_editorial.php](http://fotnyeh.org/mssa_editorial.php).

microscopic tapeworm eggs.”<sup>119</sup> Some opponents also argue that wolves do not merely kill the sick or old ungulates in a herd and thus they are harming the health of individual ungulate populations, leading to an aging of the population as the younger and healthier members of the population are consumed.<sup>120</sup> As for human health, beyond the concerns about tapeworm exposure, some wolf opponents argue that human safety is at risk with the presence of wolves – despite the fact there is no evidence of a fatal wolf attack on humans in the lower 48 states and the handful of fatal cases in Alaskan and Canadian history often have involved rabid wolves.<sup>121</sup> Opponents often cite as evidence *Wolves in Russia: Anxiety Through the Ages*, a book by a former Russian translator who argues there is evidence of a long history in Russia of wolves killing and eating humans but that this information somehow has been lost to Western audiences because the documents have not been translated.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Bridges, “Updated . . . Of Wolves and Junk Science.”

<sup>120</sup> Some wolf opponents even manage to inject rhetoric from culture wars over abortion, posting frequent images of what they argue are wolves having taken pregnant elk cows in order only to rip out and consume their preferred food of elk fetuses. For a recent example of this argument, see: Lobo Watch, Facebook post, April 17, 2015, 11:12 p.m. This post was later shared and cross-posted by Save Western Wildlife.

<sup>121</sup> Ian K. Kullgren, “Department of Fish and Wildlife says there have been no wolf-related deaths in the Rockies,” *PolitiFact Oregon*, December 16, 2011, accessed April 28, 2015, Available online at: <http://www.politifact.com/oregon/statements/2011/dec/16/oregon-department-fish-and-wildlife/departement-fish-and-wildlife-says-there-have-been-/>.

<sup>122</sup> The book has a preface by Dr. Valerius Geist, an emeritus professor of environmental science from the University of Calgary whom anti-wolf groups frequently cite in their media. Anti-wolf groups usually mention his academic degree, perhaps because it seems to give an imprint of “science” backing the anti-wolf point of view. In the case of the preface to *Wolves in Russia*, though, it is interesting that Geist seems more political and less scientifically analytical than the book’s author, Will Graves. Geist argues the greater human death toll from wolves in Russia is because Russia historically lacked the same freedom for the populace to be as heavily armed as Americans have had and it is only our gun rights that have led to American wolves being properly conditioned to be timid around humans. Valerius Geist, “Foreword,” in *Wolves in Russia: Anxiety Through the Ages*, Will Graves (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 2007).

For an example of a citation to Graves’ book by an anti-wolf activist, see the FOTNYEH website where it is the lead link under the “for more information” section. “Links.” “FOTNYEH,” Undated website, accessed April 13, 2015, <http://fotnyeh.org/links.php>.

Worth noting, given the frequency with which both paeans to wolves' aid to ecosystem health and dire warnings about their effects on human and ungulate health appear, is the fact that these arguments essentially deflect the public's gaze onto the landscape rather than onto wolves themselves. For wolf proponents, arguments over health place a value on wolves as animal celebrities only insofar as they are instigators of change rather than for any quality inherent in themselves. For opponents, arguments about health seem to distill down to using wolf celebrity as a means of talking about economies and resource use of people and ungulates.

And other, even more foundational, arguments among wolf opponents and proponents also end up deflecting attention from wolves themselves. Because important as questions of health and "naturalness" are, what both advocates and adversaries of the Yellowstone wolf really seem to care about is what they want "the American West" to be. As I said in an earlier section, the real nub of the argument is over who properly controls use of the land in the West and the eco-cosmopolitan or eco-colonial role of non-local groups. But this control matters because both sides see wolves as expressions of competing visions of the Western landscape and its meaning to the public. And so rhetorically more often than not both groups leave the wolf behind except insofar as he (and it usually is generically referred to in masculine form by both sides) can serve as a symbol of ideas about the West. And it is ideas about the West where they really try to direct their audiences' gazes in the wolf-related media they produce.

For proponents of the wolf, the whole Yellowstone project is all about making the West "truly wild again."<sup>123</sup> For example, *The Wildlife News* blog tightly ties wolves to the concept of the wild in its reflections on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of wolves' reintroduction: "Through the door that opened 20 years ago, Yellowstone's wolves stepped into the wild to reclaim their rightful

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<sup>123</sup> Suzanne Stone, "I Was There," Defenders of Wildlife Blog, April 15, 2014, accessed April 19, 2015, <http://www.defendersblog.org/2014/04/i-was-there/>.



place in America's West. The story of their success will continue to inspire future generations as we fight to preserve wolves, all wildlife, and wilderness itself."<sup>124</sup> Meantime, Defenders of Wildlife got celebrity actress Ashley Judd to declare in one of their videos that few animals "do as much to put the wild in America's wild places as the North American gray wolf."<sup>125</sup> And it is this wildness that wolf advocates mythologize as being the domain of the American West. Indeed, the National Wolfwatcher Coalition sees the return of the wolf to its historic range in the West "as part of our national heritage," while Western Wolves succinctly sums it all up: "Without wolves, the West isn't the West."<sup>126</sup> For them, the West is the canvas upon which the dramas of mythical nature apart from people still can play out (either for their own inherent sake or for aesthetic and spiritual appreciation by visitors).

Meanwhile, wolf opponents also point their rhetoric towards the larger landscape of the West but with a different vision and meaning. In their eyes, the West is made up of individual states whose ranchers, farmers, and hunters try to preserve their local culture for themselves without outside interference. As FOTYNEH eloquently sums up all these arguments opposing the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone and the broader region:

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<sup>124</sup> Lynch, "Yellowstone wolf report on 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary."

<sup>125</sup> "Ashley Judd and Defenders of Wildlife on the Idaho Wolf Hunt," last modified August 26, 2009, YouTube, Defenders of Wildlife. YouTube, accessed April 1, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qK1mZ4fL6Pk>.

<sup>126</sup> "Facebook Mission Statement," National Wolfwatcher Coalition, accessed April 14, 2015, [https://www.facebook.com/wolfwatcher.org/info?tab=page\\_info](https://www.facebook.com/wolfwatcher.org/info?tab=page_info); "A Part of the Western Landscape," Western Wolves, accessed April 14, 2015, <http://www.westernwolves.org/index.php/about-wolves>.

This conflation of wolves and wildness is not limited to advocacy groups but can even be seen in the framing language used by the ostensibly "neutral" government scientists who have been involved in wolf recovery. For example, Douglas Smith, leader of the Yellowstone wolf project since 1996, at first admonishes wolf advocates that they must "separate noble ideas of the animal from the reality on the ground" in order to manage wolves correctly. But later in the same book he describes one of his favorite wolves in the project as showing "the kind of independent streak that *spoke of the wild*, unfettered heart that wolves are both loved and hated for" [emphasis added]. Smith and Ferguson, *Decade of the Wolf*, 33, 53.

Imagine if we in Montana had the political muscle to ban coffee, the Mariners and cars throughout western Washington, enforcing with the power of the federal government. The people of Washington would be plenty upset that outsiders had the gall and power to forcibly revise the local culture and economy.

In Montana, we feel exactly that way about the imposition of wolves, which are very destructive of our culture and our ranching and hunting economy. Our culture and heritage of hunting game animals is so important here that it is enshrined in our Montana Constitution. Raising livestock is not a hobby here, not done only to provide a movie set for tourists, but a way of life for many of us.<sup>127</sup>

Notice how, once again, this rhetoric leaves wolves themselves almost on the sidelines – the instigator of the battle but not really the central focus of it. What wolf opponents seem to want people to focus on is how wolf reintroduction threatens a loss of the rugged individualism and freedom from outside constraint that defines their sense of the West – the West as portrayed essentially in the rugged men of “Marlboro Country” in the famous 40-year cigarette campaign.

So if wolf advocates and opponents are locked in this unyielding stalemate of producing wolf celebrity to wage proxy battles over competing visions of the American West, where does that leave actual wolves and their celebrity? Worth noting is that in addition to the rhetoric diverting the public’s gaze from wolves, the imagery of wolf celebrity media produced by wolf proponents and opponents also surprisingly either leaves wolves themselves out of the picture or else at best makes the imagery of them feel secondary to the narrative.

But in the case of the imagery, the question is whether wolves’ absence is by intent, because these groups really wish to portray the landscape and other values associated with the wolves rather than the wolves themselves, or simply a matter of these groups not having enough visual options to illustrate their narratives. Because the truth is that, compared to other animal celebrities like elephants and penguins, wolves are not digitally well-adapted media celebrities.

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<sup>127</sup> Marbut, “Montana culture at stake with wolves,” FOTNYEH website.

## No Pictures, Please, We're Skittish

Return for a moment to the concept of *digital adaptation*. My contention has been that animals (or more accurately their advocates – and, in the case of wolves, their adversaries) must adapt to new forms of media if they wish to retain their celebrity and that this form of adaptation is every bit as vital as adaptation to changing, physical ecosystems. It is an adaptation to changing narrative and media ecosystems. But what makes an animal digitally adaptable?

As theorist Guy Debord has argued, one of the key elements of modern society is *spectacle* – a social relationship mediated by images that creates a single commercial (or one might say “branded”) consciousness or understanding of the world.<sup>128</sup> Key to spectacle is a commodification of discourse and communication and society’s ideas about itself. While Debord was primarily interested in a critique of capitalist control of social discourse, he was right in noting that modern media focuses on producing and reproducing spectacle as a means of capturing attention.<sup>129</sup>

Spectacles have taken many forms over the years – visual, auditory, narrative – and certain forms are more suited to certain media. For example, breathless book and periodical accounts of derring-do by Theodore Roosevelt and other big game hunters rely on narrative spectacle – involved series of plot twists and surprises that turn the stalking of animals into adventure. This same long narrative – in *African Game Trails* Roosevelt takes eight pages to tell of a single elephant hunt, filled with slow build up like “hour after hour we worked our way

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<sup>128</sup> Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit, MI: Black & Red, 1983).

<sup>129</sup> As I’ll return to in the next chapter, Tad Friend has argued in a recent *New Yorker* article that modern media celebrity is different in that maintenance of celebrity now relies on ubiquity rather than spectacular rarity – demanding access to the mundane and familiar about celebrities rather than the mysterious and fanciful elements of their lives. Tad Friend, “Hollywood and Vine: The entertainment industry seeks the future in viral video,” *The New Yorker*, December 15, 2014, accessed December 16, 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/12/15/hollywood-vine>.

onward” – would be impossible in the digital media world of Twitter, with its 140-character limit or Vine, with its 6-second video lengths.<sup>130</sup> Similarly, the one note-gag of an Internet meme GIF image of a penguin falling over or hitting another penguin cannot easily be translated into radio or to a newspaper article and would not offer the same payoff even if it could be.

Thus, the best digitally adapted animals will offer spectacle in multiple forms. For example, while elephants work well as narrative spectacles in tales of majestic conquest, they also provide a visual spectacle that translates well to wildlife films and documentaries. While penguins work well in decontextualized Internet memes, they can equally handle being stars of longer narrative tales of spectacular endurance against harsh Antarctic elements.

But wolves present an interesting challenge when it comes to spectacle and digital adaptation. Narratively, they offer any number of compelling stories since, as discussed earlier, they transgress boundaries and categories society normalizes – civilized and wild, day and night – and since they are a predator that conflicts with notions of human property. Wolves’ howling is also quite adept at creating auditory spectacle. Throughout history these vocalizations have frequently been feared as ominous threats or revered as calls of the wild (although they actually seem to be a tool for pack maintenance over distances and inter-pack conflict avoidance).<sup>131</sup>

But consider the many obstacles wolves place in the way of those who would seek to adapt them to visual sources of spectacle, especially if they wish to film or photograph them. Being generally skittish around people and able to run in bursts up to 50 kilometers per hour (and to sprint more than 35 kilometers per hour for over a kilometer), wolves are not nearly as approachable as, say, Antarctic penguins where people can walk right up to the edge of rookeries

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<sup>130</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *African Game Trails* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910), 248.

<sup>131</sup> Fred H. Harrington and Cheryl S. Asa, “Wolf Communication,” in *Wolves: Behavior, Ecology, and Conservation*, ed. L. David Mech and Luigi Boitani (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 66-103.

to capture images without the penguins altering their behavior in any considerable way.<sup>132</sup> Being frequently active at night also makes wolves difficult to follow. Just trying to find wolves to film can be difficult (especially for ground-based photographers or outside of winter when tracks become harder to find) since even when their home ranges are known, some wolfpacks' ranges can cover more than 4,300 square kilometers (>1,600 square miles).<sup>133</sup>

And so visually, both pro- and anti-wolf groups have had to be creative in adapting to wolves' lack of easy production of visual media. Both sides still try to underscore visually their own visions and values about wolves when they can. But given all the obstacles discussed above in obtaining visual imagery of wolves, imagery that contains the actual wolves under discussion (as opposed to generic shots of wolves) in any media post or creation is frequently lacking. Not that the media is entirely bereft of wolf imagery; just that the wolf imagery is often recycled and secondhand – borrowed from professional wildlife photographers and reused multiple times – and used more sparingly than photos deployed in publications by advocates of other animals.

Instead, the visual messages of wolf media tend to focus more on either the context of the wolves or the effects of the wolves on the landscape. Indeed, both sides have almost made a virtue of their dearth of visual imagery. For example, in the case of pro-wolf websites, underscoring a rhetoric of wolves as symbols of the wild and wilderness, I have found most groups reuse professional photographs that involve beautiful and glamorous close up images of wolves, leaving little room for the context of the landscape in the background. As a result, I have been able to find relatively few media products from pro-wolf groups that show humans and wolves together in the same frame or even of wolves inhabiting landscapes that might contain

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<sup>132</sup> Marvin, *Wolf*, 16.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

evidence of humans (with the one major exception of media focused on wolves bred in captivity as “wolf ambassadors,” as discussed below).

Defenders of Wildlife’s “Wolf Weekly Roundup” blog posts employ a small pool of photos that are reused repeatedly, with most images showing either a single wolf in the distance (often looking toward the camera) or families of wolves (either a parent with pups or pups playing together) and none showing any evidence of a landscape with human civilization present.<sup>134</sup> Similarly, the 16 rotating banner photographs on the National Wolfwatcher Coalition page offer wolves in close up – almost always set in winter (which may be a reflection of the difficulty in tracking wolves to get photographs when there is no snow on the ground) – but no people.<sup>135</sup> At least Western Wolves’ banner photographs on its homepage rotate two pictures of people between two pictures of wolves in natural-looking settings, which somewhat acknowledges the fact that wolves in the lower 48 states – whether in Yellowstone or elsewhere – are in fact almost always found in landscapes interlaced with human settlements. But even so, Western Wolves’ images of people still keep them entirely removed from wolves – showing only a cowboy swinging a lasso in his corral and a researcher holding a radio antenna while hiking through the mountains, with no suggestion that wolves might be nearby.<sup>136</sup> So in reusing this same motif of a handful of close-up images of wolves, these groups visually help to reinforce a narrative that humans and wolves are separate – with wolves in “wild” places without people.

Indeed, visual reinforcement of the idea is so strong that even in the Defenders of Wildlife’s 26-page guidebook offered to help ranchers mitigate conflicts with wolves non-

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<sup>134</sup> “Defenders of Wildlife blog,” Defenders of Wildlife, accessed November 1, 2014, <http://www.defendersblog.org/>.

<sup>135</sup> “National Wolfwatcher Coalition,” Undated website, accessed April 15, 2015, <http://wolfwatcher.org>.

<sup>136</sup> “Western Wolves,” Undated website, accessed April 16, 2015, <http://www.westernwolves.org>.

lethally, the group never shows images of wolves even crossing through human-dominated landscapes – even though that’s the whole problem being addressed.<sup>137</sup> True, this lack of photographs may simply be a question of the difficulty of obtaining such visuals, since trying to deter wolves from lingering in human settlements means you don’t want to entice them to linger long enough for a well-framed photograph near a livestock herd or human dwelling. And to be fair Defenders does offer elsewhere on its YouTube channel a brief video of a wolf avoiding a livestock carcass placed inside a test site guarded by a fence with fladry (strips of colored cloth hanging from rope that flap in the breeze).<sup>138</sup> But still the overall lack of images of wolves in human-influenced landscapes is striking given the subject matter of the guidebook.

Interestingly, despite the apparent effort to reinforce an association between wolves and a people-less wild in the production of wolf celebrity by so many pro-wolf groups, there is evidence pro-wolf consumers of wolf celebrity have no problem with seeing wolves in human landscapes. For example, among their last six months of multiple Facebook posts daily, one of the two most liked posts on the National Wolfwatcher Coalition’s Facebook page, receiving more than 14,000 likes, is “The Wolf at Our Door” – a link to an article about the possible return of wolves to the Adirondacks illustrated by a photo of a captive wolf licking a man’s face. True, the heightened interest might be due to the subject matter and geographic area discussed (near major Eastern urban population centers where many wolf fans live), but it’s worth noting that the only other post in that same time period illustrated by a photo of a person and captive wolf

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<sup>137</sup> Suzanne Stone, et al., *Livestock and Wolves: A Guide to Nonlethal Tools and Methods to Reduce Conflicts* (Washington, DC: Defenders of Wildlife, 2008).

<sup>138</sup> “Wolf Testing Fladry,” last modified February 22, 2013, YouTube, Defenders of Wildlife, accessed April 15, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmB6-4MplU0>.

together – one about a benefit concert for wolves – received more than 7,500 likes, almost double the normal amount most recent posts on the group’s page get.<sup>139</sup>

Indeed, it is interesting to note the excitement pro-wolf audiences have for seeing captive wolves. For example, the Wolf Conservation Center in New York has only 7,800 actual subscribers to its YouTube channel and yet many of its 166 videos of captive wolves (as of mid-April 2015) far surpass that number in views, indicating how often the videos have been shared across the Internet. Moreover, the most popular videos the center offers are not of “ambassador wolves” living in naturalistic enclosures, which are their supposed educational focus, but instead videos of a wolf pup being cared for inside a human home, as though it was a pet dog. “Wolf Pup Hiccups,” which shows a hiccupping wolf in a house with human noises in the background, has been viewed more than 1 million times in the last 10 months. The next most watched video, with more than 92,000 views after 10 months, shows the same wolf playing tug of war with a Border Collie puppy.<sup>140</sup> So even if visions of the wild are what wolf proponents repeatedly proclaim with their rhetoric, they are not the only message they send with their visual imagery and plenty of audiences for wolves are willing to consume a notion of celebrity wolves in captivity.

Interestingly, even a supposedly “neutral” group in the wolf debates – the National Park Service – offers no photographs on any of its “Wolves in Yellowstone” web pages of wolves near visible human-constructed features of the park like roads or trails, instead primarily showing

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<sup>139</sup> National Wolfwatcher Coalition, Facebook post, March 7, 2015; National Wolfwatcher Coalition, Facebook post, March 29, 2015, 2:00 p.m.

<sup>140</sup> “Wolf Pup Hiccups!,” last modified June 9, 2014, YouTube, Wolf Conservation Center, accessed April 20, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmB6-4MplU0>; “Baby Wolf and Border Collie Pup Tug of War,” last modified June 18, 2014, YouTube, Wolf Conservation, accessed April 20, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YxIScOdROZE>.



aerial shots of groups of wolves in “natural” mountains or valleys.<sup>141</sup> So here, too, the concept that wolves and people are separate is visually reinforced.

Meantime for wolf opponents, the relative dearth of wolf photography also can play to their advantage, since images of the aftermath of wolves’ visits without the wolves being present can make wolves seem even more spectral and easier to demonize for the brutality of the carcass left behind. Thus, most frequently shared among the imagery produced by wolf opponents are images of either partially consumed livestock kills or grizzly and fatal injuries to pets – grim scenes of activities that took place at night and/or when people re temporarily absent. More than one website includes some version of the message “WARNING – Photos Used To Illustrate Articles & Reports On This Website Are Extremely Graphic!” (in red font for good measure), supposedly to protect the sensibilities of viewers but seemingly also to underscore the association of wolves and violence.<sup>142</sup> And to the extent wolves do appear in imagery on these sites, not surprisingly they frequently have a sinister characterization. Lobo Watch shows a wolf with bared fangs; Save Western Wildlife has a wolf crossing a road with the head of a sheep in its mouth and a pack of wolves cornering a wounded elk with blood in the snow nearby.<sup>143</sup>

So wolves’ lack of visual spectacle and relative inadaptability digitally may not be fatal to its celebrity, but in part that is only because the controversy over wolves ensures that there is continued interest by these interest groups in promoting wolves in media – as either hero or villain. Were wolves as relatively uncontroversial as penguins, this failure of digital adaptation might be a potentially bigger obstacle to their continued celebrity.

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<sup>141</sup> “Wolves in Yellowstone,” Undated website, National Park Service, accessed April 15, 2015, <http://www.nps.gov/yell/learn/nature/wolves.htm>.

<sup>142</sup> “Lobo Watch,” undated website.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid; “Photos,” Undated website, Save Western Wildlife, accessed April 14, 2015, <http://savewesternwildlife.org/pictures/>.

Moreover, wolves and wolf celebrity also highlight another interesting question of digital adaptation. While spectacle is certainly a key part of media adaptation, another issue is simply adapting to the restrictions of form presented by each type of medium. Take, for example, the case of the popular social media website Facebook, which most every wolf advocate or adversary group I studied seems to use with great regularity (several groups had active Facebook pages far more up-to-date than their own websites). As mentioned in Chapter One, Facebook employs a proprietary algorithm to determine which posts are shared more frequently. Thus for any group trying to create an animal celebrity via Facebook, it is not enough simply to acquire Facebook fans and post information. Instead, to adapt to Facebook, animal advocates (or adversaries) have to figure out how to make posts more attractive to the Facebook algorithm so that more of their fans will actually see the posts in their own news feeds. And the answer to this question is to create more engagements with viewers – “likes,” comments, or clicks – on each post, so that Facebook’s algorithm will then share it even more broadly. On Facebook, popularity begets popularity.<sup>144</sup>

The challenge with wolves is that one of the most common ways anyone on Facebook generates engagements is to include photographs with their posts, returning us the question of visual spectacle and wolves not yielding large amounts of visual imagery. Different groups involved in wolf celebrity seem to have confronted this particular challenge of digital adaptation in different ways.

The National Wolfwatcher Coalition’s Facebook page seems to have made the decision to illustrate every post that doesn’t have its own image embedded in the content with a close-up,

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<sup>144</sup> Stuart Dredge, “How does Facebook decide what to show in my news feed?,” *The Guardian* (UK), June 30, 2014, accessed April 25, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/jun/30/facebook-news-feed-filters-emotion-study>.

“glamour” photograph of a wolf looking cute, familial, or regal. This means often the images do not appear to have any relation to the actual content of the posts – which may be news stories about legislative actions or about events being held by other pro-wolf groups – resulting in odd dissonances that may undercut their advocacy message. For example, in one post this past February they posted a link to a news article about the Michigan legislature passing an anti-wolf resolution. But the Coalition chose to illustrate this content with a cuddly photo of two wolves nuzzling. And so despite this being a page filled with wolf fans, the announcement of bad news for wolves in Michigan received more than 8,800 “Likes.”<sup>145</sup> It is possible the Coalition’s fans were simply confronting the limitations of the Facebook platform, which does not provide another option for registering quick engagement aside from the “Like” button, and so they clicked Like merely to register their awareness of the issue. But I’m more inclined to think plenty of the “Likes” came from fans who just saw a pretty wolf picture in their news feed without bothering to engage with the post’s content. This would also explain why a post about a dead wolf who had been hit by a car (that Wolfwatcher Coalition illustrated with an unrelated glamour wolf photo) and an article about wolves going on a livestock killing spree in a French village (also illustrated by an unrelated glamour photo) both were liked more than 5,500 times.<sup>146</sup>

It seems that the Wolfwatcher Coalition’s strategy for digitally adapting the wolf to Facebook, where constant photographic engagement is a must, is simply to accept the possibility of creating cognitive dissonance among wolf fans rather than not having their posts get shared at all. And they might have good reason for doing so. Consider that when they posted an announcement of a Grand Canyon Wolf Recovery Project film festival that included a close-up

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<sup>145</sup> National Wolfwatcher Coalition, Facebook post, February 16, 2015.

<sup>146</sup> National Wolfwatcher Coalition, Facebook post, April 19, 2015, 2:00 p.m.; National Wolfwatcher Coalition, Facebook post, April 19, 2015, 11:00 a.m.

image of a wolf, the post received more than 8,800 likes; but when they shared news about the successful outcome of the same festival a week later in a post without any wolf images, the post was liked fewer than 500 times – far below the typical average for the site.<sup>147</sup> Or consider that Defenders of Wildlife, another pro-wolf group, does not appear to employ the same strategy on Facebook, only including pictures of wolves with their posts if they are included with the actual content of the post. Thus while both the Wolfwatcher Coalition and Defenders have similar numbers of Facebook fans (~589,000 fans versus ~559,000 fans, respectively, as of April 2015), Wolfwatcher posts average four times as many likes on posts as Defenders posts receive.<sup>148</sup> In essence, the Wolfwatcher Coalition has chosen to use imagery of a decontextualized wolf unrelated to the content of their communications in order to adapt to the constraints of Facebook.

Defenders of Wildlife, on the other hand, a more established and wealthier group, seems to have made the decision to focus their Facebook engagement strategy more on linking back to their own web content, even if that means individual posts receive fewer likes because they lack pretty, close-up wolf photographs. However, Defenders seems to have tried to adapt to the constraints of Facebook by offering more video content, rather than still photography – tapping into their own in-house video production to try to attract Facebook views, with their videos being some of their most popular recent wolf-related posts.<sup>149</sup> Indeed, their 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary video showing the original release of wolves into Idaho’s Frank Church Wilderness Area garnered 193,000 views and 13,000 likes, far more than their average posts.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> National Wolfwatcher Coalition, Facebook Post, April 11, 2015, 10:03 p.m.; National Wolfwatcher Coalition, Facebook Post, April 6, 2015.

<sup>148</sup> “National Wolfwatcher Coalition Facebook Page,” accessed April 16, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/wolfwatcher.org/timeline>; “Defenders of Wildlife Facebook Page,” accessed April 16, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/DefendersofWildlife/timeline>.

<sup>149</sup> Defenders of Wildlife Facebook Page.

<sup>150</sup> Defenders of Wildlife, Facebook post, January 12, 2015.

Meanwhile, as with their websites, wolf adversaries have the advantage on Facebook that they can illustrate their posts with provocative images of livestock and game kills and the absence of the wolf in the images again actually helps reinforce their characterization of wolves as destructive and wasteful, while still providing a visual spectacle that reaches their target audiences. But more importantly, their use of Facebook, whether a conscious strategy or not, is as highly adaptive in its way. Most people rarely actually click on linked content in Facebook posts, contenting themselves with reading the commentary provided by the person or group posting. And, interestingly, most anti-wolf groups add considerable commentary to news items, photos, and events they share – perhaps so casual Facebook users might still see their rhetorical arguments even if they don't click through to the content being shared.

For example, FOTNYEH often offers long series of thoughts while sharing news content and other posts on its posts. A recent FOTNYEH post linking to a *Telegraph (U.K.)* online video of Arctic wolves meekly visiting workers at a Canadian facility, for instance, is accompanied by FOTNYEH's own commentary: "This is an excellent video of wolves EXPLORING (ALTERNATIVE PREY)!" Following this is several sentences comparing the behavior seen in the video with behavior of wolves on Vancouver Island that supposedly presaged an attack on humans, ending with a final note: "P.S. – And remember, wolves do not play. They explore in deadly earnest."<sup>151</sup> Most pro-wolf groups, by contrast, usually seem to add at most a line or two to their posts, seemingly preferring to let visuals (limited though they may be) and shared content speak for themselves.

In the end, the groups that seem to do the best in adapting to Facebook are groups that focus on captive wolves. These groups have plenty of new and frequent wolf material – photos,

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<sup>151</sup> Friends of the Northern Yellowstone Elk Herd, Facebook post, April 19, 2015, 1:40 p.m.

videos, and stories – that is individuated and germane to their shared content.<sup>152</sup> In this they most resemble groups like Save the Elephants or the Elephant Sanctuary, who manage public affection for individual animal stars through dedicated webcams, periodic biographic updates, celebrations of birthdays, naming and photographic contests, and just generally creating recognizable individual animal celebrities. But all this celebrity arising in the context of wolves in captivity raises a question of how adaptable this strategy is in the long haul, since these groups also have – often explicitly in their mission statements – a goal of promoting wild wolves.<sup>153</sup> If the best way for the public to consume celebrity wolf content is captive wolves, in the long run pro-wolf advocates may have a problem maintaining their celebrity narrative linking wolves to the “wild.”

But beyond captive wolves, there is one other possibility that may help improve wolves’ digital adaptation – the scientific study of wolves. And here we return to what makes Yellowstone’s wolves such famed global celebrities. As mentioned earlier, when the wolf re-introduction project began, all the wolves released into the park wore tracking collars, making them easier for scientists to track. These allowed known life histories and narratives to develop

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<sup>152</sup> In addition to the groups I examined in this dissertation, there are dozens of others nationwide that especially focus on captive Mexican wolves and red wolves, both of which are subject to Species Survival Plans (SSPs) for captive breeding and population management at facilities around the country. So there are plenty of opportunities for creating new content about captive wolves.

<sup>153</sup> Wolf Haven’s mission statement ends by saying that they “promote wolf restoration in historic ranges and work to protect our remaining *wild wolves and their habitat*” [emphasis added]. The International Wolf Center’s mission statement states that: “The International Wolf Center advances the survival of wolf populations by teaching about wolves, their relationship to *wildlands* and the human role in their future” [emphasis added]. The Wolf Conservation Center’s description of itself mentions that captive wolves “contribute as ambassadors, living on view at a variety of zoos throughout the United States to help people learn about the importance of their *wild counterparts*” [emphasis added]. “Mission,” Undated website, Wolf Haven, accessed April 25, 2015, <http://www.wolfhaven.org/about/mission/>; “Mission, Vision, and Values,” Undated website, International Wolf Center, accessed April 25, 2015, <http://www.wolf.org/about-us/mission-vision-and-values/>; “Mission,” Undated website, Wolf Conservation Center, accessed April 25, 2015, <http://nywolf.org/about>.

about wolves as individuals, who could be shared with a broader public. Even today when wolves in Greater Yellowstone Region have been de-listed from the federal endangered species list and unknown dispersers from neighboring states regularly cross through the park, wolves in Yellowstone are still subject to continued scientific study, with an average of 30 percent of the wolves in the park wearing tracking collars at any given time.<sup>154</sup> This allows the status of the park's packs – currently 10 packs plus one proto-group – and many individuals in them to remain known to those who wish to keep tabs on the wolves, even fans living halfway around the world.

Having long-term life histories also helps many blogging sites like *The Wildlife News* or *Yellowstone Reports* offer better updates about wolf sightings and goings-on in the park to audiences around the world. They can report stories like “Lamar Pups – Almost a Chase” illustrated with photos showing four pups trying to take an elk cow or stories about the recent “shock” loss of Lamar Canyon alpha 925M, who “died a hero” in a battle with a neighboring pack and is fondly remembered for his “quiet presence and charmingly askew right ear.”<sup>155</sup>

Such personalized knowledge of wolves as individuals and as packs, so rare anywhere else wild wolves are common, turns Yellowstone's wolves into a digitally adaptable natural soap opera. Like the elephants of Amboseli, they offer the ultimate fantasy of being “wild” creatures with whom eco-cosmopolitan fans worlds away can imagine a personal intimacy and bond. And with Yellowstone, it can be even easier to participate in wolves' stories oneself, since one Yellowstone wolf habitat in particular – the Lamar Valley – has been continuously occupied by

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<sup>154</sup> Doug Smith, et al., *Yellowstone National Park Wolf Project Annual Report*. Although for the most recent year for which data is available the number is down to just 21 wolves or 24 percent of the known wolves in the park.

<sup>155</sup> Kathie Lynch, “Yellowstone Wolf Update,” *The Wildlife News*, April 9, 2015, accessed April 19, 2015, <http://www.thewildlifeneeds.com/2015/04/09/yellowstone-wolf-apr-2015-lynch/>; Dan Hartman, “Lamar Pups – Almost a Chase,” *Yellowstone Reports* blog, January 17, 2015, accessed April 2, 2015, <https://www.yellowstonereports.com/report.php?date=2015&cid=3586>.

different wolfpacks since the reintroduction began in 1995 and yet is fortuitously located adjacent to one of the main roads in the park. As a result, amateur wolf enthusiasts and curious onlookers are sometimes treated to views of hunts, kills, family bonding, and other wolf behaviors all from the convenience of their own automobile (or more accurately through spotting scopes and binoculars while standing next to automobiles at turn-offs). Indeed, in 2013 Yellowstone National Park's staff was able to help more than 18,000 visitors spot wolves because of their relatively easy viewing in this area.<sup>156</sup> Moreover, wildlife tour companies have developed guiding packages where naturalists familiar with the locations of the park's wolfpacks can enhance tourists' prospects of witnessing wolf behavior and understanding of who and what they are observing, drawing tourists who already know of the wolves well before they arrive.<sup>157</sup>

And, as I mentioned at the start of the chapter, all of this has allowed some individual Yellowstone wolves to garner a global celebrity to the point where they are recognized and praised in the same way as captive wolves, even being memorialized when they die or are killed. When 832F, the alpha female of the Lamar Canyon Pack was legally killed by a hunter in Wyoming in late 2012, a firestorm of public attention was unleashed, with media coverage quickly arising in the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, NPR, and *Outside* magazine among many other outlets.<sup>158</sup> People who had known her both from online and from personal visits to the park had a deep sense of personal connection to her loss.

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<sup>156</sup> Doug Smith, et al., *Yellowstone National Park Wolf Project Annual Report*.

<sup>157</sup> For example, see "Yellowstone Wolf Guides," Undated website, accessed April 2, 2015, <https://yellowstonewolfguides.com/>. For an example of a story of online wolf fans visiting the wolves as tourists, see: MacNeil Lyons, "A National Geographic Moment: A Predatory Meeting on an Undisclosed Trail," *Yellowstone Reports* blog, December 5, 2013, accessed April 14, 2015, <https://www.yellowstonereports.com/report.php?date=2015&cid=2745>; Schweber, "Research Animals Lost in Wolf Hunts Near Yellowstone."

<sup>158</sup> Schweber, "Mourning an Alpha Female;" John M. Glionna, "Popular wolf killed by hunters in Yellowstone," *The Los Angeles Times*, December 11, 2012, accessed April 19, 2015,



So Yellowstone's wolves have been more digitally adaptable than average wolves because they inhabit a landscape favorable to photographic imagery and because the longitudinal study of their populations has allowed the emergence of known individuals around whom it is easier to build celebrity narratives. But while these advantages may allow their celebrity to continue, it is quite possible the peak of Yellowstone wolf stardom may have already passed. Now that wolves have successfully re-occupied the park and remain protected within the park boundaries, their ability to generate stories for the "news" side of media has diminished. Even the main pro- and anti-wolf groups, who still argue the merits of reintroduction, dedicate the majority of their media output to wolves outside the park. For wolf advocates, this includes the status of the red wolf, Mexican wolves, and lone dispersers like Journey. For wolf opponents, the focus is on de-listing wolves from endangered species protection and challenges to the science behind wolf population estimates by state agencies across the Northern Rockies.

Meanwhile, while diehard fans continue to consume every twist and turn of the Yellowstone wolf soap opera, it may be getting harder for more casual fans to keep up with it all. Wolves' lives are shorter than some other celebrity species like elephants, who can live for many decades, whereas 12 years seems to be the outer limit for wild wolves. So the Yellowstone wolf cast of characters gets refreshed often, severing links the public may have with particular individuals. Even attachment to the larger unit of the wolfpack offers little stability – despite the packs being "a roll call of legends," as one article on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the reintroduction

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<http://articles.latimes.com/2012/dec/11/nation/la-na-nn-popular-wolf-killed-yellowstone-20121211>; Elizabeth Shogren, "Scientists Mourn Popular Wolf Shot By A Hunter," NPR, December 12, 2012, accessed April 19, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/2012/12/12/167024477/scientists-mourn-popular-wolf-shot-by-a-hunter>; Jeff Hull, "Out of Bounds: The Death of 832F, Yellowstone's Most Famous Wolf," *Outside*, February 13, 2013, accessed November 14, 2014, <http://www.outsideonline.com/1913831/out-bounds-death-832f-yellowstones-most-famous-wolf>.

proclaimed, today only one pack formed by the original re-introduced wolves still exists and even it has seen its name changed to Mollie's Pack from the original Crystal Creek name.<sup>159</sup> Moreover, the Druid Peak pack that was the subject of multiple documentary programs, including National Geographic and PBS Nature specials, has disappeared, replaced by the Lamar Canyon pack that itself has been reduced to just two wolves recently.<sup>160</sup> In general, pack composition changes frequently either due to inter-pack aggression, dispersal of member wolves, or loss of key alpha individuals and this can make it hard for casual fans to stay abreast of the wolves as individuals.

So what will happen to public interest in Yellowstone wolves if research funding runs out and/or the scientific community moves on, no longer monitoring the wolf population in the park with trackable collars that help build packs into distinguishable individuals? Will just being able to see Yellowstone's wolves more easily in the park's habitats (compared to wild wolves living elsewhere) be enough to maintain their enhanced celebrity status? Or will Yellowstone's wolves lose some of their media appeal, regressing back to the mean of wolf celebrity generally?

In the U.S. general wolf celebrity seems in little danger of fading anytime soon, especially as long as the question of wolves' presence in and around human settlements and the issue of hunting wolves remain vexed public policy debates and proxy battles for larger questions about government authority and our relationship to the American West. In essence, wolves' binary stardom as contested hero and villain is an adaptation in itself that helps to ensure they remain a part of the modern mediaverse. But given how relatively unadaptable wolves are

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<sup>159</sup> The name change honored the former head of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service who helped implement the recovery project and died a couple years later of cancer. Kathie Lynch, "Yellowstone wolf report on 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary."

<sup>160</sup> *In the Valley of Wolves*, directed by Jill Clarke, et al. (2007; Chicago: Questar, 2008), DVD; *Wolves: A Legend Returns to Yellowstone*, directed by David Douglas (Washington, DC: National Geographic Video, 2007), DVD.

digitally, it is worth considering if their celebrity would continue if their public policy status were definitively resolved one way or the other. Without providing controversy and without visual spectacle, would wolves – in Yellowstone or anywhere else – remain media celebrities?

### **Will the Wolf and Lamb Lie Down Together?**

Given the centuries of European and Euroamerican fear of wolves, the idea that wolves' binary stardom could disappear soon may seem an unlikely prospect. But consider for a moment an example of the celebrity of another set of wolves outside Yellowstone – the wolves of Wisconsin. Or perhaps more accurately I should say consider the lack of celebrity of the wolves in Wisconsin. As elsewhere in the U.S., Wisconsin's wolves were systematically exterminated until its last known timber wolf was killed in 1958. But unlike many other parts of the country, Wisconsin retained suitable wolf habitat in its northern forests and had proximity to a reservoir wolf population in northern Minnesota and Canada, so that by the late 1970s wolves passively had returned to the state without any assistance or government intervention. Wildlife officials discovered the state's first new wolfpack – the Bear Lake Pack – in 1978.<sup>161</sup> Since wolves were protected as endangered species, Wisconsin officials worked with the Federal Eastern Timber Wolf Recovery Plan to manage the population toward a goal of 350 wolves, which was reached in the early 2000s and then far surpassed. After much public policy conflict at the state and federal level at present a federal court ruling in December 2014 has re-listed Wisconsin's wolves as subject to endangered species protections after they had been de-listed and subject to state-controlled hunting for two years.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Richard P. Thiel, *Keepers of the Wolves: The Early Years of Wolf Recovery in Wisconsin* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001).

<sup>162</sup> "Gray Wolves in the Western Great Lakes States," Undated website, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, accessed April 15, 2015, <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/wolf/>.

In theory, Wisconsin's wolves have every bit as much to offer in terms of media narratives to wolf fans and foes as those in Yellowstone. Conflicts similar to those out West over wolf management have flared across Wisconsin for much of the past decade over: de-listing of wolves from endangered species protection; state compensation for livestock damage; and state-sanctioned wolf hunting. Similar to the case of residents around Yellowstone, many northern Wisconsin residents have expressed feelings of resentment towards urban "wolf-huggers" and outside interference in control over their own lands and livestock, even when they have been compensated for any livestock losses to wolves and even when they have not personally had any negative experiences with wolves at all.<sup>163</sup> Also similar to Yellowstone, there is some evidence wolves have triggered a trophic cascade in Wisconsin forests, increasing the species richness among classes of plants subject to deer herbivory.<sup>164</sup>

Yet despite these many similarities, Wisconsin's wolves have never become similar global celebrities. True, as part of the overall celebrity of wolves as a species, Wisconsin's wolves receive periodic attention from national wolf advocates or opponents on their blogs and Facebook pages when news of relevant court decisions appears or when there are action items for members to lobby Wisconsin officials about new wolf management legislation or policy. And locally there are pro- and anti- groups such as Friends of the Wisconsin Wolf and United

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<sup>163</sup> Meghna Agarwala, et al., "Paying for wolves in Solapur, India and Wisconsin, USA: Comparing compensation rules and practices to understand the goals and politics of wolf conservation," *Biological Conservation* 143 (2010): 2945-2955.

It's important to note, however, that northern Wisconsin residents are not a monolithic group with a single set of attitudes. For example, Ojibwe tribal members residing in northern Wisconsin generally hold significantly more positive attitudes towards wolves than non-tribal residents. Victoria Shelley, Adrian Treves, and Lisa Naughton, "Attitudes to Wolves and Wolf Policy Among Ojibwe Tribal Members and Non-tribal Residents of Wisconsin's Wolf Range," *Human Dimensions of Wildlife* 16 (2011): 397-413.

<sup>164</sup> Ramana Callan, et al., "Recolonizing wolves trigger a trophic cascade in Wisconsin (USA)," *Journal of Ecology* 101(4) (2013): 837-845.

Sportsmen of Wisconsin that serve the same lobbying functions as Defenders of Wildlife or Friends of the Northern Yellowstone Elk Herd do out West.

But internationally and nationally, Wisconsin's wolves simply do not attract the same cultural cachet as Yellowstone's wolves. I have been unable to find any nationally distributed documentaries about wolves of Wisconsin similar to the many PBS and National Geographic films covering Yellowstone's wolves.<sup>165</sup> And in the last twenty years *The New York Times* has featured only nine articles explicitly about Wisconsin's wolves and wolf management (excluding articles that mention Wisconsin wolves in passing) compared with 72 articles focused on Yellowstone's wolves (not even including the dozens about management of wolves in Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana to which Yellowstone wolves dispersed). Moreover tourists are not flocking into the Wisconsin woods to see wolves in the same way Yellowstone's wolves have brought an estimated additional \$35.5 million in tourism spending in the Greater Yellowstone Region.<sup>166</sup>

A good portion of this difference in celebrity status may well return to the pragmatic barrier of poor digital adaptation discussed above that is common to most wolves outside of Yellowstone National Park – in Wisconsin wolf habitat is highly wooded and a mixture of public and private lands, making filming and wildlife watching more difficult than in the relatively open valleys and hillsides of Yellowstone.<sup>167</sup> Without the same easily available imagery or the ability

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<sup>165</sup> Although Wisconsin Public Television did produce a local documentary on *Wolves in Wisconsin* in 2010. *Wolves in Wisconsin*, directed by Jo Garrett, et al. (Madison: Wisconsin Educational Communications Board & the Board of Regents of the UW System, 2010), Television Documentary.

<sup>166</sup> John Duffield, Chris Neher, and David Patterson, *Wolves and People in Yellowstone: Impacts on the Regional Economy, Final Report* (Missoula: Yellowstone Park Foundation, 2006), accessed April 15, 2015, [http://www.academia.edu/8049705/Wolves\\_and\\_People\\_in\\_Yellowstone\\_Impacts\\_on\\_the\\_Regional\\_Economy](http://www.academia.edu/8049705/Wolves_and_People_in_Yellowstone_Impacts_on_the_Regional_Economy).

<sup>167</sup> This is one of the key reasons L. David Mech cites for Yellowstone being a preferred place to watch and study wolves. As noted in: Jim Robbins, "'The Real World, Yellowstone': Wolves on

to follow and develop known identities for individual wolves and wolfpacks through constant tracking, it is much harder to build a celebrity identity in media for Wisconsin's wolves.

Moreover, since wolf recovery was not the result of active government intervention, the news media has had fewer obvious news events and actions around which to build narratives.

So this would suggest that if Yellowstone's wolves were no longer tracked and offered known individuals, they might lose some of their celebrity luster – but not all – because they would still be more filmable. But I think that Wisconsin's wolves point to an additional challenge for the future celebrity of wolves – passive recovery. As discussed earlier, opponents of wolves in Yellowstone have used the re-introduction of the wolves as proxy for larger complaints about federal government overreach and control of local land use in the West. But since wolves in Wisconsin recovered without government assistance, it blunts a little of the animus against them, even as fears of livestock depredation or reduced game hunting remain a real part of local opponents' dislike of wolves. For advocates of wolves, on the other hand, in theory the story of wolves recovering passively should be welcome, even as it does not offer quite as exciting a narrative since it lacks a heroic role for people as wolves' savior (aside from getting out of the way).

But the passive recovery of Wisconsin's wolves also challenges the narrative link between wolves and “the wild.” One major problem is that our concept of “the wild” and “wilderness” very often get conflated in popular discourse. Northern Wisconsin certainly has many relatively rural places, but whether it is “wilderness” is open to debate. The Wilderness Act and founders of the Wilderness Society made lack of roads one of their focal definitions of

wilderness and every known wolfpack territory in Wisconsin is crossed by at least one road.<sup>168</sup>

Popular misconceptions of wilderness also assume that wilderness is somehow “untrammeled” by man, even when every landscape on the planet in the Anthropocene is affected by man-made climate change and anthropogenic changes to nutrient cycles and most every land has long history of human presence or visitation.

Indeed, Yellowstone and the human communities surrounding it are not wildernesses by these standards either, with national discourse about them long eliding over substantial human histories on the landscape pre-dating and following the establishment of the park (including the present-day roads and other tourist infrastructure).<sup>169</sup> But rightly or wrongly that elision has allowed Yellowstone to retain a mythos of offering access to a different kind of wild experience with which northern Wisconsin struggles to compete, given the commonly accepted cultural constructs of the wild.<sup>170</sup> By rights, much of northern Wisconsin should qualify as wilderness and certainly offers an experience of “the wild,” in terms of natural interactions not consciously cultivated or directed by people looser standards for wilderness.

But this vision of “wildness” is not what gets wrapped up in our common discourse about wolves and wilderness – wildness is about being where people are not. And without any overt assistance, Wisconsin’s wolves are managing to live in a landscape of roads and people.<sup>171</sup> And

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<sup>168</sup> For the roadless definition of wilderness, see: Paul S. Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Autos Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002). For roads in Wisconsin wolf territories, see: James Gorman, “Wolves Come Back (On Their Terms),” *The New York Times*, March 16, 2004, accessed April 15, 2015. (LexisNexis Academic).

<sup>169</sup> Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature*.

<sup>170</sup> For more on these issues, see: William J. Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William J. Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 69-90.

<sup>171</sup> Of course defining the “success” of wolves on this landscape is tricky. Research has found that as wolf populations have increased, general public opinion in favor of wolves has decreased,

this is a pattern that is reoccurring as wolves continue to expand back into more of their historical habitat in the lower 48 states, with wolves already passively returning into areas like California and Illinois where they were not explicitly introduced by government policy. And if these wolves are no longer harbingers of people-less wildness, what are they?

As human development increases everywhere, “untrammeled” spaces for wolf habitat are shrinking and becoming more isolated. To survive, wolves in the West, in the Great Lakes, and elsewhere will have to find ways to exist in (or at least occasionally traverse through) landscapes dotted with human settlement. They may never manage more than an uneasy truce of living amidst these human dominated spaces without causing too many depredations of livestock, pets, or favored game animals. But to the extent they manage even a tenuous existence in such landscapes, they undercut the brand of “wild” that has long been part of their celebrity narrative. And without celebrity, it may be easier for future cultural discourse to ignore wolves – an outcome that wolves’ opponents might welcome.

Thus, for proponents of conservation, this means that one key to the future survival of wolves is not just management of the physical landscape but also management of the celebrity narratives associated with wolves. Even if wolves still retain a binary stardom where some see them as Journey and others see them as Lobo, going forward proponents will need to make the image of Journey less affiliated with notions of “the wild” as a place without people and more a quality of living outside full human control, even on a landscape otherwise dominated by human settlement. Otherwise, wolves’ celebrity narrative as currently constructed may contain the seeds of its own downfall. Indeed, as I will discuss in the Conclusion, for all species trying to survive

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with greater fear of wolves and support for hunting and even poaching wolves occurring. Adrian Treves, Lisa Naughton-Treves, and Victoria Shelley, “Longitudinal Analysis of Attitudes Toward Wolves,” *Conservation Biology* 27(2) (2013): 315-323.



in the Anthropocene, a major challenge is whether we as a society can rethink how we mentally construct our notions of wildlife – making peace with the idea that wildlife and people will have to share spaces in both a physical landscape and a dimensionless mediaverse of celebrity.

## CONCLUSION – A Brave New World

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*O, wonder!  
How many goodly creatures are there here!  
How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,  
That has such people in't!*

-- *The Tempest*, Act V, Scene 1

### Black and White and Read All Over

On a late summer's night in 2012, Becky Malinsky, a zookeeper at Washington, D.C.'s National Zoo, was not formally clocked into her job; yet as she sat on her couch at home she was still engaged with her charges at the zoo – via an online webcam.<sup>1</sup>

For months, zoo employees and casual enthusiasts alike had been monitoring the images and sounds broadcast online from the zoo's Giant panda (*Ailuropoda melaneuca*) enclosure, awaiting any developments before the end of the gestational period of Mei Xiang, the zoo's female giant panda. There was little reason to hope: panda pregnancies are notoriously difficult to predict and detect – even with modern medical imaging and hormonal testing – and extensive “false pregnancy” behaviors can mirror actual pregnancy.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, with only one 36 to 48-hour window per year when females are in estrus and a lack of understanding about when precisely within that window fertilization is possible, missed chances at breeding pandas in captivity are far more common than successful pregnancies, let alone births of cubs who live past

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<sup>1</sup> Michael E. Ruane, “National Zoo welcomes baby panda,” *The Washington Post*, September 17, 2012, accessed October 1, 2012, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/national-zoo-welcomes-baby-panda/2012/09/17/ea44204c-00b2-11e2-9367-4e1bafb958db\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/national-zoo-welcomes-baby-panda/2012/09/17/ea44204c-00b2-11e2-9367-4e1bafb958db_story.html).

<sup>2</sup> In one case, observers speculated Ai Lin, a captive panda in China, may have even intentionally mimicked pregnancy behaviors, apparently recognizing that other pregnant females received preferential treatment from keepers. This story became fodder for added global fascination with pandas, prompting reports in several worldwide media outlets. “Star panda off live broadcast after phantom pregnancy,” Xinhua News, August 26, 2014, accessed February 1, 2015, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2014-08/26/c\\_126916205.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2014-08/26/c_126916205.htm).

their first year.<sup>3</sup> To date, Mei Xiang had had several false pregnancies and only given birth one time in the more than 10 years the National Zoo had leased her from the Chinese government.

But that night, Malinsky heard a series of odd squeaks and noises over her computer. Although she was unable to see anything clearly – newborn panda cubs are only the size of a stick of butter – it seemed the long odds against panda fertility had been overcome. As she texted co-workers to check the webcam and confirm the potential birth, Malinsky’s discovery marked the beginning of a new round of feverish public interest in one of the zoo’s star attractions – interest that here began and was subsequently built through new platforms of online media.<sup>4</sup>

The National Zoo declared the birth was “important for Washington” the city, beyond any implications for the zoo or the conservation of pandas as a species.<sup>5</sup> And based upon the media interest immediately generated, such claims did not necessarily seem grandiose. Instantly the news was broadcast worldwide, generating more than 500 newspaper articles, media blog posts, television news segments, and other public accounts of the panda birth, according to a Google News search the following day. *The Washington Post* started a naming contest for the new cub among its readership.<sup>6</sup> Washington D.C.’s Pandas Unlimited club – the largest panda

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<sup>3</sup> Mortality in captive giant panda cubs in their first year historically has ranged from 25 to 65 percent. Among the challenges that arise are the fact that mothers sometimes crush their infants under their own body weight and often have trouble feeding their infants. Elizabeth Weise, “Dead cub shows how hard panda breeding can be,” *USA Today*, September 25, 2012, accessed February 14, 2015, <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/story/2012/09/25/panda-cubs-death-shows-nature-is-in-charge/57838334/1>. More recent improvements in cub management have led to a decline in mortality rates to around 29 percent. Lei Shan, et al., “Large-Scale Genetic Survey Provides Insights into the Captive Management and Reintroduction of Giant Pandas,” *Molecular Biology & Evolution* 31(10) (2014): 2663-2671.

<sup>4</sup> Ruane, “National Zoo welcomes baby panda.”

<sup>5</sup> D.C. National Zoo Director Dennis Kelly, as quoted in Ruane, “National Zoo welcomes baby panda.”

<sup>6</sup> Martin Austermuhle, “Let the panda-monium begin!,” *The Washington Post*, September 17, 2012, accessed February 1, 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/all-opinions-are->

fan club in the United States – shared posts, photos, and screenshots from the zoo’s webcam on its Flickr and Facebook websites.<sup>7</sup> Global interest in the birth was so high the panda webcam on which the birth had been discovered crashed within two days, with the zoo eventually limiting online visits of no longer than five minutes in order to accommodate the demand.<sup>8</sup>

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Giant pandas in general, and the story of this panda cub birth in particular, offer a fitting final example to cap off this dissertation’s exploration of animal celebrity – neatly encapsulating many of the traits of celebrity and the ways in which it has changed our relationship with non-human animals that I have tried to explore in these case studies.

For starters, as I discussed in the Introduction, celebrity animals frequently (though not always) have emerged from among large animals and also those animals humans find appealing due to *neotenuous* qualities that invoke innate associations with human infants. Penguins have their toddler-like walk. Elephants (and wolves, although not as universally acknowledged) exhibit parental-infant bonding. Giant pandas are perhaps *the* apotheosis of a large, neotenuous animal in form and motion, with their flat faces, relatively large eyes (exaggerated by the black spots around them), roundness of their faces and bodies, clumsy-seeming movements, and soft texture – all of which spur people to see them as cuddly oversized infants.<sup>9</sup>

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[local/post/let-the-panda-monium-begin/2012/09/17/5bc3f8-00e0-11e2-9367-4e1bafb958db\\_blog.html](http://local/post/let-the-panda-monium-begin/2012/09/17/5bc3f8-00e0-11e2-9367-4e1bafb958db_blog.html).

<sup>7</sup> For Pandas Unlimited posts, see: <https://www.facebook.com/pandasunlimited> and <http://www.flickr.com/groups/pandasunlimited/>.

<sup>8</sup> Personal observation. Also: Jill Heller, “Cute Overload: Panda Cub Born at National Zoo Crashes Panda Cam,” *International Business Times*, September 17, 2012, accessed February 14, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.com/cute-overload-panda-cub-born-national-zoo-crashes-panda-cam-video-789926>.

<sup>9</sup> Ramona and Desmond Morris, *Men and Pandas* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1966) 199-203.

Moreover, as I have also noted celebrity animals generally are those that can be individualized – where people can distinguish particular animals from among others of their species, facilitating naming (ala Journey and Jumbo) and the creation of narratives about individual life histories and personalities. In the case of pandas, they generally are easy to individuate, most often seen in the wild in isolation and in zoos in pairs.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Mei Xiang’s story in 2012 was so engaging because many people were familiar with her history of false pregnancies and unsuccessful breeding, making a live birth seem that much more triumphant.

Most importantly, as I’ve tried to emphasize, celebrity species tend to be those that are adaptable for use in multiple narrative and graphic media formats. I realize this can seem like a circular definition, since presence in multiple media forms and narratives is also one of the key pre-requisites of being considered a celebrity. But what I mean by this is that as new media keep evolving, the traits that make any individual (human or not) a star in one medium do not always transfer to stardom in a newer medium – think of Rin Tin Tin’s failure to make the jump from silent films to talking pictures. So only animals that have particular traits or associated popular narrative tropes that work across multiple media formats are actually well-adapted to become and stay celebrities in our mediaverse.

In all media, adaptability so often equates with the ability to stand out through some quality of *spectacle*; but different mediums rely upon different forms of spectacle. Animals with unique vocalizations may not stand out in a visual medium. Other animals may have spectacular visual appearances but be hard to distinguish without close-up or time-lapse imagery that is not always possible to obtain without high-tech cameras. And today in the world of memes, gifs, and

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<sup>10</sup> Although a groundbreaking study of geo-tagged pandas recently published reveals that long-held assumptions of pandas being loners in the wild are inaccurate; they actually interact together with some frequency. Vanessa Hull, et al., “Space use by endangered giant pandas,” *Journal of Mammalogy* 96(1) (2015): 230-236.

hyperlinks being shared via an algorithmic jumble on RSS, Facebook, and Twitter feeds, animals whose spectacle emerges only if contextualized with history and habitat – ala many gray wolves – may not attract lasting attention as much as animals whose spectacle can be appreciated decontextualized from any sense of place or time.

In the case of pandas (as with Antarctic penguins), their decontextualized lack of history has been one of the attributes that has contributed to their success as animal celebrities. Indeed, surprisingly pandas were largely unknown both outside *and* inside China before the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In his political history of pandas, Henry Nicholls finds only three references to animals that could even possibly refer to a panda in all of Chinese literature prior to the 1800s. Nor did pandas appear in any known historical Chinese artwork prior to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup> This helped their celebrity in two ways. First, this lack of history allowed pandas – both upon their initial discovery and again when they first were captured for live display in the Western world in the 1930s – to serve more easily as a *tabula rasa* for whatever stories international media wished to impose upon them. Second, Nicholls speculates the panda’s lack of association with the imagery or rhetoric of imperial China was a key reason the communist Chinese government chose to embrace pandas as a 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century emblem of modern China and sought to

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<sup>11</sup> The three possible examples include a 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E. reference to a *pixiu*, a ferocious animal resembling a tiger or bear that was a good emblem for warriors (however, pandas generally are quite docile); an 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D. reference to a *zhouyu*, a black-and-white non-carnivorous animal as large as a tiger; and a 16<sup>th</sup> century A.D. reference to a *mo*, which may be a confusion of a panda and a tapir and is supposedly an aggressive creature subsisting upon bamboo. Henry Nicholls, *The Way of the Panda: The Curious History of China’s Political Animal* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2011), 4-6.

For more about pandas and their relationships to many of the themes discussed in this dissertation, see: Ian J. Miller, “Pandas in the Anthropocene: Japan’s ‘Panda Boom’ and the Limits of Ecological Modernity,” in *The Nature of Beasts: Empire and Exhibition at the Tokyo Imperial Zoo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 193-230.

promote them to a global audience.<sup>12</sup> Had pandas been entangled in a longer Chinese history, the communist Chinese government might have tried to suppress international interest in them.

As I have also tried to discuss, another factor in being adaptable to media – and thus more likely to emerge as a celebrity – is the ease with which imagery of a particular species can be created and transmitted.<sup>13</sup> This idea of *ease* refers both to the ease of obtaining imagery and the ease with which viewers accept imagery. Taking pictures of wild wolves loping away at 50 kilometers per hour through heavily wooded environments presents challenges to tourist or media paparazzi. Meanwhile consider the case of pandas where there are more than 300 captive pandas globally (compared to fewer than 2,000 left in the wild in very remote, mountainous habitat of dense bamboo forests).<sup>14</sup> Since most people have only ever known pandas through captive panda imagery and not from the wild, there may perhaps not be as strong a social expectation that panda stories will be set in the wild.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, many other animal species that also have captive representatives – like elephants, penguins, and wolves – also have a dominant cultural identity strongly tied to their presence in particular “wild” landscapes. This may create social expectations that narratives and imagery containing these animals can or

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<sup>12</sup> Nicholls, *The Way of the Panda*, 4-6, 100.

<sup>13</sup> See: any of tens of millions of pet cat videos, GIFs, and Internet memes.

<sup>14</sup> Estimates of the number in captivity appear in: Christine Dell’Amore, “Is Breeding Pandas in Captivity Worth It?,” *National Geographic News*, August 27, 2013, accessed March 2, 2015, <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/08/130827-giant-panda-national-zoo-baby-breeding-animals-science/>. Current population estimates of the wild panda population are fewer than 2,000 individuals, all found in high altitude, dense forests where it would be hard to photograph. Population estimates from: Lü, Z, Wang, D. & Garshelis, D.L. (IUCN SSC Bear Specialist Group), “*Ailuropoda melanoleuca*,” Version 2014.3, The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://www.iucnredlist.org>. Other estimates place the wild population at no more than 1,600. Hull, et al., “Space use by endangered giant pandas.”

<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, as early as the 1960s a survey of children found that pandas were already among the Top 10 most popular animals, despite the fact that to date there had only been 15 living pandas ever known to the Western world – all of them as captives in zoos. Morris and Morris, *Men and Pandas*, 197.

should feature “natural” scenery as a backdrop – making images and stories of these animals potentially more complicated and costly to obtain. With pandas, using captive animals for imagery and stories does not seem to provoke as much backlash or disappointment and so their image can be created and transmitted cheaply while still being socially acceptable. This makes them more adapted to being an animal celebrity.

The ease of transmission of panda imagery in another sense is responsible for one of the most prominent uses of pandas in media today – as the iconic brand of the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF), one of the largest international conservation organizations. The panda has been the logo of WWF since its founding in 1961 and yet the choice of the panda had nothing to do with the WWF’s initial projects or priorities. In fact, the Morges Manifesto, the founding agreement upon which WWF was based, suggested the organization focus primarily on African-based conservation.<sup>16</sup> WWF did not even become involved in wild panda conservation efforts until almost 20 years later in 1979.<sup>17</sup> The reason WWF chose artist George Waterson’s sketch of a panda as its logo was because pandas were simple-to-draw, black-and-white animals that would reproduce well in publications no matter how much the logo was reduced or enlarged or

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<sup>16</sup> J.G. Baer, et al., *Morges Manifesto* (1961), accessed January 10, 2015, <http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CB8QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fassets.panda.org%2Fdownloads%2Fmorgesmanifesto.pdf&ei=WQwbVda4J8-WoQSBzIGICg&usg=AFQjCNGXmqn9d2h9AqVwX06RWh66EDhJRg&sig2=PMmedVX0My07x0K3pSsvwQ&bvm=bv.89744112.d.cGU>.

<sup>17</sup> In 1979, the Chinese government invited WWF to be the first international organization to work on panda conservation. Today, pandas are one of the 20 “flagship species” upon which WWF focuses its efforts. WWF contends that the panda is “perhaps the most powerful symbol in the world when it comes to species conservation.” “Giant Panda,” Undated website, WWF Global, accessed January 10, 2015, [http://wwf.panda.org/what\\_we\\_do/endangered\\_species/giant\\_panda/](http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/endangered_species/giant_panda/).



whether it was printed in a color or black-and-white document.<sup>18</sup> This is truly decontextualization of an animal at its most elemental.

Thus, pandas encapsulate many of the factors that have made certain animal species more likely to achieve a degree of celebrity stardom in the modern mediaverse – qualities like charismatic neoteny, individuation, and media adaptability. But the birth of the National Zoo’s panda cub in 2012 in particular also reflects many of the challenges for those interested in wildlife conservation I have tried to explore in my case studies. In particular, the cub’s birth underscores the fundamental question lurking behind the production and consumption of animal celebrity with respect to conservation: does it re-direct public focus so much onto the individual animals that the populations, species, and ecosystems conservationists aim to save get forgotten?

Animal studies scholar Randy Malamud has argued: “The famous animal is always singular, individual, while . . . the real animal is always multiple: part of a pack. The cultural construct of fame strips the animal of his or her peers, his or her society, as it sets the animal who happens to become famous apart from the others.”<sup>19</sup> But focus on the individual is not necessarily a flaw – indeed, as I have noted, a major reason those working on conservation choose to promote individual animal celebrity is that it is easier for the public to form emotional bonds with an individual than abstract concepts like “species.” And emotions are what cement so many of the beliefs and worldviews shaping our actions, in conservation and generally.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Additionally, a popular captive panda was readily at hand to model, since the panda Chi Chi had recently become a public sensation in Great Britain as the latest resident of the London Zoo. See: “WWF in the 60’s,” Undated website, WWF Global, accessed January 10, 2015, [http://wwf.panda.org/who\\_we\\_are/history/sixties/](http://wwf.panda.org/who_we_are/history/sixties/). Nicholls, *The Way of the Panda*, 100-101.

<sup>19</sup> Randy Malamud, “Introduction: Famous Animals in Modern Culture,” in *The Cultural History of Animals in the Modern Age*, Volume 6, ed. Randy Malamud (Oxford: BERG, 2011), 15.

<sup>20</sup> For theories on the precursors to behaviors generally, see: Shalom H. Schwartz, “Normative Influences on Altruism,” in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 10, ed. Leonard Berkowitz (New York: Academic Press, 1977), 221-279; Icek Ajzen and Martin Fishbein,

The National Zoo certainly hoped the public's emotional connection to this new baby panda would lead to support for its broader conservation efforts, especially given their own history in this realm. In the year following Mei Xiang's first successful pregnancy – when she gave birth to the male cub Tai Shan in July 2005 – the National Zoo exceeded by three-fold the previous annual record for Adopt-a-Species program revenues, gained 9,000 additional members to its Friends of the Zoo program, and had nearly half of its merchandise sales in the final quarter of that year consist of panda-related paraphernalia.<sup>21</sup>

But at the same time, there is also reason to wonder how much the focus on these individual pandas actually benefited the conservation of the species as a whole. The history of conservation has many examples where focus on individual animals obscures focus on a bigger picture. For example, in June 2011, an exhausted emperor penguin washed up on the Kapiti Coast of New Zealand – 2,000 kilometers from Antarctica, far outside the normal range of sea-going emperor penguins. Rescuers brought him to the Wellington Zoo and dubbed him “Happy Feet” in honor of the titular star of the 2006 animated film. His story went global and became a

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*Understanding Attitudes and Predicting Social Behavior* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1980); Icek Ajzen, “The Theory of Planned Behaviour,” *Organisational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes* 50 (1991): 179-211. For theories that try to model environmental behavior in particular, see: Paul Stern, “New Environmental Theories: Toward a Coherent Theory of Environmentally Significant Behavior,” *Journal of Social Issues* 56(3) (2000): 407-424; Harold R. Hungerford and Trundi L. Volk, “Changing Learner Behavior Through Environmental Education,” *The Journal of Environmental Education* 21(3) (1990): 8-21; Paul Stern, et al., “The New Ecological Paradigm in Social-Psychological Context,” *Environment and Behavior* 27(6) (1995): 723-743.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Libit, “The Panda Paradox.” *The Washington Post*, April 5, 2009, accessed October 1, 2012, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/27/AR2009032701569.html>.

Pandas have long created such revenue for zoos. The first captive panda ever exhibited live outside of China was a male cub, Su Lin, in 1936. On the first day he went on exhibit at Chicago's Brookfield Zoo, 53,000 visitors showed up to see him – a one-day admissions record that has never been exceeded in the history of the zoo. The zoo also recouped all costs from acquiring the panda in just the first week's gate. Vicki Croke, *The Lady and the Panda* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2006).

media phenomenon. More than NZ\$22,000 (~US\$16,500) was raised through worldwide donations to rehabilitate him and equip him with a radio tracking collar, while his fame led to visits from everyone from New Zealand Prime Minister John Key to British actor Stephen Fry.<sup>22</sup> However, only one week after being released back into the wild, his tracking signal disappeared and Happy Feet was presumed to have been eaten by a shark. A year later, he unexpectedly returned to New Zealand, still far removed from other emperor penguins.<sup>23</sup>

As some conservation biologists pointed out at the time, emperor penguins are not (yet) classified as even a threatened species, let alone an endangered one and yet the rescue of this one individual consumed significant international resources.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, Yellow-eyed penguins (*Megadyptes antipodes*) who are native to New Zealand where Happy Feet washed up are one of the most endangered penguin species in the world. But lacking a compelling individual star, there has been no comparable global outpouring of support for their conservation;

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<sup>22</sup> “New Zealand’s farewell to lost penguin Happy Feet,” BBC News, August 28, 2011, accessed January 10, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-14702100>; “Stephen Fry meets Happy Feet,” *The Dominion Post* (Wellington, NZ), August 11, 2011, accessed March 30, 2015, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/news/5428392/Stephen-Fry-meets-Happy-Feet>; “New Zealand’s lost penguin heads home,” NDTV, August 28, 2011, accessed March 30, 2015, <http://www.ndtv.com/world-news/new-zealands-lost-penguin-heads-home-465749>.

<sup>23</sup> Bonnie Malkin, “New Zealand penguin Happy Feet may have been eaten,” *The Telegraph* (UK), September 12, 2011, accessed January 10, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/australiaandthepacific/newzealand/8756767/New-Zealand-penguin-Happy-Feet-may-have-been-eaten.html>; Emma Bailey, “Happy Feet frolics in Caroline Bay,” *The Timaru Herald* (NZ), January 4, 2013, accessed January 10, 2015, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/timaru-herald/news/8493054/Happy-Feet-frolics-in-Caroline-Bay>.

<sup>24</sup> Wayne Linklater, “Happy Feet, unhappy ending?,” Op-ed, *The Dominion Post* (Wellington, NZ), August 3, 2011, accessed January 10, 2015, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/comment/5379975/Happy-Feet-unhappy-ending>. Linklater also pointed out that rehabilitating and releasing injured or ill birds can also spread diseases that threaten otherwise healthy, wild populations.

concern for the single marketable emperor penguin trumped global support for an entire endangered species of similar creatures found in the same location.<sup>25</sup>

Returning to pandas, some scientists have similarly questioned whether it would be more productive to focus on protecting wild panda habitat rather than trying to breed individual captive pandas who attract international attention but who are not adapted for re-introduction into the wild.<sup>26</sup> True, the Chinese government and groups like the National Zoo and WWF try to create that cognitive and emotional link between supporting the captive individuals and support for protection of wild habitats. But what happens if emotional interest in particular captive pandas is disrupted? Will the public's interest in wild pandas and habitats also be disrupted?

Sadly, the 2012 National Zoo panda birth leaves open this very question, as less than a week later the female cub died. At first, news of her death became as global a media event as her birth had been. According to a search of Google News at the time more than 800 news accounts globally announced the death, with the news listed as "Breaking" at the top of both the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* websites and as the lead story on both the Yahoo and Google News websites. The National Zoo received outpourings of grief and condolences from interested

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<sup>25</sup> To be fair, the local cachet of the Yellow-eyed penguin has grown in recent years, with more than 31,000 tourists annually visiting a rookery in Dunedin, New Zealand that has guided observations and viewing blinds. H. Ratz and C. Thompson, "Who is watching whom? Checks for impacts of tourists on Yellow-eyed penguins *Megadyptes antipodes*." *Marine Ornithology* 27 (1999): 205-210.

And these local eco-tours emphasize yellow-eyed penguins' conservation plight and need for financial support. The Penguin Place, an eco-tour facility in Dunedin, New Zealand, advertises on its website for yellow-eyed penguin tours that: "On any one of our tours, you are guaranteed to see penguins and in doing so you are helping in the survival of this endangered species." "Penguin Tour," Undated website, Penguin Place, accessed February 14, 2014, <http://www.penguinplace.co.nz/penguin-tour/>.

<sup>26</sup> Noel F.R. Snyder, et al., "Limitations of Captive Breeding in Endangered Species Recovery," *Conservation Biology* 10(2) (1996): 338-348; Christine Dell'Amore, "Is Breeding Pandas in Captivity Worth It?," *National Geographic News*, August 28, 2013, accessed March 18, 2015, <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/08/130827-giant-panda-national-zoo-baby-breeding-animals-science/>.

parties around the world. Follow-up stories in major national media outlets continued sporadically for a few weeks, covering autopsy results and the cause of death. But soon this one-time individual animal celebrity faded from view.<sup>27</sup>

And so what did that mean for the public's relationships with pandas? Certainly pandas remain a highly popular species, both in general and for visitors at the National Zoo. But having made the baby cub the focus of people's affection, did the zoo risk the loss of interest of more casual panda fans after the cub passed away? Much as many Antarctic tourists I encountered craved seeing "the" emperor penguin colony from *March of the Penguins* but having once seen emperor penguins they lost interest in additional sightings on our trip, does the interest in seeing an individual celebrity panda make other nameless pandas seem blasé by comparison? Or did this individual narrative help more people rally to the cause of protecting a celebrity wild species? Was it just another anecdote to fill the void of electronic distraction? In the end, I ultimately believe the individual celebrity animal can have value for the survival of species as a whole, but it is by no means guaranteed. This is why groups that try to produce individual animal celebrities must be so deliberate in understanding how to manage celebrity.

### **Up Close and Personal**

While my dissertation has tried to examine how certain species like pandas, penguins, elephants, and wolves become animal celebrities and the challenges for those interested in wildlife conservation in navigating this celebrity, the larger question I have tried to answer is *why* celebrity matters when thinking about our changing relationship with non-human animals

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<sup>27</sup> As best the zoo veterinarians could determine, the female cub had liver abnormalities that allowed a build-up of fluids in her body. JuJu Kim, "National Zoo Panda Cub Died of Lung and Liver Problems." *Time*, October 11, 2012, accessed February 14, 2015, <http://newsfeed.time.com/2012/10/11/national-zoo-panda-cub-died-of-lung-and-liver-problems/>.

beyond merely offering a new way of categorizing animals that expands upon the vague concept of “charismatic megafauna.” Indeed, several readers and friends have asked me over the course of this project why I focus on celebrity, as opposed to considering more broadly the ways in which the media mediate human-animal relationships.

Certainly I recognize how critical the relationship media are in mediating people’s thinking about non-human animals. Media transmit and shape narratives, becoming a primary conduit for how people create and share cultural discourse. In the case of conservation, media dialectically reflect and create many values people choose to ascribe to non-human nature. Is nature for our utilitarian purposes only? Is it something we should embrace as sacred? Is it separate from humans as groups like Defenders of Wildlife seem to imply? Is it something to be feared as groups like Lobo Watch argue about wolves?<sup>28</sup> Answers to these questions of values find their expression in media narratives and imagery. And the media that transmits them have been changing constantly in recent decades.

Thus, I entirely agree that understanding the broad role of media is critical to understanding human-animal relationships. As I have previously said: other species and their human champions must digitally adapt to the changing media landscape if they wish to improve their chances of surviving the Anthropocene – an accommodation every bit as vital as adaptations to changes in the physical environment. But to understand how to adapt to that changing media– and, indeed, to understand how our relationships to animals is changing – you must first understand celebrity, because celebrity is *the* engine that drives all forms of media.

Celebrities – whether explorers, movie stars, politicians, athletes, Jumbo the elephant, wolf 832F, or Mei Xiang the panda – have always been important characters in the long history

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<sup>28</sup> For an overview of the many values people assign non-human nature, see Stephen Kellert, *Kinship to Mastery* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1979).

of mass media, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century advent of popular newspapers to the current era of shared “cloud” Instagram digital photo feeds. But the quality of celebrity itself has undergone significant transformation over this same time.

First, the quest for celebrity and for “branded” identities has expanded into media narratives and realms of society that previously were less affected by questions of stardom.<sup>29</sup> Second, the dialectic interplay between media and celebrity has grown – the sheer volume of media content regularly produced and transmitted (and re-transmitted) now drives production of still further content in an effort to achieve notoriety that can stand out amidst this cacophonous Babel. Indeed, as a civilization we have created an unprecedented spiral of production and consumption of new media content. Consider, for example, that users of YouTube (itself but one of hundreds of online portals for video content) now upload 300 hours of content every minute and simultaneously consume six billion hours of video every month – the latter an increase of 900 percent since just 2010.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, because maintaining celebrity now depends upon being

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<sup>29</sup> Neil Postman argues that recent media has been distinguished from earlier forms of mass media by their total reliance on entertainment as the frame for all discourse, transforming everything from the nightly news – witness Brian Williams’ career setback mixing the worlds of talk show raconteur with news anchor – to political and educational debates. While Postman notes entertainment’s spread into discourses of news, politics, education, and religion, I wonder if even he would have anticipated its spread into the realm of conservation and wildlife. Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition.

<sup>30</sup> See Tad Friend, “Hollywood and Vine: The entertainment industry seeks the future in viral video,” *The New Yorker*, December 15, 2014, accessed December 16, 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/12/15/hollywood-vine>; “YouTube Statistics,” YouTube, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html>.

To put this consumption in perspective, it equates roughly to 1 out of every 560 waking hours of human existence consumed just watching YouTube videos – not counting consumption of *any* other media. But when you consider that estimates are that only 38 percent of humanity has connections to the Internet, for those who with Internet access the statistic is closer to a staggering 1 in every 213 waking hours spent just watching YouTube videos. All of this from a website not even 20 years old – truly human existence has fundamentally changed. *State of Connectivity: 2014 – A Report on Global Internet Access*, (Internet.org, 2015), accessed

omnipresent in this mass volume of media content, it is possible to become a celebrity merely by making oneself omnipresent, regardless of any accomplishment or inherent virtue one may possess – a phenomenon I mentioned in the Introduction celebrity scholars refer to as *celetoids*.

Finally, as Tad Friend pithily summarized in *The New Yorker*: “Stardom used to be predicated on a mystique derived from scarcity . . . now it’s predicated on a familiarity derived from ubiquity.”<sup>31</sup> We now live in a world where stars not only have to be everywhere, but they are expected to share the mundane, as well as the spectacular, of their existence. This in turn drives the production of even more media content, as so many people and entities participating in the mediaverse – celebrity, celetoid, and commoner alike – share every casual “personal” thought on Twitter, “private” Instagram photos, and “home” video clips on YouTube (and sometimes also the “outtakes” and “making of” videos and stories of these ostensibly “as-they-happened” moments). This has encouraged in turn the creation of entirely new forms and platforms of media for people to engage with this content – media like Twitter and Snapchat and other microblogging or messaging services that through portable, haptic interfaces like the Apple Watch may soon infiltrate even more moments and places in Americans’ daily life.

Celebrity’s enmeshment within media and media’s transformation of much of civil society has led many a critic to issue fearful or despairing Jeremiads – warning society of the dangers of this brave new world while simultaneously trying to fend off charges of Luddism that frequently emerge when anyone fails to embrace wholeheartedly the evolution of new media and its drivers. Included in this group are several critics I have cited throughout this dissertation like Neil Postman on the entertainment-ization of media; Nicholas Carr on the ways new media are

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February 25, 2015, <https://fbnewsroomus.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/state-of-connectivity1.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> Friend, “Hollywood and Vine.”



reshaping the biochemistry of human thought; and Daniel Boorstin on the deleterious effects of modern forms of celebrity generally.

And returning to my Introduction, clearly I fall into this category at times with my fears about the effects of media celebrity on human-animal relationships. I can bemoan how the celebrity mediaverse may lead to a loss at times of everyday wonder in the natural world, an increase in our distraction from the world around us, and a change in our aspirations for wildlife encounters merely to reify already-known spectacles and stories of other species rather than offering the surprise of serendipity. And, for me, these remain real fears. But even for those who do not share them, I hope this dissertation makes the argument that to be concerned with the future of other species (and our own) in the Anthropocene means we must reckon with how non-human animals fit into our celebrity mediaverse.<sup>32</sup>

### **The Meek (perhaps) Shall Inherit**

Indeed, scared or not, those of us who care about conservation cannot merely decry the changing media landscape of celebrity, cover our ears, and hope it somehow all goes away – for now, this celebrity mediaverse is a dominant force of society. And thus we should recognize that not only does it present challenges to be navigated but also potential benefits for conservation, as I have tried to suggest previously, that should be recognized and explored.

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<sup>32</sup> A few critics have at least started to acknowledge the concept of “celebrity animals” as being the latest in a long line of differing human-animal relationships. Jon Mooallem, for example, notes that the Internet media allow for easier celestoid fame for unusual animal videos and notes that the celebrity of individual animals like polar bears can be deployed in service of larger advocacy campaigns, like polar bears being used for climate change advocacy. But he never unpacks the definition of *celebrity* as to how it differs from other forms of human-animal relationship. Jon Mooallem, *Wild Ones: A Sometimes Dismaying, Weirdly Reassuring Story About Looking at People Looking at Animals in America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014).

First, the evolution of new forms of interconnected global media platforms has allowed new animal celebrities to emerge from a fan-dom cobbled together from people all over the world. Just as 832F and Journey have garnered online fans from Europe and Asia and places far removed from Yellowstone National Park, individuals of many other species geo-tracked or documented online have found new fans in far-flung locations. For example, the Tagging of Pacific Predators project allowed viewers worldwide to follow for a decade 23 marine individuals – from Monty the mako shark to Jon Sealwart and Stelephant Colbert the northern elephant seals – offering near-real time data about these animals’ movements and online digital trading cards to anyone who wanted to build a relationship with these animals.<sup>33</sup>

For individuals and groups interested in conservation, developing a similar online, a-geographical constituency that supports particular individuals and their species offers a form of power that potentially can be leveraged in policy and conservation battles in the offline world. For better and worse, these constituencies can become new stakeholder groups – exemplifying a form of what Ursula Heise terms “eco-cosmopolitanism,” where people have feelings of place-attachment to locations and nature to which they have no physical connection.<sup>34</sup> Hence the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has to take into account the global tourism value of Yellowstone wolves when weighing the costs and benefits of their reintroduction against the loss of local livestock to wolf depredations. But similarly, the concerns of local wildlife managers in southern

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<sup>33</sup> “Tagging of Pelagic Predators,” Undated website, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://www.topp.org/>; See also: Emily Anthes, “Tracking the Pack,” *The New York Times*, February 3, 2013, accessed February 8, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/04/opinion/tracking-the-pack>. Anthes points out that online followings have developed for animals as unexpected as dairy cows, where 12 tagged cows in the Teat Tweet project send automated tweets on Twitter announcing how much milk they produce each time they are milked.

<sup>34</sup> Ursula Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Africa who see their elephant population outstripping the carrying capacity of local protected parks get weighed against global support for African elephants and fears about the status of the species as a whole. Balancing the rights of local stakeholders with those of a new place-less global constituency can make policy determinations even more fraught with tension and lead to charges of eco-colonial interference by urban, wealthy, and Western outsiders with the rights and interests of local residents living with and adjacent to the wildlife in question.

But these eco-cosmopolitan constituencies can also help to create economic values and opportunities for the preservation of intact ecosystems and species that had previously not had much role in local economies. As but one example, as I mentioned at the end of Chapter 2, global interest in seeing gorillas has led to nearly 20,000 annual tourist visits to Volcanoes National Park to Rwanda, helping tourism become one of the main sources of foreign exchange in Rwanda in a way it had not been prior to the 1970s.<sup>35</sup>

To offer another example from personal experience, global interest in cranes has allowed Muraviotka Park in Far East Russia to create eco-cosmopolitan connections for “Friends” groups in South Korea, China, Russia, and the United States to help the park endure as the only privately managed nature preserve in Russia, providing vital nesting ground for endangered Red-crowned cranes (*Grus japonensis*) and vulnerable White-naped cranes (*Grus vipio*), as well as the endangered Oriental stork (*Ciconia boyciana*).<sup>36</sup> In the process, the park has also become a

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<sup>35</sup> It should be noted that the vast majority of Rwandan tourists are not holiday tourists but business travelers. Nevertheless, emphasis on wildlife tourism, especially to see the gorillas, has resulted in innovative revenue-sharing programs that help develop community projects in the areas surrounding protected parks – building wells, schools, and other needed programs. Hannah Nielsen and Anna Spenceley, *The Success of Tourism in Rwanda: Gorillas and More*. (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2011), accessed March 10, 2015, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/9240>.

<sup>36</sup> I serve on the board of the American Friends of Muraviotka Park (FOMP) group, which is affiliated with the International Crane Foundation (ICF) in Baraboo, Wisconsin.

cultural center for the local region, drawing together local artists at international festivals and providing educational training about tourism, translation, and wildlife for local students.

A second advantage of celebrity is that – when celebrity can come from ubiquity in media regardless of the innate qualities of the individual – there is the potential for creating conservation interest in “celetoid” individuals from animal species that traditionally have not been considered neotenous, charismatic, or popular. This still leaves open the question of whether interest in these individual stars will transfer to the conservation of species as a whole and be sustainable as celebrity beyond random events; but at least celetoid individuals can provide an initial toehold to gain regard in the mediaverse for species that had rarely been significant parts of the cultural discourse before.

Consider the unlikely celebrity of Paul the Octopus, a common octopus (*Octopus vulgaris*) kept at a Sea Life Centres aquarium in Oberhausen, Germany. Paul shot to fame in 2008 and 2010 for correctly picking winners of 11 out of 13 FIFA soccer matches – his picks being registered based on which of two food containers he would open first when given a choice. His fame became global, prompting regular stories of his predictions in major news outlets worldwide, respectful reports upon his death in October 2010, and even condemnation from Iranian leader Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Paul as a symbol of Western decadence and decay.<sup>37</sup> Even after his death, he lived on – both in the form of multiple “Ask the Octopus” iTunes apps

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<sup>37</sup> Paul Armstrong, “Would you trust World Cup’s octopus oracle?,” *CNN.com*, July 9, 2010, accessed February 15, 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/SPORT/football/07/08/germany.octopus.explainer/index.html?iref=allsearch&fbid=Jooe3DILDf8>; “Paul the World Cup octopus dies in his tank in Germany,” BBC News, October 26, 2010, accessed February 15, 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11626050>; “Mahmoud Ahmadinejad attacks Octopus Paul,” *The Telegraph* (UK), July 27, 2010, accessed February 15, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/germany/7912418/Mahmoud-Ahmadinejad-attacks-Octopus-Paul.html>.

that allow users to have an animated Paul make predictions for them and as an animated angel hidden in Google's doodle logo on its main search page during the 2014 World Cup Final.<sup>38</sup> This one individual, at least temporarily, helped make octopi more familiar and ubiquitous members of cultural discourse than they otherwise normally are – perhaps building interest in subsequent stories about individual octopi, such as the recent media splash about the Seattle aquarium's new Giant Pacific octopus (*Enteroctopus dofleini*) resident (as yet unnamed) who tried to escape from his exhibit (as seen via a visitor's cellphone video shared virally online more than one million times in just three days).<sup>39</sup> Whether this newfound popularity will ultimately increase regard for octopus conservation remains to be seen (although, of course, no octopus species is currently listed even as "Vulnerable" yet on the IUCN Red List).<sup>40</sup> But at least this popularity has made octopi a bit more visible in the broader cultural discourse.

Or consider a case of a human celebrity helping to highlight a new animal celetoid when television star Kristen Bell shared in 2012 her long-standing love of sloths. Surprised by her

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<sup>38</sup> Samuel Axon, "Paul the Octopus Gets His Own (Unofficial) iPhone App," *Mashable.com*, July 14, 2010, accessed February 18, 2015, <http://mashable.com/2010/07/14/paul-the-octopus-iphone-app/>. As of February 2015, the iTunes store offered 17 different ask-an-octopus apps for download.

"Is today's World Cup final Google doodle carrying a hidden message?," *Outside of the Boot.com*, July 13, 2014, accessed February 18, 2015, <http://outsideoftheboot.com/2014/07/13/is-todays-world-cup-final-google-doodle-carrying-a-hidden-message/>.

<sup>39</sup> "So long, suckers: octopus caught leaving tank not escaping, says Seattle aquarium," *The Guardian* (US), March 6, 2015, accessed March 7, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/06/octopus-seattle-aquarium-escape-video>. See also: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BIGG3m-8ZMQ>.

<sup>40</sup> Again to be fair, octopi already had some cultural cachet even before Paul, being mentioned in everything from the Beatles' 1969 song "Octopus's Garden" to French underwater filmmaker Jean Painlevé's respected 1965 short film *Amours de la pieuvre* (Love Life of the Octopus).

And in terms of conservation interest, even before Paul, the octopus was one of only two invertebrates (the other being a Monarch butterfly) available as a species for potential WWF donors to "adopt" – having been among the initial 40 species offered when the program started. Personal communication with WWF, March 31, 2015.

husband with a birthday visit with a sloth, Ms. Bell went into hysterics, as captured on a home video. The video went viral online, getting more than 20 million views after *The Ellen Show* posted a clip in January 2012.<sup>41</sup> While the video is mainly notable for Bell’s over-the-top reaction, it did help popularize sloths – a species that had just started growing an online fandom. Only one month earlier *The Washington Post* had declared that “sloths are the new kittens” of Internet video crazes, while the television network Animal Planet had aired a documentary special *Too Cute! Baby Sloths*.<sup>42</sup> Sloth fandom continues to grow, with online groups such as “Slothville – Headquarters of the Sloth Appreciation Society” – liked by more than 29,000 people on Facebook – selling photos, videos, and calendars in support of sloth conservation.<sup>43</sup>

Or consider how – with slick production values, humorous narration, and excellent visuals – even species as non-charismatic as the naked mole rat can become (however fleetingly) minor online animal celebrities. Ze Frank, now executive vice-president of video for the popular website BuzzFeed, created in partial cooperation with BBC Worldwide the animal video series “True Facts About . . .” that elevated the exploits of little known “odd” animals into popular

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<sup>41</sup> “Kristen Bell’s Sloth Meltdown,” last modified January 30, 2012, YouTube, The Ellen Show, accessed February 15, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5jw3T3Jy70>.

<sup>42</sup> Maura Judkis, “Sloths are the new kittens,” *The Washington Post Style Blog*, December 21, 2011, accessed February 15, 2015, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/arts-post/post/sloths-are-the-new-kittens/2011/12/21/gIQANE2j9O\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/arts-post/post/sloths-are-the-new-kittens/2011/12/21/gIQANE2j9O_blog.html).

<sup>43</sup> As of February 2015, Slothville also had more 3,000 Twitter followers. See: “Slothville,” Undated website, accessed February 15, 2015, <http://www.slothville.com/>; “Slothville Facebook page,” accessed February 15, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Slothville/205151536190455>.

According to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, of the six sloth species two are vulnerable, with the Pygmy Three-toed sloth (*Bradypus pygmaeus*) critically endangered. B. Voirin, et al., “*Bradypus pygmaeus*,” Version 2014.3, The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, accessed March 7, 2015, <http://www.iucnredlist.org>.

comedic info-tainment, seen by as many as 15 million viewers each. Odd animal stars from Frank's series included the anglerfish, the mantis shrimp, the echidna, and the dung beetle.<sup>44</sup>

None of these examples has necessarily spawned as sustained or lasting a phenomenon of animal celebrity as penguins or pandas . . . at least not yet. Moreover, as always it remains to be seen how well groups interested in conservation of these particular celetoid animals can leverage public interest in the stories of individual personalities into support for conservation and preservation of the generic species. But the fact that celebrity and notoriety is possible at all for animals that have not traditionally received consideration as "charismatic megafauna" should offer hope to those working with less heralded species like nematodes or snail darters.

### **O Brave New World**

In both Miranda's speech in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and the Aldous Huxley dystopic novel that drew its title from this passage, the authors' use of the phrase "brave new world" conceals a degree of ironic commentary. Both goodly creatures and beauteous mankind exist within a world of concealed treacheries – whether the betrayal of men in the original play or a society drowning in "a sea of irrelevance" and distraction in the latter novel.<sup>45</sup>

The "brave new world" of celebrity media conceals many pitfalls and hidden problems, not the least of which are the digital distractions Huxley feared. But the world of celebrity is not

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<sup>44</sup> Zach Dionne, "Learn True Facts About Sloths, Moles, and Making a YouTube Hit: Ze Frank Reinvents the Nature Show," *Co.Create*, March 29, 2013, accessed February 15, 2015, <http://www.fastcocreate.com/1682681/learn-true-facts-about-sloths-moles-and-making-a-youtube-hit-ze-frank-reinvents-the-nature-s#2>. See also: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHi9FvUPSdQ>. As of February 2015, the Naked Mole Rat video had more than 2.4 million views, along with 3.4 million views for the Dung Beetle, 5.8 million views of the Mantis Shrimp video, 6.2 million views of the Echidna video, and a staggering 15 million views of the Angler Fish video. See: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLOHbM4GGWADc5bZgzbivvtAuWGow6h05>.

<sup>45</sup> The latter being Postman's summary of Huxley's fears for the future of mankind. Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, xix.

without value. Indeed, with respect to non-human animals and our relations with them celebrity media offers potential for hope: because as long as celebrity animals exist in our digital media world, then non-human species in some way remain part of our overall community of concern.

As I noted in the Introduction, Aldo Leopold’s land ethic argued that humans need to “enlarge the boundaries of the community” we care about to include other species and their habitats, making us all equal citizens of the land.<sup>46</sup> Leopold’s vision of a land ethic was one where individual landowners create a mosaic of habitats for wildlife on their own lands intermixed with larger habitats protected by government – a vision connecting landscapes ranging in scale from large protected “wilderness” to smaller farm fields and wooded tracts to tiny urban and suburban lawns and gardens. As the digital world increasingly interpenetrates our physical world, Leopold’s vision of protecting habitats for non-human animals now needs to be extended to protecting species in the dimension-less spaces of our digital landscapes as well.

And you need go no further than your own backyard to see evidence this phenomenon has already started to occur, with celebrity and media helping rethink our relationships to other animals and place. Consider one final example.

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With more than 46 million Americans considering themselves birders, birding is one of the most popular hobbies in the United States. For more than 100 years, birding in the United States has encouraged people to value species as a whole and to support their conservation. For example, after the publication in 1889 of Florence Merriam’s *Birds Through An Opera Glass* – the first popular American bird guide – birdwatching was actively promoted as a pastime explicitly for the purpose of altering American women’s appreciation of birds, discouraging their

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<sup>46</sup> Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), Special Commemorative Edition, 204.



use of bird feathers in millinery.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, early supporters of birdwatching encouraged people to see birds as “part of the life of the land,” especially in urban landscapes where people might otherwise feel alienated from a sense of nature.<sup>48</sup> And by getting people to understand the life cycles and migratory patterns of birds, birdwatching also encouraged early forms of eco-cosmopolitanism – with birders becoming a force for conservation of national and international habitat for migrant birds whose flights took them far beyond birders’ hometowns.

But the evolution of media further has changed birders’ understanding of birds. For example, advances in printing technology allowed for more sophisticated field guides that offered new cues for birders to use in identifying fleeting or partially hidden individuals in the wild. Later development of CDs and downloadable apps containing bird calls advanced bird identification to allow for greater non-visual recognition of birds. Similarly, while birders long shared information person-to-person about sightings of rare and migrant birds, the Internet now allows them to share this information instantaneously to millions of people who might want to go out and experience these birds. Casual birders now share sophisticated analyses of Doppler radar data each spring to plot exactly when and where great masses of neo-tropical migrants return to the United States.<sup>49</sup>

And the digital evolution of media has also allowed for the creation of a virtual landscape of bird celebrities that reach a broader audience than just casual or dedicated hobbyists. Indeed, one recent spring I was sitting in a classroom with graduate students from the University of

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<sup>47</sup> Thomas Dunlap, *In the Field Among the Feathered: A History of Birders and Their Guides*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>49</sup> Marissa Fessenden, “How Bird Migrations Show Up Beautifully on Doppler Radar,” *Smithsonian.com.*, September 24, 2014, accessed March 11, 2015, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/how-doppler-radar-can-track-bird-migrations-180952834/?no-ist>. An aggregate site linking to the many birding sites that use Doppler radar can be found here: [http://people.mbi.ohio-state.edu/hurtado.10/US\\_Composite\\_Radar/](http://people.mbi.ohio-state.edu/hurtado.10/US_Composite_Radar/).

Wisconsin-Madison learning about ways to transform our classroom learning environments. And joining us for the discussion was an example of one such strategy for changing the classroom: a pair of nesting Bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) participating as virtual companions projected onto one wall from live webcam feed of a nest in Decorah, Iowa.

And we weren't the only ones watching – that year the Decorah Bald Eagles had become major celebrities, with their webcam feed attracting more than 200 million views from fans in 184 countries. A Facebook page set up to support the Raptor Resources Project that had placed the webcam on the nest received more than 39,000 likes and offered a map tracking real-time travels of the geo-tagged eagles.<sup>50</sup> Closer to home, people in Madison and worldwide were also watching a “hawk cam” set on a ledge of the Geology building on the UW-Madison campus, which that same summer had more than 590,000 visits from fans in 100 countries to see the fledging of a new nest of Red-tailed hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*).<sup>51</sup> Farther afield, the king of urban avian celebrities, Pale Male, a red-tailed hawk living near Central Park in New York City, continued to be followed by his legion of global fans – fans who had been learning since 1990 about his mates, chicks, and exploits via diverse media ranging from regular newspaper reports, a children's book, a blog, and television and film documentaries like *The Legend of Pale Male*.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> “Raptor Resource Project,” Undated website, accessed December 8, 2014, <http://www.raptorresource.org/us.htm>. See also: “Baby eagle fever! 4 million per day log on to check out newborn baby eaglets,” *The Daily Mail* (UK), April 12, 2011, accessed March 10, 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1376282/Bald-eagle-fever-4million-day-log-check-newborn-baby-eaglets.html>.

<sup>51</sup> “‘Empty Nest Syndrome’ Strikes Hawk Cam,” Space Science and Engineering Center, UW-Madison, June 11, 2012, accessed December 8, 2014, <http://www.ssec.wisc.edu/news/articles/589>.

<sup>52</sup> Vicki Croke, “Spying On the World's Most Famous Hawk: Pale Male,” WBUR *The Wild Life*, November 6, 2014, accessed December 8, 2014, <http://thewildlife.wbur.org/2014/11/06/spying-on-the-worlds-most-famous-hawk/>; Thomas J. Lueck, “Reprise: The Fifth Avenue Ballad of Pale Male and Lola,” *The New York Times*, May 1, 2008, accessed December 8, 2014. (LexisNexis Academic).

For all of us watching these celebrity birds, they were now part of a new virtual human community – one created in our homes, classrooms, laptops, and cell phones. But these virtual animal celebrities were also living members of physical landscapes – landscapes that happened to be largely human-dominated in their composition.

Thoreau argued: “In Wildness is the preservation of the world.”<sup>53</sup> But like the pandas espied on the National Zoo’s webcam or wolves like Journey followed online, these celebrity birds both embodied and blurred the mental categories we so often divide our worlds into – human versus wild, digital versus physical. By spying on these virtual animal celebrities, those of us watching have an opportunity to appreciate and create anew a “wildness” always lurking in supposedly “human” landscapes.<sup>54</sup> Ethical regard for online animal celebrities potentially improves our ethical regard for living animals – starting to meet Leopold’s land ethic vision. And blurring a virtual world of animal celebrity with a human landscape may be the first step in helping people re-define and re-value all our physical landscapes – encouraging us to work on co-existing in community with more wildlife – one that is perhaps more like a “rambunctious garden,” a vision many conservation scientists now advocate as the best hope for future conservation in the Anthropocene.<sup>55</sup> So if animal celebrity can offer more such encounters like these in the future, then, o wonder, what a brave new world it might un-ironically be.

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<sup>53</sup> Henry David Thoreau, “Walking,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 9(56) (1862): 657-674, accessed March 10, 2015, <http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Walking>.

<sup>54</sup> For more on the potential of these new technologies to create “cross-species sympathy,” see: Etienne Benson, *Wired Wilderness: Technologies of Tracking and the Making of Modern Wildlife* (Baltimore, The John Hopkins Press, 2010), 191.

<sup>55</sup> Emma Marris, *The Rambunctious Garden: Saving Nature in a Post-Wild World* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011). In the view of Marris and other scientists and advocates in the same vein, the future will depend upon valuing novel ecosystems that rely on hybrid human landscapes to preserve species and ecosystem functions, even if they’re not in the same form as historical ecosystems.

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