

Do the Leaders in Profession help/ don't help in conservation? Why?

In 'Follow-The-Leader' initiative Payal and Karthikeyan enlightened me about the nature guide profession. This profession is aligned with the ecotourism industry which has both positive as well negative impact on wildlife.

I have analysed the perspective and enlisted my points referring to some research papers. Let's look at the positive side. Ecotourism has net positive impact on conservation because it creates revenue for conservation and contributes to increase in species survival (Buckley et al. 2016) it creates livelihood for local communities and aligns with sustainable development goals (Stronza et al. 2019) and acts as an educative initiative towards sensitisation towards wildlife, it seems the best collaborative strategy that promotes participation from locals.

There are criticisms of ecotourism as well, because conservation is just one aspect of

ecotourism. The impacts it can have on protected areas can be:

- change in the land use by new resorts and lodges,
- increased pressure on resources increases as water and electricity are exploited for guest comforts,
- waste disposal can be hazard to wildlife species as well as nearby habitats, affects health of wild animals adversely (Holmes 2018),
- effects it has on behaviour of wild animals and makes them vulnerable (Geffroy et al. 2015).

Presence of more people in protected areas dilutes the intent of keeping animals undisturbed in natural habitats. Photographers and recreational tourists are interested in charismatic species that are bigger and appear vivid. Ecotourism is an industry that intends to encourage consumption and make profit; hence conservation measures are compromised often. The communities living around could be neglected because of lack of vocational skills, therefore upskilling, re-skilling becomes necessary.

Ethics followed by nature guides is subjective to individual perceptions, it contributes to the health of ecosystems because:

1. the tourists consciously/ unconsciously mimic nature guides behaviour.
2. assertiveness by nature guide is necessary in scenarios where money power may deteriorate ecosystems.



3. guides, hosts and guests are on boarded with some common but mostly different expectations, nature guides being executioners must advocate for conservation aspects of tourism.

From the above discussion I feel professionals in ecotourism depend on the guests or/ and hosts for their own livelihood unless they are entrepreneurs; it can become a deciding factor for conservation vs staying employed. These professionals do have good intent and help in contributing to conservation to some extent.

There is a possibility that local tribals/ rural populations could be forced by capitalists and bureaucrats to leave their local lands for construction of resorts. Lack of policy in ecotourism creates an ambiguity. Some ecotourism initiatives bloom with huge profits and some fail miserably, both are lose-lose for wildlife, too much profit equals resource exploitation and loss equals no funds for conservation.

There are also lack of

1. longitudinal studies that reflect impact of ecotourism on species conservation, habitat conservation.
2. information on anthropogenic threats of ecotourism.
3. ecological models to predict survival of species affected by ecotourism.
4. ecological models to mitigate issues in ecotourism.

There is a need to advance the theories in conservation science that contribute to the management of protected areas.

Therefore, a leader's profession, being a nature guide takes us back to the principles of conservation, sticking to ethics, being assertive, and balanced execution of programmes. Taking deliberate measures to prohibit steering towards commercial tourism is a challenge that can be taken up by a nature guide.

References

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