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BALANCING THE COSTS AND BENEFITS OF PRIMATE TOURISM

M.P. Muehlenbein

Indiana University, Bloomington, United States

Organizer's Email: mpm1@indiana.edu

Like other types of nature-based tourism, primate tourism (viewing wild or rehabilitated apes and monkeys in source countries) can promote conservation by increasing public awareness, empowering community members to take action against habitat degradation and poaching, and raise much needed funds for the protection of endangered species. However, intensive, unmonitored use of habitats for tourism can produce deleterious effects on animal well-being through habitat loss, pollution, crowding, and the introduction of invasive species. Habituation and range restriction can alter animal behaviors and may affect endocrine stress responses. Nonhuman primates are particularly susceptible to human infections, and the problem becomes exacerbated by the fact that many travelers are under-vaccinated, potentially infectious, and lack a clear understanding about the susceptibility of these animals to the human condition. Given these potential costs, various regulations have been implemented at wildlife sanctuaries and ecotourism destinations. Our symposium brings together experts on primate conservation and behavior, infectious disease ecology, and tourism management from Japan, Singapore, United Kingdom, Malaysia, and United States to facilitate discussion regarding the costs and benefits associated with primate tourism. We aim to disseminate primary research on these costs and benefits involving case studies on several sentinel species. Furthermore, we aim to add to the continued development of tourism regulations at these locations and develop an agenda about how to better communicate these issues to tourism personnel and the general public. As the ecotourism industry continues its rapid expansion, we must better understand and communicate the risks of negatively affecting these endangered species.