

Lines in the Sand:
An Anthropological Discourse
on Wildlife Tourism

By

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Abstract

The management of wildlife tourism has been dominated by ideologies informed by western colonialism and its values of nature. These ideologies, made transparent through communicative and interpretative discourses, influence the way management policies and practices are devised and enacted. The inherent scientific and utilitarian views are supported by a doctrine of separation. This is apparent in the dualism posed, and enacted, between nature and culture that sees humans as being the sole carriers of culture that separates them from the uncultured and uncivilised world of nature into which all other animals, and certainly untamed wildlife, belong. It justifies the use of non-humans for human purposes and continues to allow us to treat non-human animals and other forms of nature in often abominable ways.

This thesis investigates two situations in which wildlife tourism occurs in Australia. Fraser Island and Penguin Island are two wildlife tourism destinations on opposite sides of the continent with very different wildlife but some very similar issues. From these two contexts data was collected through interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and from literary and documentary sources. Understanding the empirical data collected from these case studies is facilitated through a social constructionist view of discourse analysis that allows an unpacking of the messages and a stance from which to challenge the dominant ideologies that frame management and interaction.

In the thesis I demonstrate that anthropology, in its incarnation as environmental anthropology and as a team player in a necessarily interdisciplinary approach to understanding and resolving environmental issues, has much to offer. This engagement has the potential to enhance not only the sustainable future of nature-based activities like wildlife tourism but also the relevance of anthropology in the postcolonial contemporary world.

The need for a holistic framework encompassing all the stakeholders in any wildlife tourism venture is proposed. This approach to wildlife tourism is best serviced by examining perspectives, values and concerns of all members of the wildlife tourism community at any given destination. It is only through this type of holistic and situated focus that we can hope to effectively understand, and then manage, in the best interests of all parties.

More specifically, and finally, I argue for a rethinking of the way wildlife tourism interactions are managed in some settings. The ideology of separation, enacted both conceptually and physically to create maintain boundaries, is demonstrated through the two case studies and the ways in which interactions between humans and wildlife are currently managed. An alternative is posed, that by reconstructing management in settings where wildlife tourists may be more accepting of their own responsibility towards nature, a model can be developed that allows people and wildlife to co-exist without 'killing' the natural instincts of either.

Statement of Originality

This thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma at any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where reference is made in the thesis itself.

Georgette Leah Burns

26 May 2008

Publications Arising from this Thesis

The following seven publications have arisen directly from the research undertaken during my candidature for this degree. Modified versions of these are used, and acknowledged, throughout the thesis.

Burns, G. L. (accepted, in press) Managing Wildlife for People or People for Wildlife? A case study of dingoes and tourism on Fraser Island, Queensland, Australia. J. Hill and T. Gale (eds), *Ecotourism and Environmental Sustainability: An examination of concepts, theories and practice*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Hyttén, K. and Burns, G. L. 2007 Deconstructing Dingo Management on Fraser Island, Queensland: The significance of social constructionism for effective wildlife management. *Australasian Journal of Environmental Management*, 14:40-49.

Burns, G. L. 2006 The Fascination of Fur and Feathers: Managing human-animal interactions in wildlife tourism settings. *Australian Zoologist*, 33(4):446-457.

Burns, G. L. 2004a Anthropology and Tourism: Past contributions and future theoretical challenges. *Anthropological Forum*, 14(1):5-22.

Burns, G. L. 2004b The Host Community in Wildlife Tourism. In K. Higginbottom (ed), *Wildlife Tourism: Impacts, management and Planning*. Gold Coast: Common Ground Publishing. Pp 125-144.

Burns, G. L. and Howard, P. 2003 When Wildlife Tourism Goes Wrong: A case study of stakeholder and management issues regarding Dingoes on Fraser Island, Australia. *Tourism Management*, 24(6): 699-712.

Burns, G. L. and Sofield, T. H. B. 2001 *The Host Community: Social and cultural issues concerning wildlife tourism*. Status Assessment of Wildlife Tourism in Australia. Gold Coast: CRC for Sustainable Tourism.

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I have called the final section of this thesis ‘concluding the journey’ but of course there is much to the journey that is not told throughout its pages. It has taken me on a journey that has spanned many years and many life changes. Being a student has been one role amongst many of mother, wife, daughter, sister (and other familial roles), as well as lecturer, colleague, friend (and other social roles). Because of this length, and breadth, the path travelled has touched the lives of many others whom I want to thank for their help, patience and sharing of knowledge.

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