

Conservation Caring: Using Psychology and Statistics to Save Wildlife

Tuesday, October 30, 2018 - 12:00-1:00 PM EDT

Q&A

Thank you to everyone who was able to join us on 10/30 for this webinar, especially those who asked such great follow up questions. We were not able to get to all of the questions during the webinar so our presenter, Dr. Jeffrey Skibins, Assistant Professor in Recreation & Park Management at East Carolina University, took the time to type up some additional responses. *Notes in italics* were added by Joy Ackerman, Co-Director of Antioch University New England's Conservation Psychology Institute, who served as moderator for the webinar.

Q: What are the downsides for use of flagship species that are economically important e.g. groupers, tuna?

A: It would seem that economically important species would be particularly susceptible to common pitfalls of flagship use, such as overlaying non-conservation topics or popularity. The main question to using species of economic value is what is the message you are linking to them. For example, they might be very relevant to overfishing or sustainable sea food campaigns.

Q: How can zoos collaborate with programs for the conservation of large carnivores to increase public connection with biodiversity conservation. How do you suggest large carnivores may become flagship species for biodiversity conservation, considering the strong, conflicting attitudes people may have towards them? ...also, what to avoid!

A: This is a great question, but also very complex. This is direction that needs much more focus and can be very productive for conservation. Please contact me directly and we can schedule a time to talk.
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Q: Is there a consequence to using anthropomorphism to generate caring?

A: The use of anthropomorphism is just one of many dimensions to charisma. The best approach is to appeal to as many charismatic elements as possible. However, for anthropomorphism specifically, it is important to make sure the interpretive message is presenting it analogously and not directly ascribing human features to the animal.

Q: You say that anthropomorphism is necessary for making connections, but what if staff at your institution does not like that?

A: Of course, you should abide by institutional policy. However, there is a large and growing amount of empirical support in the literature for using anthropomorphism. I would be happy to send you a list of references.

Q: How is conservation caring measured?

A: Conservation Caring is a scale I developed. The full article can be found here:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/251235431_Conservation_Caring_Measuring_the_Influence_of_Zoo_Visitors'_Connection_to_Wildlife_on_Pro-Conservation_Behaviors

The scale itself is in the powerpoint presentation. The scale functions as a composite variable. In other words, you add the scores for each question and divide by the total number of questions used. This creates an average conservation caring score for that individual. I would be happy to explain all the statistical maneuverings you can do if you would like to contact me directly.

Q: Can you say more about species like sea jellies appealing to the peripheral processing route?

A: The exhibit itself was at a very high level of professional production (e.g., lighting, sound, environment). As such, it is possible, some of the attraction was attributable to the ‘whiz-bang’ or novelty element of the exhibit itself, and not the scientific messaging. At that time, the project did not have the bandwidth necessary to untangle that issue.

Q: How can we reinvigorate public interest in backyard wildlife, like squirrels, to minimize the impact of ecotourism travel?

A: I would recommend starting with William Cronon’s essay, “The trouble with wilderness” and the books, “Rambunctious Garden” and “Thinking like a mall: Environmental philosophy after the end of nature”. As a whole we need to develop campaigns that encourage people to “see” the wilderness in their backyards and to connect to everyday nature, such as squirrels, in a manner parallel grizzly bears or elephants. Campaigns such as ‘Backyards for biodiversity’ and environmentally responsible golf courses are great places to start. Also working directly with local bird feeding/gardening shops is a great way to connect people to the nature in their neighborhood.

Citations Added:

*Cronon, W. (1996). The trouble with wilderness. Uncommon Ground : Rethinking the Human Place in Nature
William Cronon, Editor*

*Marris, E. (2011). Rambunctious garden : Saving nature in a post-wild world (1st U.S. ed.). New York:
Bloomsbury.*

*Vogel, S. (2016). Thinking like a mall : Environmental philosophy after the end of nature. Cambridge,
Massachusetts: MIT Press. (2016).*

Q: Why is there a greater tendency to focus on the conservation of faraway places and not enough on the backyard/ local wildlife? Is this because of the visitor/tourist preferences or are there some other factors that are setting the stage?

A: I don’t have a good answer for this, as it is a very deep and philosophical question. The short answer is that this is the pattern that has developed over time. There is no reason that can’t change.

Q: Have you studied the conservation caring response of voting? (i.e. in addition to giving and volunteering)

A: One of the behavioral questions often included in studies is, “I will only vote for politicians who prioritize wildlife conservation.” Conservation caring is a strong predictor of this behavior, i.e., increased conservation caring scores indicate increased likelihood of that voting pattern. However, the overall likelihood of performing that behavior is still quite low (average scores of 4 or less out of 9)

Q: Can you reiterate the definition of Conservation Psychology? Is it an "officially" accepted term?

A: I am not clear on what you consider an “officially” accepted term. However, within the academic and practitioner community, conservation psychology is a widely utilized and studied discipline/field of study. Many universities around the country offer courses and concentrations in conservation psychology. Zoos, national parks, and protected areas often utilize conservation psychology frameworks to develop behavioral and communication plans. The following are two key citations that can provide you with more information regarding the development and definition of conservation psychology:

Clayton S, Myers OG. 2009. Conservation psychology: understanding and promoting human care for nature. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell. *This textbook is now in the 2nd edition, 2015.*

Saunders CD. 2003. The emerging field of conservation psychology. *Hum Ecol Rev* 10:137–149. *This special issue includes an essay proposing the field as well as responses from other social scientists.*

The Oxford Handbook of Environmental and Conservation Psychology, Susan Clayton, ed. 2012. Oxford University Press. This edition of the handbook includes a history of the fields of environmental and conservation psychology, in addition to literature reviews of current research in topic areas such as Children and Nature, Environmental Attitudes, Environmental Values, Environmental Identity, Cultural Differences in Environmental Engagement.

Q: In the Behaviors model slide, you noted examples of value sets with the acronyms: NEP, CNS, EAN - can you tell us what those are?

A: NEP: New Ecological Paradigm

Dunlap, R. E., Van Liere, K. D., Mertig, A. G., & Jones, R. E. (2000). New trends in measuring environmental attitudes: measuring endorsement of the new ecological paradigm: a revised NEP scale. *Journal of social issues*, 56(3), 425-442.

CNS: Connectedness to Nature Scale

Mayer, F. S., & Frantz, C. M. (2004). The connectedness to nature scale: A measure of individuals' feeling in community with nature. *Journal of environmental psychology*, 24(4), 503-515.

EAN: Emotional Affinity to Nature scale

Kals, E., Schumacher, D., & Montada, L. (1999). Emotional affinity toward nature as a motivational basis to protect nature. *Environment and behavior*, 31(2), 178-202.

Q: Can we build a case for reducing plastic use and fostering proper disposal of prescription drugs by capitalizing on the impact on a species or two...?

A: Yes, this would be a good situation for the use of a flagship species.

Q: What about negative vs positive messages regarding flagships? This bird is going extinct vs. This bird is recovering.

A: Great question. Current literature (and my data) is showing that the public is less and less responsive to fear/guilt/blame messaging. Messages that provide hope and ways to participate are more effective at stimulating positive emotions and driving behaviors. In general, I would expect the 'recovery' message to be a better strategy.

Q: Your presentation focused on fostering the emotional connection with animals, but long-term attitude change is typically developed through the central route, which is not as influenced by emotional appeals. How do you reconcile these disconnect?

A; Creating an emotional connection is not the same as developing an emotion-charged message (think late night TV infomercials or media headlines). Designing wildlife encounters that provide opportunities for individuals to develop an emotional connection (e.g. increasing empathy, love, respect) to an animal creates a deep, meaningful, and purposeful response. Also, the peripheral route (e.g., emotional appeals via celebrities) does serve to reinforce central route messaging.

Q: In your research, did you notice any trends between flagship appeal (regarding the type of species) and various age groups? Do any of these strategies change for different age groups (teens, children, adults)

A: To date, I have not looked at specific audience demographics and flagship appeal. That is something on my 'to do' list.

Interpretation and environmental education best practices all suggest making messages specific to age groups. This is not simply watering down the adult message, but rather creating an entirely new campaign targeting youth audiences.

Q: Much of what you said applies to audiences that are mobile. What do you suggest for engaging audiences that may not have the financial means to visit zoos/aquariums or travel to natural areas? How can you apply the flagship concept to urban settings/audiences that you want to engage in conservation caring/behaviors away from where the species lives?

A: Ultimately, this is a factor of what mechanism an agency has in place for reaching non-visitors. Creating broad public campaigns, irrespective of visitation, is a useful endeavor and flagships can be useful in that process. This would require specific strategies and resources to identify and reach target audiences.

Q: What role does empathy play in helping to solidify charismatic connections between animals and our visitors? Does implementing empathy-best practices help set the foundation for conservation caring?

A: Many models suggest charisma and empathy are closely related and serve to influence each other. So, to develop more empathy for lesser known species, appeal to charismatic dimensions. For species that are already charismatic, create experiences that foster empathy. Empathy and conservation caring are very similar, and arguably parallel concepts. You could use the conservation caring scale as a rubric to gauge empathy responses.

Q: Have you considered expanding your scale based on the Theory of Reasoned Action to address the three components widely accepted to address behavioral intentions? It seems the scale is mostly associated with attitudes, and much less with personal control and social norms.

A: To date, I have not used TRA. This is primarily because I have focused on suites of behaviors. Value-Belief-Norm theory and Interaction Theory are better suited for this purpose. TRA and Theory of Planned Behavior are better suited for individual or specific actions (e.g., recycling, using public transportation)

Q: How many flagship species are too many?

A: That is difficult to say. Typically, the more species you use the more confusion you create within a campaign and the more diluted your message becomes. While there are no hard and fast rules, I would make sure you have a very sound strategy/defense for using more than one species per issue.

Q: In individual conversations can a "flagship species" be anything that the person you are talking to is interested in rather than the one on the poster or public campaign?

A: Yes. Flagships can be very individualized, provided they drive action and awareness within that individual.

Q: Can a flagship species change on the fly based on who you are talking with and what they are interested in?

A: It is possible, but flagships should be well thought out, strategic campaigns. Unless you have a way to elicit empathy, awareness, and action extemporaneously, I would not recommend this. Ultimately, it could dilute and confuse other flagship messaging.

Q: Can/Should we use several flagship species to create a broader picture of an issue? Maybe it would also help with biodiversity messaging?

A: This is similar to the multiple flagship question above. Conservation issues are very complex and impact multiple species. The sustainable palm oil initiative is a great example of this. Orangutans and tigers are common flagships for this issue, but each one tackles it in a slightly different manner. This brings the complexity to bear, but also keeps the messaging focused and clear.

Q: How can you apply this to huge global topics like Climate Change? I think people are tired of the sinking polar bear images

A: This ties into issues like the above-mentioned palm oil campaigns, and positive messaging. Try to be specific and positive. Provide messages of hope and opportunities for direct action to help the flagship.

Q: Isn't the "buy" message contrary to the conservation message?

A: No, quite the opposite. The provision and purchase of sustainable products is necessary to conservation. Mass-produced items such as sustainable, organic, fair-trade coffee, chocolate, and palm oil are good examples of linking local communities, global communities, and conservation outcomes. Other products, such as jewelry, clothing, and home goods create micro-economies for impoverished communities, which decreases the need for non-sustainable wildlife management practices. Also, demonstrating to western cultures, which are heavily focused on consumerism, ways to support conservation and develop sustainable purchasing habits creates long-term growth of conservation.