

Wildlife film fees: a reply to Jepson & Jennings

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Jepson et al. (2011) proposed what they considered to be a payment for environmental services (PES, also referred to as 'payment for ecosystem service') certification mechanism by which wildlife film-makers would contribute financially to nature conservation. We suggested this rather constituted a tax that could reduce wildlife film-making and could thus backfire by eroding the biophilia-nurturing effects of such films (Wunder & Sheil, 2013). We appreciate the response (Jepson & Jennings, 2013) and concentrate here on two key aspects of the debate.

Firstly, how do we conceptualize Jepson & Jennings's proposed instrument? They reply by referring to a broader definition of PES than ours (Farley & Costanza, 2010). But even there PES 'aims to create incentives to align individual and/or collective land-use decisions with the social interest in the management of natural resources' (ibid: 2063). The proposed wildlife-film fund pays nobody directly, so no direct incentives to align land-use decisions are created. Hence, when opportunistically 'the [PES] concept is continually being redefined, expanded and aligned' (Jepson & Jennings, 2013) the danger is that it will lose its defining features, depriving the concept of its utility.

Also, Jepson & Jennings call their proposal a 'certification scheme'. Environmental certification is a way for producers 'to minimize the harmful impacts to the environment by voluntarily following a set of externally set and measured objectives' (Wikipedia, 2013a). No certification scheme we know of requires as a principal action a share of profits to be paid into a global trust fund. In Jepson & Jennings's words, 'the goal is to widen and increase financial flows for the protection and restoration of ecosystems', which is clearly different from direct incentives such as PES and certification. Jepson & Jennings may be correct that 'tax' is the wrong term if in fact they envisage these funds not to be publicly administered but the correct term is then 'fee': 'A fee is the price one pays as remuneration for services' (Wikipedia, 2013b). For comparison, a PES scheme would imply that this collected fee is also being transferred to

people on the ground in ways that contingently depend on improved environmental outcomes.

Secondly, Jepson & Jennings agree with us that classical wildlife films have been instrumental in promoting pro-conservation sentiments. However, they doubt this extends to the new generation of nature films governed by 'commercial imperatives in entertainment markets' and caution that assertion is not the same as proof. Jepson & Jennings provide 12 testable claims on the contribution of the wildlife film industry to conservation. As researchers we support evidence, and though we are less sceptical that evidence has already been gathered (see below), we accept that Jepson & Jennings's first five hypotheses are valuable to guide future research. We would, however, urge that rather than seeing films as uniform, attention should focus on different film types and how these target and influence their audience (for an example of the different genres involved, see Aldridge & Dingwall, 2003). Also, testing hypotheses such as 'Exposure to nature via wildlife films builds public support for conservation' is bound to be difficult because of problems of time lags and attribution of impacts. When Jepson & Jennings believe, for example, in Cousteau's pro-conservation impacts, it is hardly because controlled social experiments or sophisticated econometrics have proved the impacts scientifically. It is rather because of overwhelming anecdotal evidence, on which we often have to rely when scientific proof is complicated. Similarly, to take a more general point: we have little reason to doubt that international concern over tropical deforestation was a result, at least in part, of the fact that distant viewers could see the destruction and its consequences through televised media (Vivanco, 2002).

As advertisers know, media exposure influences human value systems and behaviours (Villani, 2001). Despite Jepson & Jennings's dismissal, the manner in which such exposure influences environmental concerns and resulting actions has a substantial research history (Ajzen, 2001). There are numerous books on the representation of nature and environmental issues in film and mass media (e.g. Brockington, 2009; Hansen, 1993; Mitman, 1999; Stepan, 2001). There are peer-reviewed evaluations as well. Many studies have gathered data indicating that exposure to media, including wildlife films, is positively related to environmental awareness and concern among both adults and children (see brief reviews in Ballouard et al., 2011; Lee, 2011). For example, one study of 2,106 high-school students in Hong Kong found that media exposure is associated with environmental interests and actions (Lee, 2011). Many studies agree that

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television informs views and concern about the environment (Abeliotis et al., 2010; Chan, 1996; da Silva, 2012, Rosalino & Rosalino, 2012). The interesting question is not whether wildlife films and other media have an influence on conservation concern—clearly they do—but how that role might most effectively be tapped in promoting effective engagement in a world where people are increasingly insulated from nature (Bradshaw et al., 2007; Pearson et al., 2011; Yong et al., 2011).

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