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**Tourists' reactions to non-human animals:
Implications for tourist-animal research in the Caribbean¹**

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non-human interactions,*

SUMMARY

Domestic pets were the most common animals seen by respondents in a survey of attitudes and perceptions towards non-human animals of 212 tourists in the Caribbean. These visitors indicated that the care offered animals caused some of them to change their view of the island visited. More tourists reported positive than negative interactions with animals, but unstructured interactions with domestic animals were associated with most of the negative comments. Research on tourist non-human animal interactions should include unstructured interactions if the real impact of tourists' responses to animals is to be assessed.

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a major industry in the Caribbean and it is estimated that it contributed to 16.5% of GDP in the Caribbean in 2006, but in some countries its contribution can be over 50%, such as in The Bahamas (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2007).

Consequently, any aspect of the “tourism product” which creates negative responses in tourists is of concern when visitors contribute so much to these economies. The dependency of these territories on tourism means that animal welfare issues may assume greater importance than elsewhere, as negative impacts due to perceived deficiencies in animal welfare have the potential to harm the livelihoods of entire communities (Plumridge and Fielding, 2003).

Tourists to the Caribbean and roaming non-human animals (which for brevity we shall call merely animals, but may also include creatures which people keep as pets or occur in the wild) have a long history of interaction and the presence of roaming animals, dogs in particular, have been a reoccurring theme in travel accounts; for example: in the 1880s a visitor noted the presence of dogs at a tourist attraction in The Bahamas (Drysdale, 1888). Tourism interests motivated the last major revision of the Bahamian dog license law in 1942 when visitors complained of roaming dogs around their winter homes (Fielding, Mather and Isaacs, 2005). Various studies in the Caribbean have indicated that there is a pet over-population problem which is of concern to residents (for example: Free, 1990 and Fielding, 2007). Reports of interactions between tourists and animals have often been negative. Postings on the internet (for example: tripadvisor.com) reveal complaints about

animal welfare from tourists to the Caribbean which suggest that tourist interactions are not always pleasurable to visitors. Many animal welfare groups in the Caribbean contacted by the Pegasus Foundation have reported receiving letters of complaints from visitors about animal welfare (Anne Ostberg, personal communication, 30th May 2007). One result of visitor-interactions is that dogs are adopted and taken home as tourists attempt to change the level of care to selected animals (Fielding, Mather and Isaacs, 2005). In The Bahamas, the press has contained stories of tourists being upset by the state of the animals or even being bitten by roaming dogs, and in at least one case, being mauled by roaming pit bulls (The Tribune, 2003). Elsewhere, an Australian study found that 2.5% of overseas tourists were admitted to hospital due to dog and other non-venomous bites and 3.0% as a result of horseback riding accidents (Wilks and Davis, 2003). It has also been found that being attacked/bitten by animals is a concern of tourists (Dolnicar, 2007). Consequently interactions with animals can cause tourists to be “scared”; fear of rabies may be an extreme and “emotive” (Gale, 1998) example of this.

In the case of eco-tourism, domestic animals, such as dogs, can have an impact on local fauna (Brickner, 2003). Diversity of bird populations have been shown to have a positive impact on tourism (Freytag and Vietze, 2006) so when one cat can be responsible for the extinction of an entire bird species this highlights the threat which introduced animals can have on local wildlife (Galbreath and Brown, 2004), and cats and dogs continue to be a threat to species such as the kiwi (Pierce et al., 2006). Consequently, the economic impact of domestic animals can be large unless they are kept responsibly. In recognition

of this, in The Bahamas, dogs have been placed on the country's invasive species list (BEST Commission, 2003).

Even in the 1990s, tourism interests were concerned about the impact of roaming animals on Caribbean tourism (Bryant, 1994). However, it has been a concern of Caribbean welfare groups that stakeholders in tourism have not exhibited more concern about the presence of roaming animals when they have attempted to enlist their participation in efforts to educate residents on animal welfare, pay for neutering programs and encourage governments to update and enforce animal welfare laws. These views have been expressed by delegates to several regional animal welfare conferences since 2002 (Humane Society International, 2002). In The Bahamas, animals have not featured on the list of complaints in formal tourist exit surveys (Research and Statistics Division, 2005) and this may explain the reluctance of tourism officials to be more proactive regarding animal issues. An internet campaign organized by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals concerning animal care in The Bahamas failed to result in the updating of animal welfare laws (Fielding, Mather and Isaacs, 2005). This suggests that either officials have failed to be convinced of the validity of the claims in the campaign (of lack of care offered animals) or that they did not appreciate that animal welfare is an important issue with regard to tourism. Elsewhere, for example in Greece, the planned slaughter of roaming dogs before the 2004 Olympic games caused a major outcry in the world media which forced the authorities to rethink their animal control plans

(Burroughs, 2001). Consequently, it is clear that animal welfare, including that of domestic animals, is important to tourist destinations.

The debate and research on tourists and animals tend to have focused on what we term structured interactions between tourists and animals; these are planned interactions which the tourist wishes to occur. These would include visits to zoos (Mason, 2000) and aquaria (Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, nd.) and structured encounters with wildlife of various forms in various ways (ecotourism, or wildlife or nature tourism, for example: The International Ecotourism Society (nd), Roe, Leader-Williams and Dalal-Clayton (1997), Knight (2006)). The educational role such encounters might have (Broad and Smith, 2004) and ethical considerations of exploiting animals for profit have been issues for discussion (UN World Tourism Organization, n.d.). This debate has given rise to the “compassionate traveler” concept endorsed by many groups (for example: World Society for the Prevention to Cruelty to Animals, 2007). However, there appears to be little research on the reactions of visitors to animals in what we term unstructured settings. Unstructured tourist-animal interactions are unplanned and unsupervised encounters with animals and ones in which the tourist did not expect to participate – e.g.: finding a roaming cat on a hotel balcony, or encountering jellyfish while swimming. It is these unstructured encounters with animals which appear to be responsible for the distress reported in the letters written by visitors (Anne Ostberg, personal communication, 30th May 2007). A study on tourists and roaming dogs in The Bahamas, found that relatively few tourists remembered seeing roaming dogs but a small percentage of visitors were

very disturbed by what they saw. Given the fact that a tourist speaks to about 15 people about their vacation, the multiplier effect could mean that, in the case of The Bahamas, the country could forfeit as many as 10% of its visitors as a result of negative reports concerning animal welfare (Plumridge and Fielding, 2003).

This study extends the work of Plumridge and Fielding (2003) to investigate reactions of tourists to non-human animals in general, not just roaming dogs. It aims to discover if the negative anecdotal stories of interactions of tourists and animals are the exception or do indeed reflect common concerns of tourists, particularly if we assume that most interactions, both positive and negative, probably go unreported. Therefore, the results from this study provide a basis for researchers to possibly widen the scope of tourist-animal interactions to ascertain the impact of the whole tourist-animal interaction on the vacation experience rather than just focusing on components of the interaction. Consequently it can help policy makers with assessing the importance of tourist-animal interactions and their response to them.

RESEARCH METHOD

The method anticipated that 500 interviews would be conducted in seven territories, The Bahamas, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, St. Maarten, the Turks and Caicos Islands and the US Virgin Islands, with the number of interviews related to the number of visitors to each island. A quota was imposed to get an even split of respondents between both sexes and those aged under 18-35 and over 35 years of age. This quota was used

because it has been shown that respondents' sex and age can influence responses concerning animals (Herzog, 2007, and Burrows and Fielding, 2005). Visitors under 18 years were excluded from the target population for ethical reasons. Animal welfare organizations on each island agreed to collect data. However, several groups were unable to dedicate the resources necessary to complete their allocated number of interviews and this resulted in only 212 interviews from six islands.

The interview gathered general demographic information about tourists, their attitudes and actions towards pets. It then asked about their visit to the island and their interactions with and reactions towards animals.

Throughout the paper, the term "animal" is used to mean "non-human animal" and includes creatures kept as pets or found in the wild.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Visitor demographics

Two hundred and twelve tourists were interviewed on six islands from five territories. Most of the interviews originated in The Bahamas (114 replies or 53.8%) and came from two islands, New Providence and Grand Bahama, 25.0% (53 replies) came from Jamaica, 8.0% (17 replies) from St. Maarten, 7.5% (16 replies) from the Dominican Republic, and 5.7% (12 replies) from Puerto Rico. Respondents were broadly equally distributed

between both sexes and aged 18-35 or over 35 years of age (Fisher's exact test: $p=0.092$, $n=212$). The majority of respondents came from North America (65.1% from the USA and 6.6% Canada), with 18.9% coming from the UK.

Tourist characteristics

Most visitors (56.6%) were repeat visitors to the Caribbean and 95.3% said they would visit again the island on which they were interviewed and 96.2% would recommend the destination to others; respondents shared their vacation experiences with a median of 15 others (semi-interquartile range: 7.5). Repeat visitors had made a median of four previous trips (semi-interquartile range: 3.5) to the region (112 replies). The median time since their first trip was 10 years (semi-interquartile range: 5.5). Most respondents stayed in resorts or hotels (86.8%), while 10.4% were cruise ship passengers. The median length of stay was seven days (semi-interquartile range: 5.0).

Tourists and their association with non-human animals

Most tourists (79.2%) "liked" animals, 10.8% were members of animal welfare organizations and 28.3% had made a donation to an animal welfare group in the past 12 months. Most tourists (63.7%) kept pets, and the most popular ones were cats and dogs (Table 1).

Table 1: Percentage of 212 tourists to the Caribbean keeping pets.

Pet	Percentage keeping
Dogs	37.3
Cats	31.1
Fish	19.3
Horses	9.0
Birds	9.0
Reptiles	8.5
Other	7.1

The most common way of acquiring pets was from a shop/breeder (43.9%), but adoption from shelters (22.2%) and other sources (22.6%) were also popular. Many tourists (45.0% of 211) reported having roaming animals where they lived and 31.6% thought that roaming animals could cause them to get ill.

Tourists' and island non-human animals

Most visitors (54.2% of 201 responses) (Table 2) remembered seeing roaming animals; the most commonly seen were companionable animals (dogs and cats) but farm animals were also seen unattended (Table 3). Some 28.8% of tourists also remembered seeing animals being cared for as pets.

Table 2: Percentage of 212 tourists seeing non-human animals roaming.

Pet	Percentage seeing
Dogs	45.5%
Cats	34.9%
Goats	18.9%
Horses	11.8%
Cows	11.3%
Donkeys	2.8%

Table 3: Respondents' replies concerning roaming animals

Aspect	%
Remember seeing roaming animals	54.2% (n=201)
Felt comfortable with the condition of the animals	41.5% (n=211)
Animals affected trip in a pleasant way	36.3% (n=212)
Wanting to see improvements in the way animals are treated in the Caribbean	31.0% (n=213)
Island has too many roaming animals	23.5% (n=212)
Animals affected trip in an unpleasant way	20.8% (n=212)

More tourists reported that their trip was affected in a pleasant way than in an unpleasant way by seeing non-human animals. While 36.3% said that animals had had a pleasant effect on them, 20.8% said otherwise (Table 2). The condition of animals was not associated with unpleasant interactions (Fisher's exact test: $p=0.33$, $n=212$), but when the interaction was pleasant, proportionately more tourists thought that the condition was "good" (40.3%) than when the interaction was not considered pleasant (14.8%) (Fishers' exact test: $p<0.001$, $n=212$). Comments explaining why respondents thought the encounter was pleasant or unpleasant were themed as relating to wildlife (birds, fish in the sea, reptiles, insects etc.), domestic animals (dogs, cats, horses etc.) in unstructured and structured encounters (seeing a roaming dog verses horseback riding, dolphin swims etc.). Unstructured encounters with domestic animals accounted for the majority of unpleasant experiences (72.5% of 40 negative comments) and many pleasant experiences (46.9% of 49 positive comments). However, unstructured interactions with domestic animals were more likely to be unpleasant (55.8% of 52 comments) than unstructured interactions with wildlife (26.7% of 15 comments) or structured interactions (31.8% of 22 comments) (Chi-squared test= 6.02, $df=2$, $n=89$, $p=0.049$) (Table 4).

Table 4: Themed reactions of tourist in structured and unstructured interactions with non-human animals by type of encounter, percentages of 89 responses.

Result of interaction	Unstructured encounters: wildlife	Unstructured encounters: Domestic animals	Structured encounters: wildlife or domestic	No. of responses
Pleasant experience	12.4%	25.8%	16.8%	49
Unpleasant experience	4.5%	32.6%	7.9%	40
No. of responses	15	52	22	89

When tourists had unpleasant interactions with animals, 93.2% had remembered seeing roaming animals as opposed to 47.1% who did not have an unpleasant interactions (Fisher’s exact test: $p < 0.001$, $n = 201$). When tourists had pleasant interactions with animals, 86.7% had remembered seeing roaming animals as opposed to 39.7% who did not have an pleasant interactions (Fisher’s exact test: $p < 0.001$, $n = 201$). Reactions to roaming animals centered on feeling concern/sorrow, while extreme reactions (pleasure or irritation) were in the minority. In the case of those who observed roaming animals, 56.5% of 115 respondents thought that their condition was less than “good”. The animal’s condition (“good” or “not good”) modified the tourists’ reactions, including that of feeling frightened or concerned for their own safety (Table 5).

Table 5: Reactions of tourists to seeing roaming non-human animals by visible condition of the animal.

Reaction	Animal condition: “good” (n=65)	Animal condition: “not good” (n=60)
No reaction	32.0%	9.2%
Concerned for their safety	30.0%	52.3%
Felt sorry for them	26.0%	81.5%
I wanted to feed them	24.0%	41.4%
Glad to see them free	24.0%	3.1%
I fed them	18.0%	23.1%
Felt sad	14.0%	49.2%
Uncomfortable	6.0%	32.3%
Frightened or concerned for my safety	6.0%	21.5%
Annoyed or bothered by them	4.0%	20.0%
Disgusted	2.0%	23.1%
Angry	2.0%	21.5%

Only 10.8% of all tourists had no reaction to roaming animals. Twenty-five percent of respondents were “uncomfortable” with the condition of the animals they saw; but in the case of animals, tourists considered to be pets, only 4.7% described their condition as less than “good”. Many tourists (23.6%) thought that there were too many roaming animals (Table 2) and in the case of 6.6% of tourists, their view of the island changed after seeing roaming animals. Logistic regression was used to determine if seeing roaming animals and the condition of the animals were associated with a pleasant or unpleasant affect on the holiday. In the case of pleasant experiences, the animals’ condition was not significant (Wald statistic = 0.43, $p=0.50$), but seeing roaming animals affected the experience (Wald statistic = 27.2, $p<0.001$). This appears to contrast with the case of unpleasant experiences, where in addition to seeing roaming animals (Wald statistic =

22.7, $p < 0.001$), condition was close to being a statistically significant factor (Wald statistic = 3.53, $p < 0.06$) affecting the experience.

Views on animals of repeat visitors

One hundred and twenty respondents (56.6% of all respondents) had made at least one previous visit to the Caribbean. Of this group, 78.3% of them had seen animals on this trip and for 41.7%, animals had affected the trip in a pleasant way and for 28.3% in an unpleasant way. Of 35 repeat visitors who remembered seeing animals on their previous visit(s) 74.3% thought that the treatment of animals had improved since their first visit. However, of this group 45.7% thought that the island had too many roaming animals and 17.1% had had their view of the island changed after seeing roaming animals.

DISCUSSION

Limitations of the research

When interpreting these results it should be noted that convenience samples can be subject to unknown biases which may invalidate extrapolation to the wider population of visitors to the Caribbean. The number of cruise ship tourists was less than might have been expected, and this may have resulted from visitors being unwilling to participate in the study as they were only ashore for a short time. The current sample size is too small to investigate island differences and we note that different destinations cater to different types of tourist and offer different types of holiday. For example: a tourist staying in an “all inclusive” hotel (where a flat-rate fee includes accommodation, food, drinks etc.)

may not leave the hotel compound and so have little, or no opportunity to “see” the island and so might not be exposed to roaming animals, even if present. Likewise, a cruise ship tourist may simply have insufficient time ashore to explore more than area immediately around the anchorage and so not see animals roaming. Such considerations mean that on islands with tourism products which limit visitor exploration of the island, animal welfare issues may be hidden and so have less impact on tourists. Likewise, in those destinations which actively encourage tourist-animal interactions animal welfare issues may be of more importance.

The importance of cultural sensitivities in research has been noted by others and points to the involvement of local enumerators in the collection of data (Dresden and Coultis, 2005). Despite the willingness of animal welfare organizations to assist in data collection, they were unable to participate to the extent anticipated, presumably due to their limited resources (Fielding, 2004). Future research will require an alternative approach, such as the use of college students or paid data collectors.

Tourists' background with respect to animal welfare

Tourists are attuned to animal welfare through keeping pets and in either making donations to animal welfare groups and/or being members of animal welfare organizations. Visitors almost certainly have a frame of reference as to what constitutes acceptable animal welfare, which may be influenced by their local animal welfare organizations and so they may pass judgment upon how they perceive animals are cared

for at their tourist destination. It is noteworthy that many visitors had roaming animals in their own community and may have long-standing worries about roaming animals in general as respondents thought that roaming animals may make them ill. This concern probably heightened their anxiety of seeing sick, loose animals which was clearly seen in Table 5. It should be noted that many visitors (44.8%) adopted pets, which suggests that they are willing to assume care for unwanted animals.

Tourist reactions towards roaming animals

Most visitors saw roaming animals, which were mainly companionable animals, and in many cases considered by visitors to be pets. Almost a quarter of respondents thought there were too many roaming animals on the island they were visiting, and 25% were uncomfortable with the condition of the animals but relatively few people reported seeing pets in poor condition. These reactions probably motivated the feelings of pity and concern felt towards the animals, reactions also tinged with stronger feelings, such as “anger”. It should be noted that some tourists were concerned for their own safety as a result of the encounter, a point raised by Dolnicar (2007) and which points to animals being seen by tourists as a potential threat to their personal safety. The fact that visitors’ reactions were influenced by the condition of the roaming animals suggests that while the animal’s visible condition probably contributed to unpleasant experiences, it may not necessarily have been the principle reason for tourists fearing for their safety. Consequently, we suggest that if residents confined their animals this would be an effective means of decreasing the number of tourists being distressed.

Despite the negative feelings generated by seeing animals, these were not strong enough to discourage respondents from either recommending the destination to others or thinking that they might visit the island again. However, in relatively few cases, their interaction with animals actually changed the visitor's view of the island. While on their own, negative tourist interactions may dissuade few tourists from returning or recommending the destination to others, the competition between tourism centres is such that it demands that the entire tourism experience be positive to enhance its public image. Further, animal welfare is an emotive issue and animal welfare groups are well-known for their lobbying skills; a recent example of this concerns the support some Caribbean countries have offered pro-whaling countries (IFAW, 2006).

Affect of animals on the tourist experience

Animals can have both positive and negative affects on a tourist's vacation. When tourists interacted with animals which they considered to be well cared for then the experience enhanced the vacation experience. Typically, roaming animals are at risk from harm by motor vehicles and may endanger other road users. In The Bahamas, 24.4% of owned dogs are killed by motor vehicles (Plumridge, Fielding and Bizzell, unpublished data), so why some tourists should approve of seeing roaming animals while on vacation could be useful to know; particularly if they come from communities where animals must be controlled. Possibly their response is a reaction to the separation between humans and animals in their own communities (Hodges, 1999). Conversely, when animals appeared

to receive less than the level of care anticipated by tourists, the interaction detracted from the vacation and gave visitors a poor impression of the island. It is clear that in many cases the interaction between animals and visitors was not a positive experience for visitors. Visitors' reactions are illustrated by those who did what they may have felt to be the only thing they could do, namely feed the animals and so try to relieve the animal's apparent suffering. Some visitors are more pro-active and adopt animals (usually dogs) and have them flown to their permanent home (Fielding, Mather and Isaacs, 2005).

Implications for future research

These findings point to the need for researchers to distinguish between structured (zoos, horseback riding and aquaria etc.) and unstructured interactions of tourists with animals. Structured visitor-animal interactions can, and should, be controlled and their successful regulation should minimise negative reactions from tourists. In the case of unstructured interactions, particularly with domestic animals, pleasant visitor-animal interactions can only be assured when visitors perceive that animals are receiving what they consider to be acceptable care and are confined. It is apparent that unstructured encounters with domestic animals have the potential to upset tourists and so could be viewed as a cause for concern by the tourism industry. This requires all caregivers (both residential and commercial) to provide a level of care which goes beyond "essential" (Shore, Riley, and Douglas, 2006) and for laws concerning animals to be appropriate and enforced.

In conclusion, this study indicates that visitors can and do have negative experiences as a result of interacting with animals in both structured and unstructured settings, but particularly in latter setting. Further research is required to determine which setting has the greatest overall impact, a structured or unstructured one. Not all tourist-animal interactions are negative and interactions with animals can enrich the vacation experience; however interactions must be sensitively managed so that they are not detrimental to the welfare of animals. We suggest that researchers appreciate that unstructured tourist-animal interactions may have a more important impact on a tourist's vacation than previously considered, and so they must be included when assessing the overall impact of animals in tourism. Only when the wider implications of tourist-animal interactions are known will policy makers be able to assess if the concerns of animal welfare groups are justified and, if so, to work with animal activists to improve animal welfare.

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