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# Introduction to Ecotourism

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“Nature-based Tourism & Protected  
Area Management“ module  
May 23, 2023





## Definition of ecotourism





## Definition of Ecotourism

**"Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people (and involves interpretation and education)."**



THE  
INTERNATIONAL  
**ecotourism**  
SOCIETY

## Ecotourism background

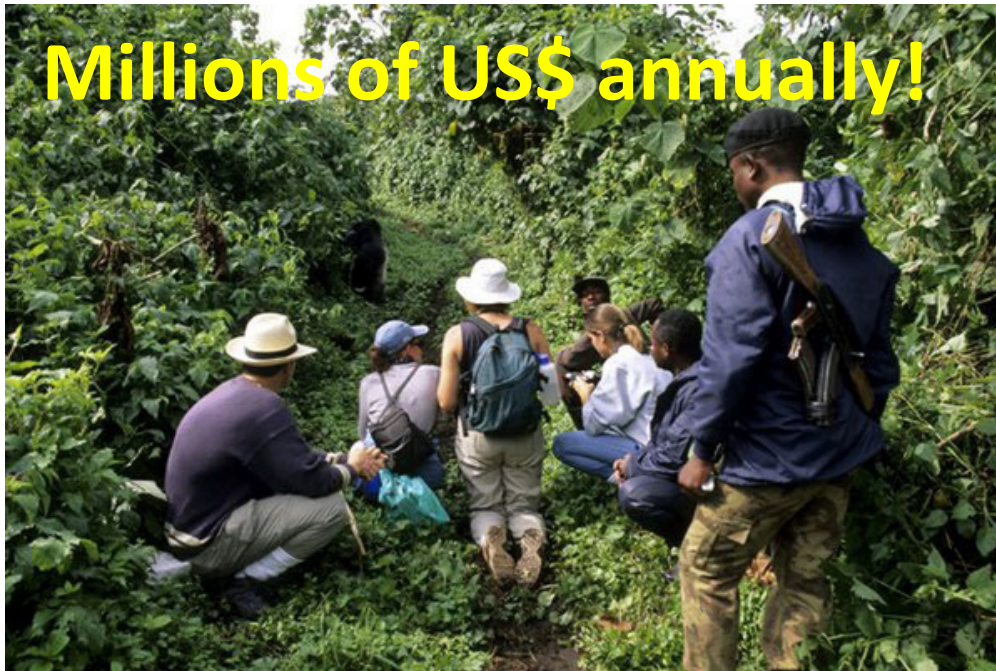
- **Difficult situation of nature conservation, especially in developing countries:**
  - under-staffed/-funded *paper parks*
  - widespread rural poverty and lack of participation
  - Different political priorities; government failure
- **Growing demand for nature-based tourism**
- **Main strategic goal:** to use ecotourism for the **sustainable economic valorisation of biodiversity**



Source: UNEP/GRID 2007



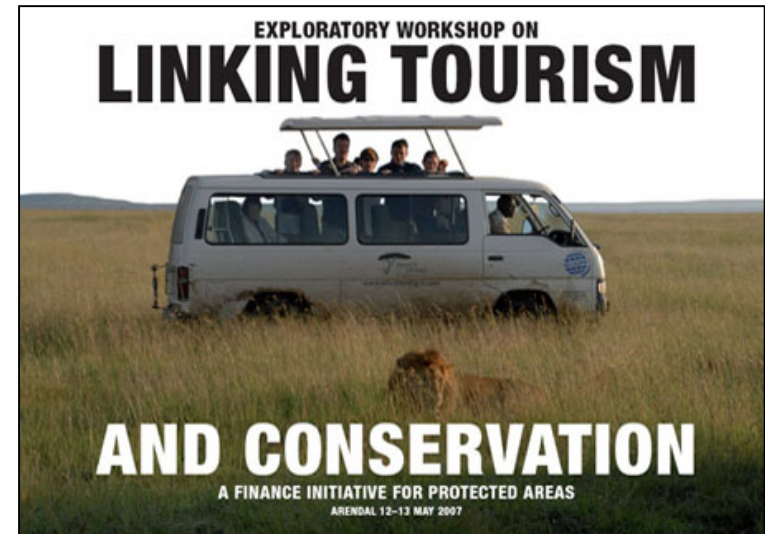
## Ecotourism background



Source: IUCN 2018

## Linking nature-based tourism to conservation

- **Worldwide tourism turnover estimated to be around USD 6 trillion at the time**
- **Global network of functioning PAs would require USD 30 billion = 0.5% (47 billion if marine areas are included)**
- **Buying all land in the world's biodiversity hotspots would cost about USD 100 billion**

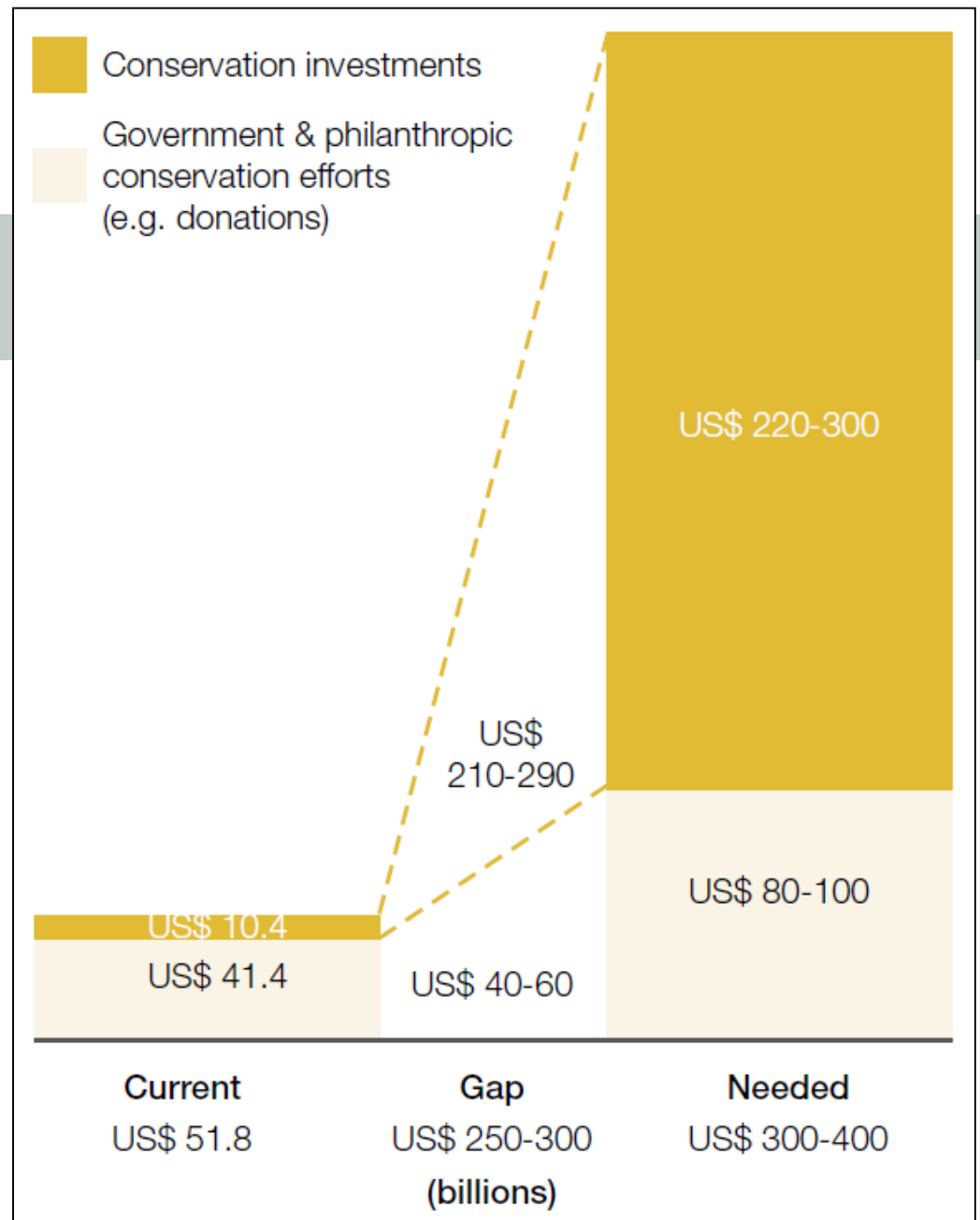


Sources: WPC 2003 in Durban, UNEP/GRID 2007, Stolton/Dudley 2007



## More recent funding needs

Source: IUCN 2018, based on  
Huwyler et al. 2014



## World tourism turnover (2019)

TRAVEL & TOURISM REGIONAL PERFORMANCE, 2019\* (incl. indirect & induced effects)



\* Growth highlighted in green when it is above global T&T GDP growth of 3.5%

Source: WTTC 2020

**Total of USD 8.9 trillion ⇔ Conservation finance gap of USD 250-300 billion**



## Goals of Ecotourism

1. **Minimize** physical, social, behavioral, and psychological **impacts**.
2. Build environmental and cultural **awareness** and **respect**.
3. Provide **positive experiences** for both visitors and hosts.
4. Provide direct **financial benefits** for **conservation**.
5. Generate financial benefits for both **local people** and **private industry**.
6. Deliver memorable **interpretative experiences** to visitors that help raise **sensitivity** to host countries' political, environmental, and social climates.
7. Design, construct and operate **low-impact facilities**.
8. Recognize the rights and spiritual beliefs of the **Indigenous People** in your community and work in partnership with them to create empowerment.



Source: [www.ecotourism.org](http://www.ecotourism.org)

## Does ecotourism really work?



- 1. What risks does such a strategy entail? What could go wrong?**
- 2. What would be needed to make it work?**



## Ecotourism as “neo-liberalism“ and “neo-colonialism“

On the other hand, there is a group of academics who have fundamentally criticised ecotourism as yet another phenomenon in a “neoliberal” world that does not only **commodify nature**, but uses conservation as a pretext to **dispossess local communities** of their natural resources and **exposes rural subsistence economies to global markets**, thus making them even more vulnerable economically and socio-culturally. An entire edition of the Journal of Sustainable Tourism was dedicated to this theme (Devine & Ojeda 2017). The authors point to the **roots of conservation in colonial times**, especially in Africa, and see nature-based tourism as a neo-colonial continuation of that tradition, exerting “**structural violence**” (Büscher & Fletcher 2017).

There is also criticism about “**ecotourism bubbles**” devoid of human beings as part of the ecosystem (Brockington et al. 2008). In this view, ecotourism’s approach to local people, especially indigenous groups, is **paternalistic** at best, **commodifying their cultures** in supposedly “authentic” tourism representations (Koot 2016). Even though highly controversial, the merit of this school of thinking is that it draws attention to the overall societal and economic global context in which ecotourism is taking place. (Strasdas 2018)



## Dispossessing indigenous communities (?)




Survival

BACKGROUND BRIEFING

### Wilderness Safaris

Wilderness Safaris is a tourism company with lodges scattered throughout southern Africa.

After the Botswana government closed the Bushmen's only water borehole and forced them from their land, Wilderness Safaris opened a tourist lodge on their land, complete with bar and swimming pool.





## Ecotourism “bubbles“





## Dangers of commercialisation





## Private PAs: Namibrand Nature Reserve



# Namibian Institute of Culinary Education





## Success stories: Communal Conservancies (Namibia)



### NACSO PICTURE STORIES

#### LEARNING ON THE JOB

#### JOINT VENTURE LODGES BRING JOBS TO CONSERVANCIES

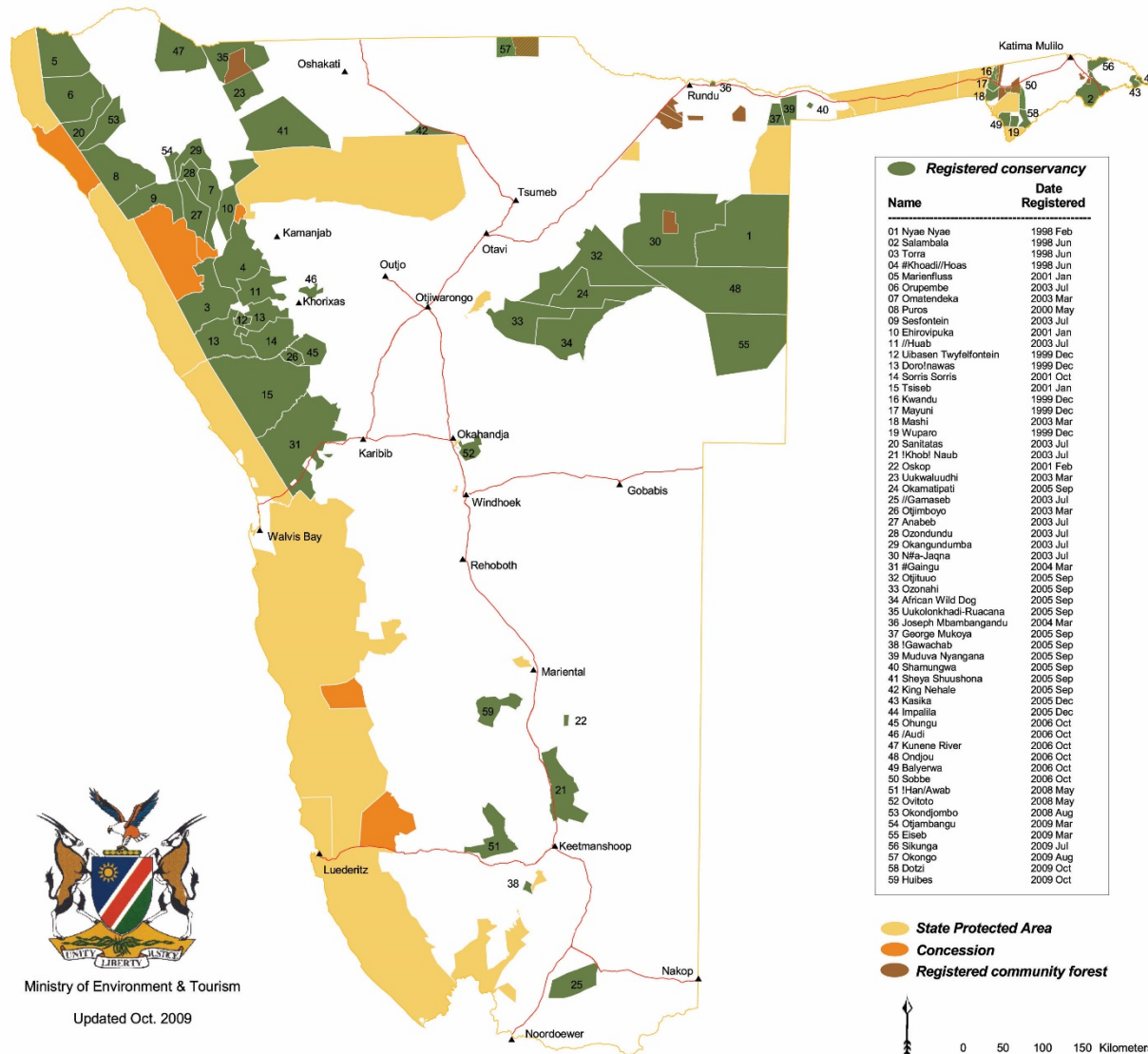
“The boat is easy, I learnt it in an hour,” says Benito. We are on a cruise up the Chobe River looking for hippos – we have already seen the elephants just across the river from Serondela lodge where Benito is a tour guide.

But it wasn't always easy. Benito used to be a fisherman. “You haven't been baptised until you have been capsized.” He says, referring to the hippos. Fishing is done from mokoros: wooden canoes dug out from trees, and a hippo can capsize a mokoro with a toss of its head.



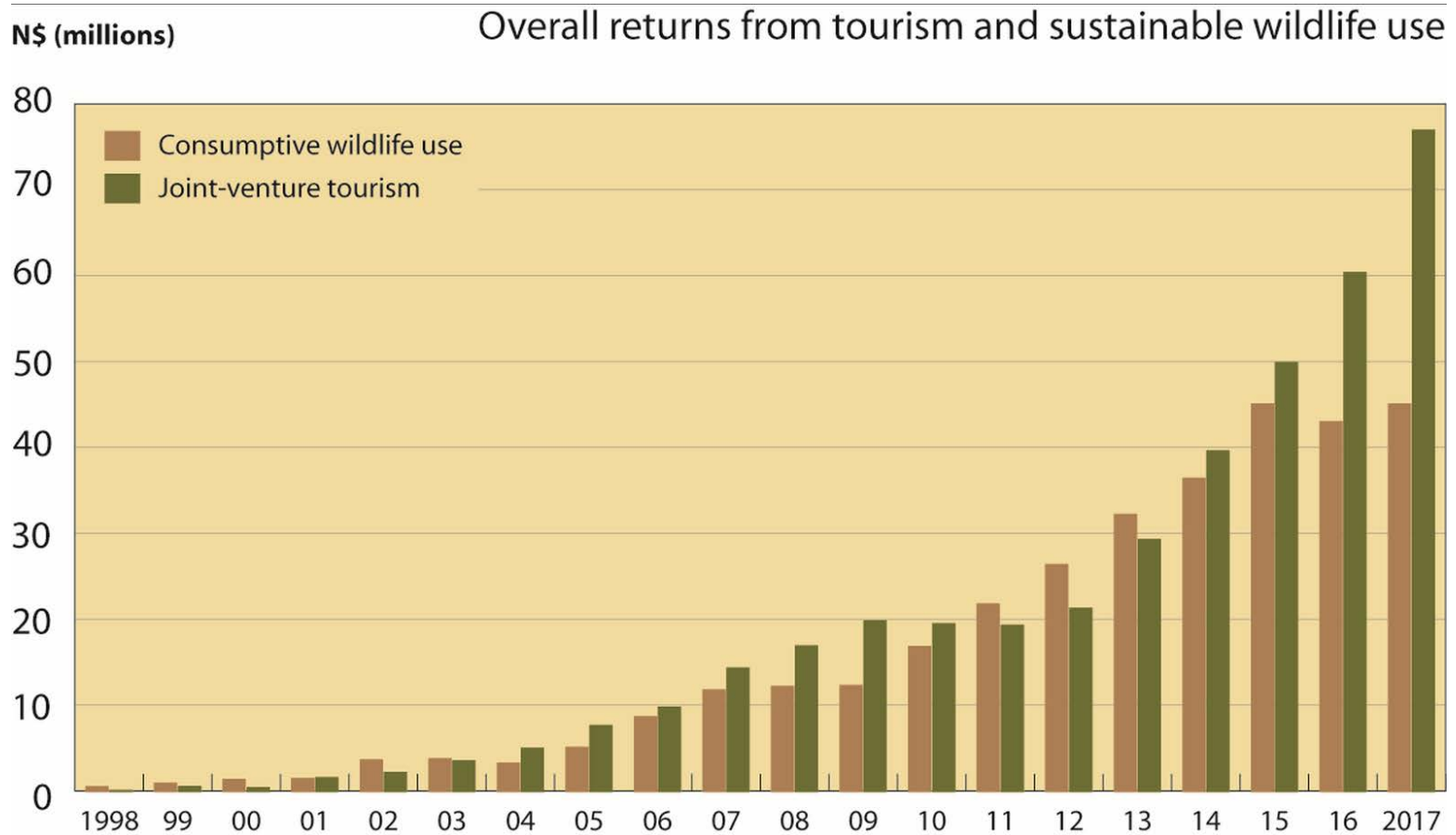
Source: NACSO 2018

## Registered Communal Conservancies



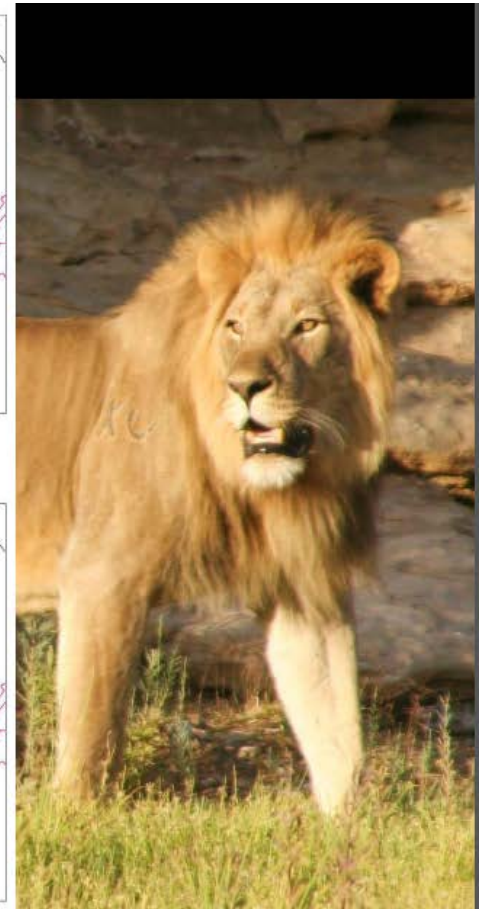
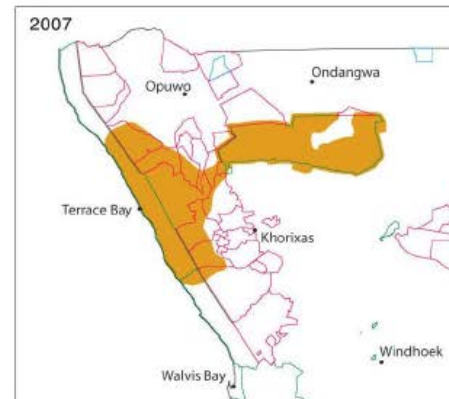
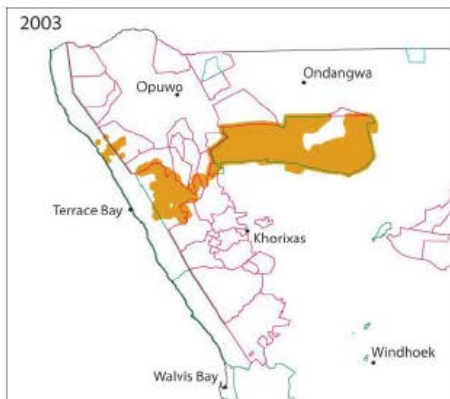
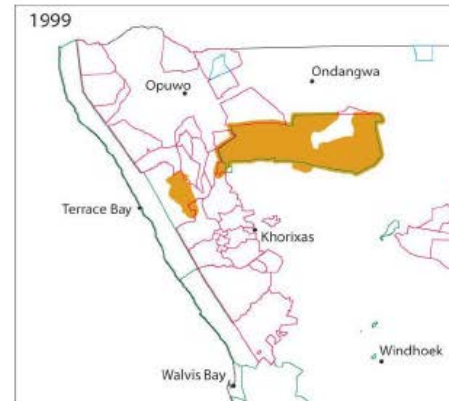
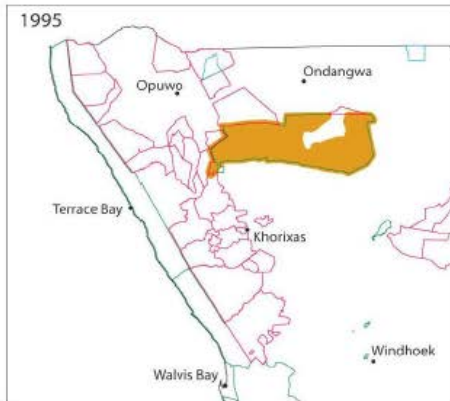
Source: NAM Min. of Environment & Tourism 2009

## Communal Conservancies (Namibia)



Source: NACSO 2018

## Extended lion ranges in Communal Conservancies



Source: Sproule n.d

# US National Parks – America's Best Idea!





## US National Park Service – Mission statement

“The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the **natural** and **cultural resources** and **values** of the national park system for the **enjoyment, education,** and **inspiration** of this and **future generations**. The Park Service cooperates with **partners** to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world.”



## US National Park Service – Objectives

- **Excellent service to visitors and partners**
- **Visitor enjoyment and accessibility to all**
- **Heritage education and interpretation**
- **Natural (& cultural) resource conservation and ecological research**
- **Productive partnerships and citizen involvement (incl. with indigenous groups)**
- **Commitment to sustainability (incl. tourism)**
- **Employee development & excellency**
- **Effective management and planning**



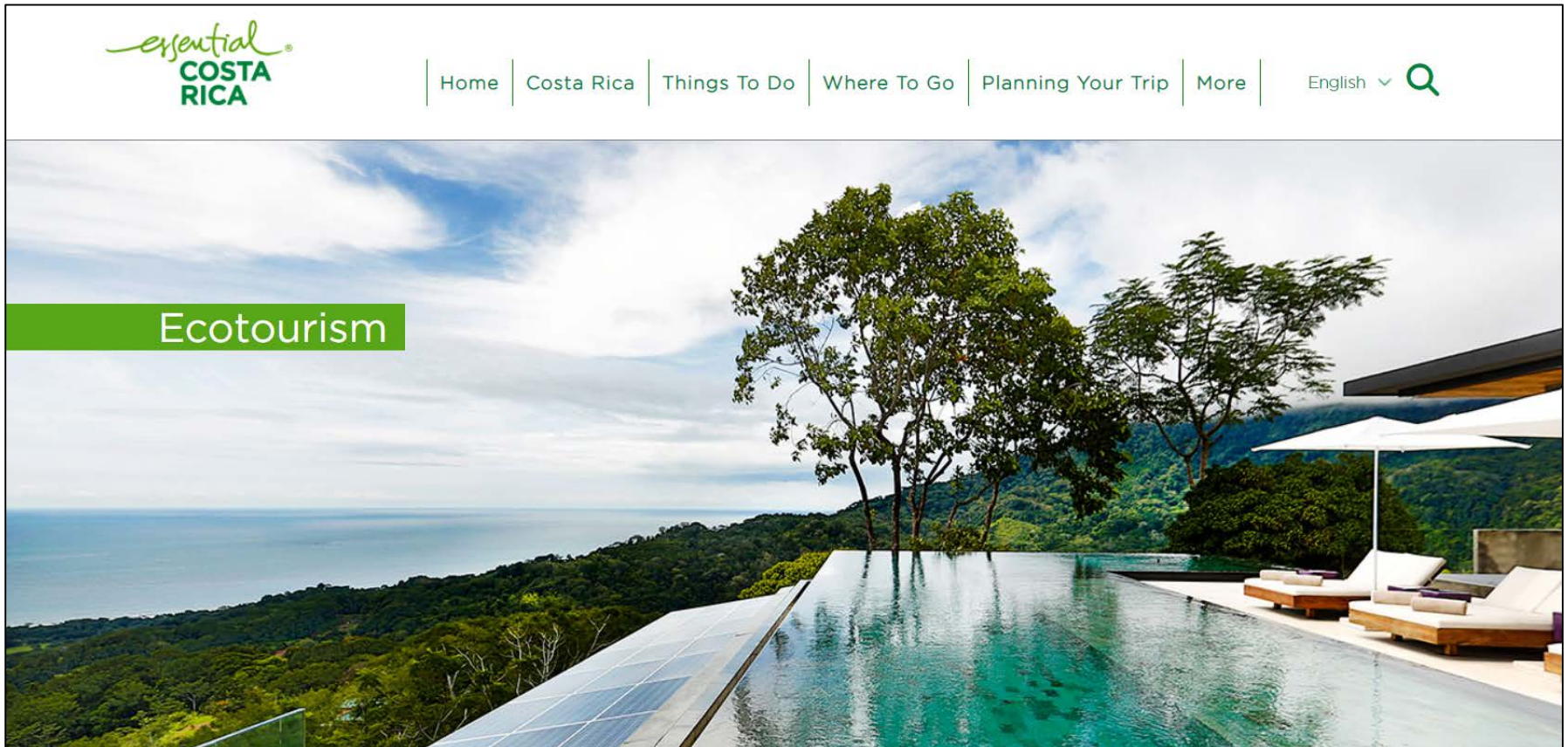
## US National Parks – Achievements

- **Effective protection of iconic landscapes and species** (in spite of some conflicts with mining interests, local conflicts and recreational overdevelopment)
- Public enjoyment & inspiration → **Interpretation** made attractive to the “masses”
- National parks as motors of **rural development** and **employment**
- Public funding gaps usually overcome by **bipartisan support**
- Willingness of the **public to support parks** politically, pay for services, make donations and volunteer
- **Concession system** and **corporate sponsoring** → *but:* danger of commercialization and overdevelopment





## Success stories: Ecotourism in Costa Rica



<https://www.visitcostarica.com/en/costa-rica/things-to-do/ecotourism>



## Success stories: Conservation in Costa Rica

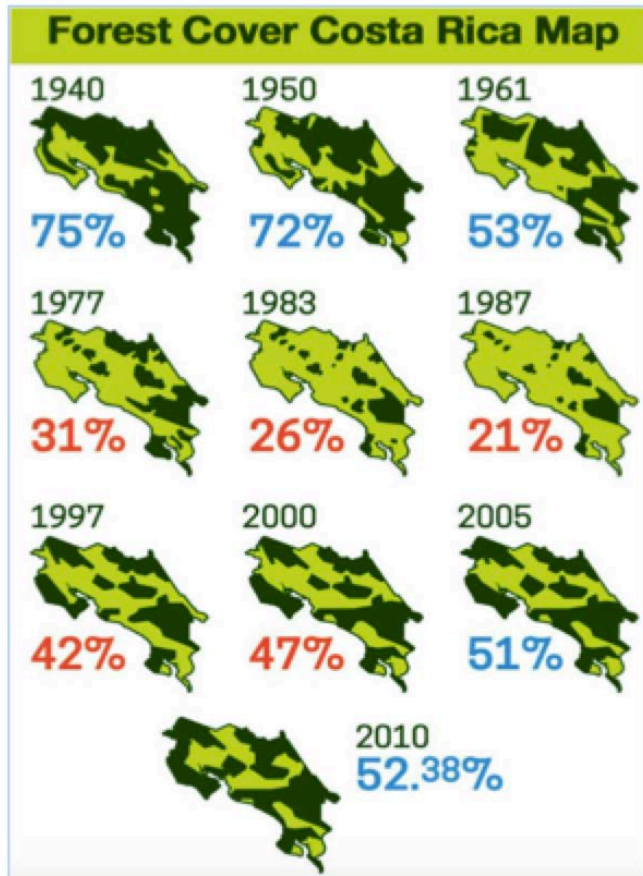
Costa Rica: The Government's decision to increase protected areas with the support of Ecotourism



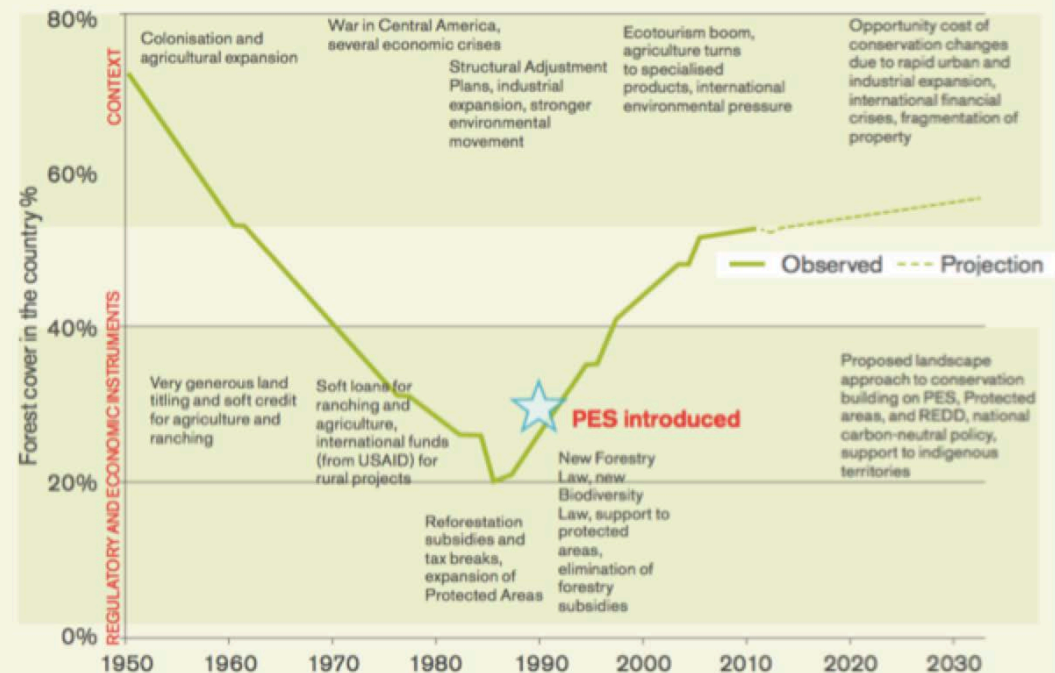
Source: <https://www.itandc.org/costa-rica-the-governments-successful-decision-to-increase-protected-areas-and-forest-cover-in-line-with-and-support-of-eco-tourism/>



## Success stories: Conservation in Costa Rica



**FIGURE 1. CHANGES IN FOREST COVER IN COSTA RICA IN RELATION TO CONTEXT, ECONOMIC AND REGULATORY INSTRUMENTS**



Source: Authors' own, based on Watson *et al.* (1998), Kleinn *et al.* (2002) and Daniels *et al.* (2010)

## Mixed results: Ecotourism and poaching

# Elephant anti-poaching activities bear clear results in KAZA

WWF *Posted on 05 September 2019*

The European Union (EU) funded project “Strengthening Community Law Enforcement and Sustainable Livelihoods in Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA TFCA)” trained and equipped 39 Community scouts to respond to illegal hunting and to carry out joint patrols with state rangers.





## The flip side: Impacts of the Corona crisis



Source: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/covid19-behind-uganda-poaching>; Date: July 9,2020



## The flip side: Impacts of the Corona crisis

# Pandemic Poaching

How the effects of COVID-19 threatens jobs and wildlife

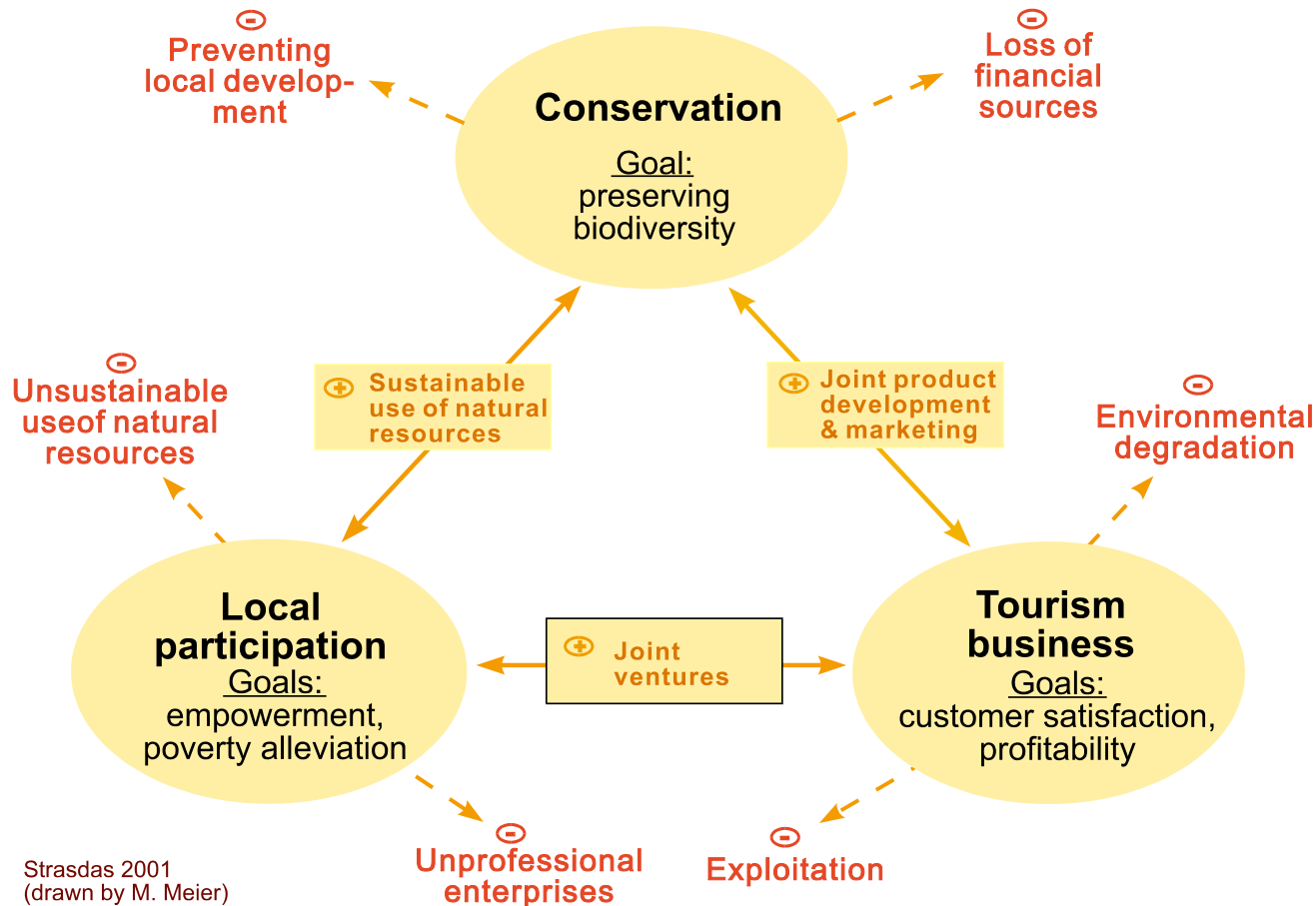
Dr Richard Thomas from the wildlife trade specialist NGO TRAFFIC sees the absence of tourists itself as a main challenge to prevent poaching during the pandemic: „For many protected areas tourism is a central source of funding. With this no longer being available, the areas can only afford fewer rangers and there are no tourist visitors around with an open eye on big game. This makes it easier for poachers to move around the areas unnoticed.“ Presence on site seems to be key, also operator „Wilderness Safari“ is claiming: „The absence of normal ecotourism activities could present an opportunity to poachers, and therefore we continue to work closely with our government partners and local authorities to carry out the necessary patrols in our various concessions“, says Dr Neil Midlane, Wilderness Safaris Group Sustainability Manager.

Source: <https://www.tourism-watch.de/en/focus/pandemic-poaching>; Date: Sept. 6, 2020

## Conclusions

1. Ecotourism was a **buzzword** in the **1990s** and early 2000s. It preceded and stimulated the broader sustainable tourism debate.
2. Ecotourism has become an **important economic factor** and mostly **supports conservation goals** in several countries.
3. This has become particularly evident during the **Corona crisis**.
4. Rural **value chains** and **community empowerment** have been **limited**.
5. Effective **visitor management** techniques do exist, but local **management capacities** must be in place for their implementation.
6. The **climate change challenge** has hardly been taken up.
7. Ecotourism is **not** a promising strategy where scenic **attractiveness is limited** or **framework conditions** are **unfavourable**.
8. Effects of voluntary contributions (travelers' philanthropy) are limited. Adequate **fee systems** are required to **generate substantial revenue** for conservation.

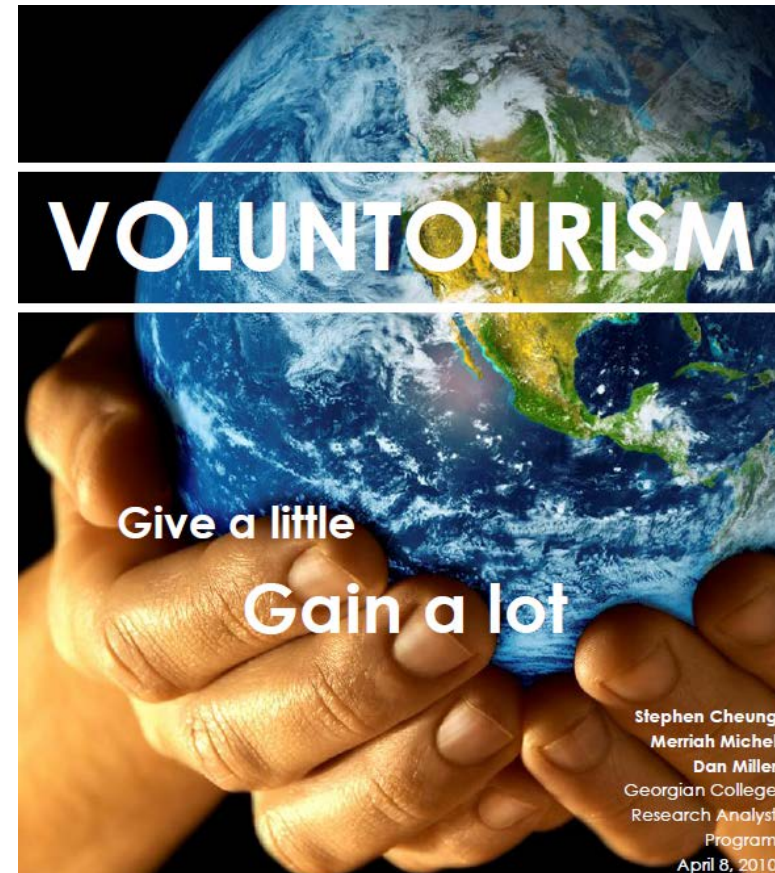
## Ecotourism management – A balancing act



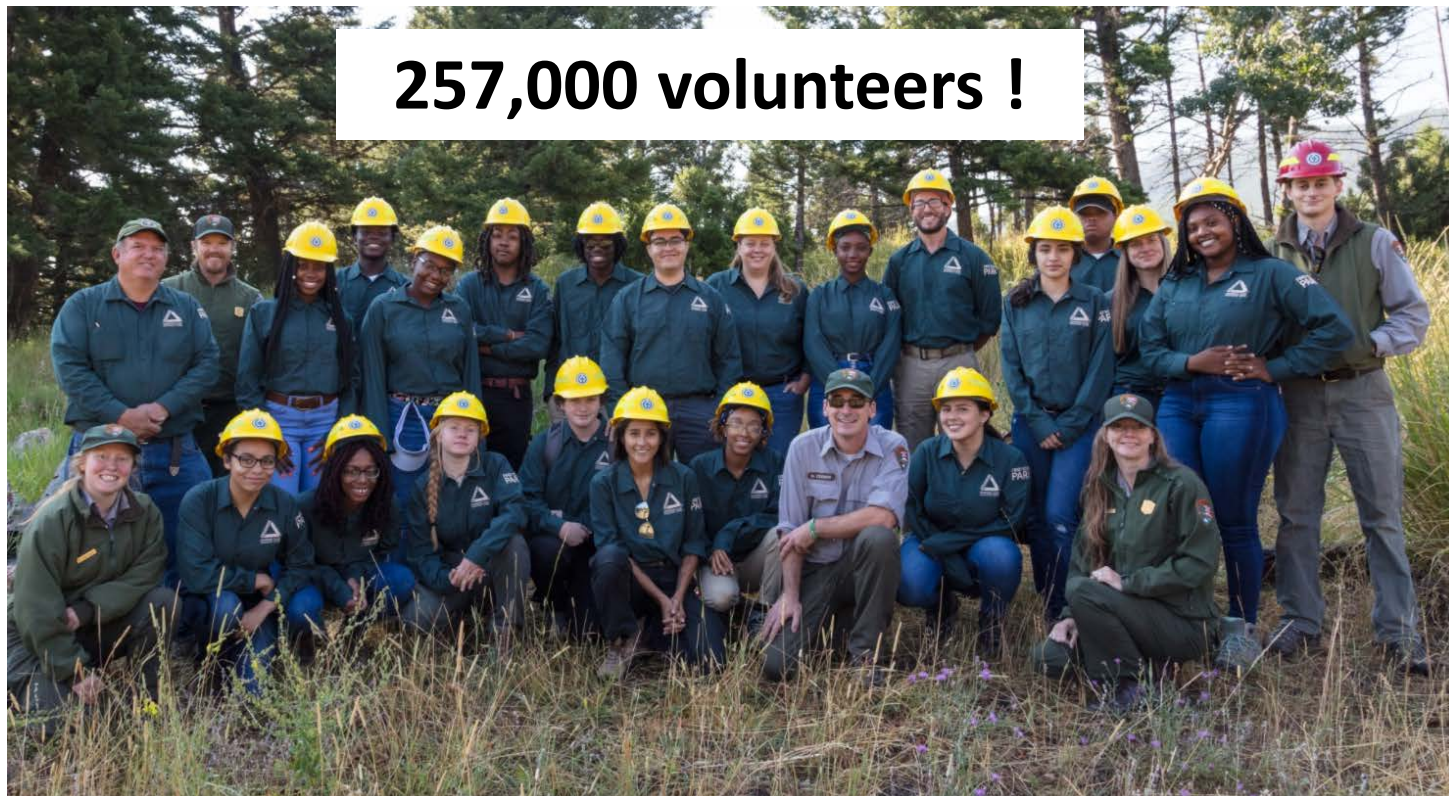


## Excursus: Voluntourism

“The generic term ‘volunteer tourism’ applies to those tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment.” (Wearing 2001).



## Volunteering – An Anglo-Saxon tradition



Source: National Park Foundation 2013

## Voluntourists' motivations

- **Altruism:** Helping others or supporting nature conservation
- Mixture of **general values, travel and lifestyles**
- **Personal growth**, intellectual challenges
- **Learning** opportunities (also as part of internships, studies)
- **Social travel:** making friends
- Combining **fun** with doing good
- **Social status**

➔ **Genuine altruism + self-centered motives**

Source: Schluzy 2009, adapted from Clary/Snyder (1998) in Stebbins/Graham (2004)

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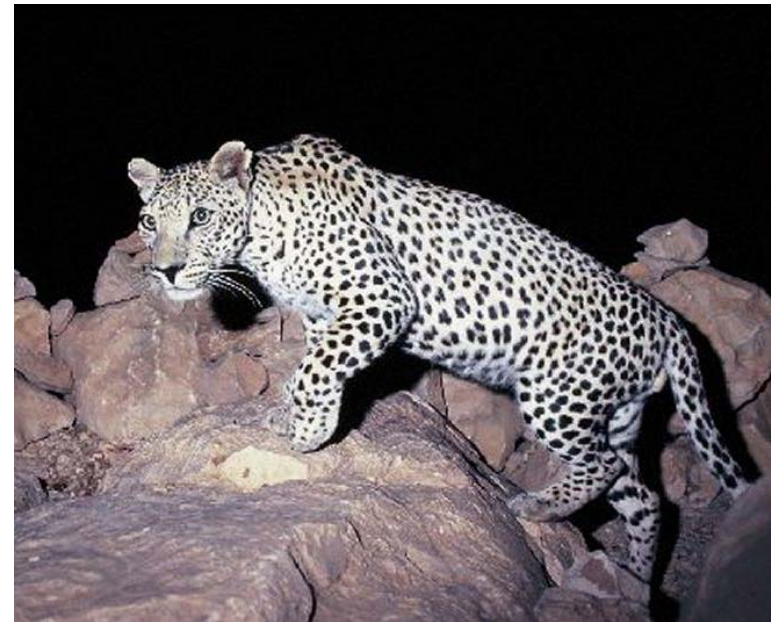
MidLife Leap

Corporate Leap

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# Conservation volunteering: Biosphere Expeditions

## Arabian leopards (Oman, 2 weeks)



Source: Biosphere Expeditions (Hammer 2008)



# Conservation volunteering: Biosphere Expeditions

## Citizen science



Source: Biosphere Expeditions (Hammer 2008)



## Conservation volunteering: Biosphere Expeditions



Source: Biosphere Expeditions (Hammer 2008)



# Conservation volunteering in Germany



## Voluntourismus-Angebote in den Nationalen Naturlandschaften



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## Guidelines for conservation-related voluntourism

- 1. Preparatory:** Local needs assessment and long-term vision
- 2. Cross-sector partnerships**
- 3. Know your target audience**
- 4. Programme development:** Create an experience; group size; volunteer tasks
- 5. Transformative learning approach**
- 6. Trained guides/coaches**
- 7. Preparation of volunteers**
- 8. Post-trip engagement**
- 9. Monitoring, evaluation, reporting**
- 10. Communication & marketing**
- 11. Involvement of locals** (purchasing, education)
- 12. Effective contribution to biodiversity conservation & environmental management**

Source: Miller 2017