# Understanding Views on Sentience and Conservation: A Study of Emotional Experiences with Wildlife

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## Introduction

- Humans play a large role in non-human animal conservation
- extent to which humans understand and experience **sentience** among non-human animals may impact the future of **conservation,** human-wildlife interactions, and **coexistence**
- Recognition of animal sentience is important in the context of multispecies interactions and human-caused **biodiversity loss**

## Problem

- Lack of research on the impact of human understanding of animal **sentience** on behavior and treatment of wildlife
- Understanding this connection will be essential to improving **conservation** practices.

## Purpose

- Gain insight into the impact of these interactions on treatment of animals, attitudes, and action for **conservation**.
- **Meaningful human engagement** with animal sentience could motivate humans to change their behavior towards wildlife and improve conservation to protect precious biodiversity.

## Research Question

**What motivates participants to connect to animal sentience, and how could this motivation lead to better treatment of wildlife?**

## Methods

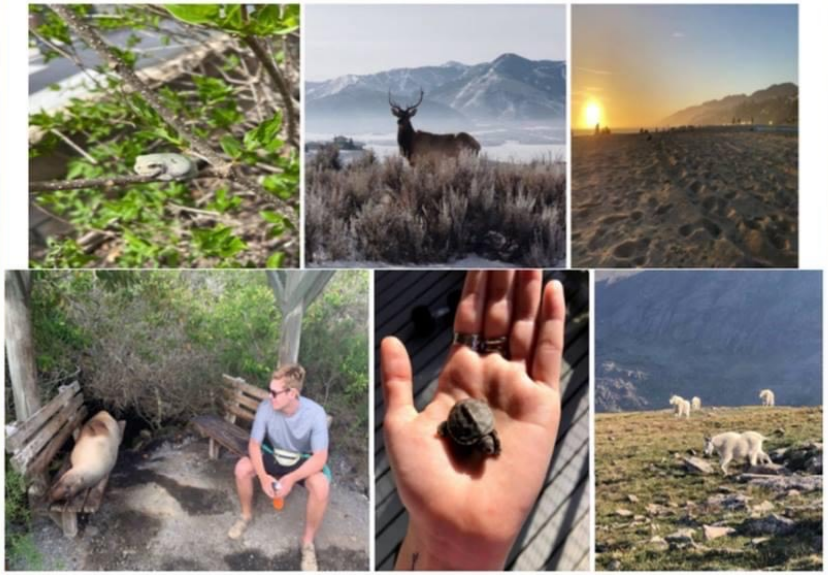
### Sample and Participants

- Participants, all over the age of 18, were recruited using a non-random convenience sample
- 44 total participants
  - 22 **humans**
  - 22 non-humans

**→ woodpecker, humpback whale, snapping turtle, elk, black bear, whale, seal, bunny, seagull, sea turtle, deer, mallard, bison, swan, mountain goat, terrapin turtle, duck, monkey, turkey, frog, sea lion**

### Instrument

- Facebook
- Share narratives/mixed media in community setting



## Results

**Trend 1: Animal Sentience**
- 63.63% of participants commented on perceived emotions of the animal(s) encountered.

**Trend 2: Human Emotion**
- 13.63% of participants reported feeling **empathy**
- 13.63% reported feeling curious about the other species.
- **Apprehension/fear.**

**Trend 3: Transformative Nature of Experience**
- 36.36% explicitly transformative.
- 31.18% implicit reference to transformative effect.
- 31.18% no reference to transformative effect.

**Trend 4: Species Type**
- 59.09% focused on an interaction with a threatened or species not commonly encountered
- Encounters with **rare** species were 2.07 times more likely to discuss a **transformative** impact than encounters with common species.
- 64.28% of reflections considering **coexistence** inspired by interactions with rare species.
- Equally likely to include a reflection on **human impact** and the idea of **multispecies** shared space

**Trend 5: Composition of Photograph**
- 45.45% of posts referenced human **proximity** to wildlife species
  - Aspect of respect in mentions of proximity show evidence of **coexistence** at present and in willingness for the future

## Discussion

### Strengths

- Narratives allowed researchers to gain a deeper, more **personal understanding** of the encounter.
- **Diverse** participant pool
- **Community** building
- **Educational** aspect: videos to explain key concepts in the non-human animal research space

### Limitations

- sample size was relatively small- only 22 of 42 Total **human** participants shared their experiences
- COVID-19 pandemic complicated research recruitment
- The sample was overwhelmingly female, with only one male participant, and the vast majority of participants (77.27%) were college students.

### Recommendations

- Importance of education on **sentience** and **conservation** in order to protect **biodiversity**
  - Participants without previous knowledge of these terms had less profound reflections than others
- Future replicated study: create more online **communities** for sharing media narratives about their wildlife interactions & connecting on their experiences.
  - Larger sample size with continual posts would enrich the data and allow researchers to draw more in-depth conclusions about attitudes toward sentience and conservation.

### Directions for Future Research

- Future research can build upon this study by exploring whether humans tend to think about conservation from a **bio-, eco-, or anthropocentric perspective**
- future studies could compare how perceptions of **wild animals** and **domesticated species** differ, and the impact on attitudes towards **conservation.**

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