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Joint open letter to:

Mr Zurab Pololikashvili  
Secretary-General of the UNWTO  
World Tourism Organization  
Calle Poeta Joan Maragall 42  
28020 Madrid, Spain

and the members of the UNWTO Global Tourism Crisis Committee:

Mr Najib Balala, Chair of the UNWTO Executive Council  
Mr Ronald K Chitotel, Chair of the UNWTO Regional Commission for Africa  
Mr Edmund Bartlett, Chair of the UNWTO Regional Commission for the Americas  
Mr Mohd Daud, Chair of the UNWTO Regional Commission for Asia and the Pacific  
Mr Ali Waheed, Chair of the UNWTO Regional Commission for South Asia  
Mr Harry Theoharis, Chair of the UNWTO Regional Commission for Europe  
Mr Mohammed Khamis Al Muhairi, Chair of the UNWTO Regional Commission for the Middle East  
Ms María Reyes Maroto Illera, Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism  
Mr Ahmed Aqeel Al-khateeb, Minister of Tourism, Saudi Arabia  
Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, World Health Organization  
Dr Fang Liu, Secretary-General, International Civil Aviation Organization  
Mr Kitack Lim, Secretary-General, International Maritime Organization  
Ms Ana Larrañaga, Chair of the Board of UNWTO Affiliate Members and IFEMA Director  
Mr Alexandre de Juniac, Director-General, International Air Transport Association  
Mr Adam Goldstein, Global Chair, Cruise Lines International Association  
Ms Angela Gittens, Director General, Airports Council International  
Mr Jeff Poole, SVP Advocacy, World Travel and Tourism Council

28 May 2020

**Re: A call to phase out captive wildlife entertainment in tourism as an essential element of 'growing back better' and preparing for tomorrow's responsible and sustainable tourism**

Dear Mr Zurab Pololikashvili and members of the UNWTO Tourism Crisis Committee,

The undersigned organisations acknowledge and commend the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the Global Tourism Crisis Committee partners' call for action to not only mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and accelerate recovery, but to come back stronger as a resilient and sustainable tourism sector that is 'Preparing for Tomorrow'.

The COVID-19 pandemic is having an overwhelming impact on both human health and the global economy, particularly the tourism sector. As noted by Secretary-General Pololikashvili: *"Tourism will be a key pillar for building a better future in all world regions"*. It is therefore important that the tourism sector embraces its part of the responsibility to prevent future pandemics while preparing for sustainable tourism tomorrow.

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In this regard, we strongly urge that the UNWTO and its partners in the Global Tourism Crisis Committee take a pro-active, precautionary and responsible approach in 'preparing for tomorrow' by calling for the phase out of all use of captive wildlife for tourist entertainment<sup>1</sup>.

As COVID-19, like SARS and Ebola, shows that the capture, handling, and close contact with wildlife can lead to catastrophic disease spill-over from wildlife to humans, we urge the UNWTO to exclude the exploitation of wild animals for entertainment from tourism altogether and promote a transition to a wildlife-friendly future as part of the implementation of the recommendations for action.

Such decisive action would signal the tourism sector's commitment to not only recover, but to build back better to protect the health of tourists and tourist workers. In keeping with the UNWTO Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, this action would truly promote an equitable, responsible and sustainable world tourism order from which all sectors of society will benefit. Moreover, transitioning from captive wildlife entertainment to wildlife-friendly tourism supports the implementation of most of the 23 recommendations to help mitigate the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 and accelerate recovery.

Visits to wildlife tourist attractions may account for up to 20-40% of international tourism globally.<sup>2</sup> Many of these attractions rely on practices that require keeping wild animals in captivity to be handled, posed with, ridden, or watched as they perform in shows. Many animals at such attractions suffer poor welfare conditions which undermine their immune systems and accelerate disease emergence and spread.

As noted recently by Dr David Nabarro, a WHO special envoy on COVID-19: "It's partly the markets, but it's also other places where humans and animals are in close contact that pose real dangers [to human health]". His guidance to "make absolutely certain that you're not creating opportunities for viral spread"<sup>3</sup> goes directly to the responsibility of the UNWTO and all stakeholders in the tourism sector to protect the health of tourists and tourist workers as laid out in articles 6 and 10 of the UNWTO Global Code of Ethics for Tourism. Phasing out support for captive wildlife entertainment attractions and transitioning to wildlife-friendly tourism is the only way to effectively reduce opportunities for viral spread and demonstrate the sector's commitment to promote responsible wildlife tourism.

Excluding the use of captive wildlife entertainment in tourist activities and discouraging the close contact between wildlife and people (workers and tourists alike) would signal a pro-active and precautionary stance to making the sector more responsible, more resilient and more responsive to the inevitable shift in consumer demand. This would significantly aid the implementation of recommendations 17, 20, and 21.

A strong message from UNWTO and members of the Global Tourism Crisis Committee that wild animals should be kept in the wild will also strengthen the sustainability of the tourism sector itself. Moreover, it will strengthen the image of the sector as a force for good whose benefits will be shared by all sectors of society.

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<sup>1</sup> Wildlife entertainment includes activities that risk portraying or trivialising wild animals as pets, novelty objects, comedians, or domesticated species; that encourage animals to perform behaviours that are either unnatural, unnecessary, or harmful; that involve procedures that may be considered stressful or harmful to all or individual animals; that expose visitors or handlers to unnecessary risks of injury or disease; that are commerce-driven beyond sustaining maintenance of the animals at facilities striving to phase-out captive wild animal keeping; or that may risk replication of similar activities in harmful ways in other places.

<sup>2</sup> Moorhouse, T.P., Dahlsjö, C.A.L., Baker, S.E. et al. (2015) The Customer Isn't Always Right – Conservation and Animal Welfare Implications of the Increasing Demand for Wildlife Tourism. PLOS ONE.

<sup>3</sup> Ng, K (2020) "WHO Urges China to Close 'Dangerous' Wet Market as Stalls in Wuhan Begin to Reopen". The Independent. April 13, 2020 - <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/coronavirus-china-cases-deaths-who-wet-market-wuhan-a9462286.html>

Captive wildlife tourism often requires the removal of wild animals from their natural habitats and is a known driver of legal and illegal wildlife trade. The most recent global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services<sup>4</sup> has determined that direct exploitation, in particular over-exploitation, of animals, plants and other organisms, is the second most important driver of biodiversity loss. Additionally, removing large vertebrate animals from the wild, also known as 'defaunation', has the potential to significantly erode carbon storage by tropical forests and hamper climate change mitigation.<sup>5</sup>

Protecting our natural heritage and biodiversity is a key requirement as stated in article 3 of the UNWTO Global Code of Ethics for Tourism. Keeping wild animals in the wild and transitioning to wildlife-friendly tourism is key to delivering on this requirement. Article 3 also speaks to the importance of preserving endangered species of wildlife.

There is, however, no evidence that captive use of wildlife in tourist entertainment activities contributes to such preservation. In fact, the Convention on Biodiversity reports that a vast majority of countries are failing to demonstrate progress in preserving endangered species (Aichi target 12)<sup>6</sup>. There is little to no logic, from either an ethical, sustainability or tourism perspective, to limit the protection of wildlife to those species that are endangered, or wait for individual species to become endangered before they warrant protection or preservation.

Moreover, preventing the decline of abundant wildlife species as well as preserving endangered species, is crucial in maintaining responsible wildlife-friendly tourism opportunities and promoting sustainable, economic growth in the sector in addition to protecting and preserving current existing ecosystems and biodiversity.

Incorporating wildlife protection in a forward-looking, transformative approach to preparing for tomorrow's tourism would enhance tourism's contribution to sustainable development. It would also equally support the sustainability of the sector itself. Phasing out captive wildlife use for tourist entertainment and transitioning to wildlife-friendly tourism will therefore assist in the implementation of recommendations 12, 14, 16, 22, and 23.

We call on the UNWTO and other stakeholders to recognise their significant roles in pro-actively minimising the risk of future pandemics, protecting the health of tourists and tourist workers and securing tourism's sustainability. We believe that the protection of wildlife is a crucial element in this process. Phasing out captive wildlife entertainment in tourism is an opportunity to combine wild animal protection with prevention of human health hazards and the promotion of the interests of a sustainable tourism economy.

Equally, we encourage all stakeholders in the tourism industry not to seek to relax any environmental protections as the sector accelerates recovery, but rather to consider the current crisis an opportunity to advance to a new, more responsible tourism model within which protecting wildlife from exploitation as entertainment firmly sits.

The undersigned organizations would be pleased to engage with the UNWTO and the UNWTO Crisis Committee on this issue. We also suggest that you consider the inclusion of a wildlife protection advocate in the Tourism Recovery Committee as envisaged in recommendation 15. The attached appendix provides further detail and evidence in relation to the issues raised in this letter.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance in your consideration of this matter.

Excellency, we remain yours sincerely,

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<sup>4</sup> IPBES (2019) Summary for Policymakers of the IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services - [https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/202002/ipbes\\_global\\_assessment\\_report\\_summary\\_for\\_policymakers\\_en.pdf](https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/202002/ipbes_global_assessment_report_summary_for_policymakers_en.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Bello et al. (2015). Defaunation affects carbon storage in tropical forests. *Science Advances*. 1. e1501105. <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.1501105> - <https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/1/11/e1501105>

<sup>6</sup> Convention on Biological Diversity (1992) Aichi Target 12 - <https://www.cbd.int/aichi/targets/target/12>

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nick Stewart".

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## Animal Protection Groups and NGOs

AAP Animal Advocacy and Protection, the Netherlands  
ACTAsia  
Action for Dolphins, Australia  
Action for Primates  
Africa's Wild Dog Survival Fund, South Africa  
Ali Anima, Brazil  
Aliança Pró Biodiversidade, Brazil  
All life in a viable Environment, Japan  
Alliance for Animal Rights, Ireland  
Alliance for Earth, Life, Liberty & Advocacy, the US  
Ananta Jyoti Dhayn Kendra, Nepal  
Andhra Pradesh Goshala Federation, India  
Anima, Denmark  
Animal Aid Unlimited, India  
Animal Concerns Research & Education Society, Singapore  
Animal Defenders International (ADI), the US  
Animal Friendly Alliance, Hong Kong  
Animal Friends Croatia  
Animal Friends Jogja, Indonesia  
Animal Guardians, the US  
Animal Nepal  
Animal People Forum, the US  
Animal Projects and Environmental Education Sdn Bhd, Malaysia  
Animal Protection Agency Foundation, the UK  
Animal Protection and Environmental Sanctuary (APES), South Africa  
Animal Rescue Cambodia  
Animal Rights Centre, Japan  
Animal Sanctuary Trust, Indonesia  
Animal Welfare and anti-Harassment Society, India  
Animal Welfare Institute, the US  
AnimalConcepts, Spain  
Animals Asia Foundation, Hong Kong  
International Primate Protection League, the US  
International Wildlife Bond, the UK  
IQRA Foundation, the US  
Jakarta Animal Aid Network, Indonesia  
Japan Anti-vivisection Association, Japan  
JBF (India) Trust, India  
Karuna Society for Animals & Nature, India  
Kathmandu Animal Treatment Centre, Nepal  
Korea Animal Rights Advocates  
KYMA sea conservation & research, Switzerland  
Lady Freethinker, the US  
La Fondation Droit Animale, Ethique et Sciences, France  
Landmark Foundation, South Africa  
Lawrence Anthony Earth Organization, South Africa  
Lega Nazionale Dirritte Animalì per la Difusa del Cane, Italy  
Liberia Chimpanzee Rescue & Protection, Liberia  
Lifelong Animal Protection, Hong Kong  
Love Animal House, Thailand  
Love Wildlife Foundation, Thailand  
Marine Connection, the UK  
Mater Natura - Instituto de Estudos Ambientais, Brazil  
Melbourn Dolphin, Australia  
Moonbears.org, Hong Kong  
Moving Animals  
Neotropical Primate Conservation, the UK  
Nepal Animal Welfare and Research Centre, Nepal  
Nepal Street Animal Rescue, Nepal  
Noahs Ark Ipoh Malaysia  
NowZad, Afghanistan  
OceanCare, Switzerland  
OneKind, Scotland  
ONG Sante Animale Afrique, Cameroon  
Orangutan Aid, Global  
Orca Rescues Foundation, the UK

Anima-Society for the Protection of Animals (Macau), China  
 Associação de Preservação do Meio Ambiente e da Vida, Brazil  
 Bali Animal Welfare Association, Indonesia  
 Bali Streetdog Fund, Australia  
 Ban Animal Trading, South Africa  
 Bears in Mind, the Netherlands  
 Big Cat Rescue, the US  
 Bikoshito Bangladesh Foundation, Bangladesh  
 Blood Lions, South Africa  
 Blue Cross Odisha, India  
 Blue Cross of India  
 Born Free, International  
 British Hen Welfare Trust, the UK  
 Captured in Africa Foundation, South Africa  
 Catholic Concern for Animals, the UK  
 Centre for Orangutan Protection, Indonesia  
 Centro Voluntário de Reabilitação de Animais Selvagens, Brazil  
 C'est Assez, France  
 Change for Animals Foundation, the UK  
 China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation, China  
 Code Animal, France  
 Community Dog Welfare Kopan, Nepal  
 Compassion Unlimited Plus Action, India  
 Compassion Works International  
 Conservación de Mamíferos Marinos de Mexico – COMARINO–, Mexico  
 CPR Environmental Education Centre, India  
 Crescente Fértil  
 Darjeeling Animal Shelter, India  
 Deutscher Tierschutzbund / German Animal Welfare Federation, Germany  
 Djurättsalliansen (the Animal Rights Alliance), Sweden  
 Djurskyddet Sverige (Animal Welfare Sweden), Sweden  
 Dobro Surtse, Bulgaria  
 Dogstop  
 Earth Crusaders Organisation, India  
 Elephanatics, Canada  
 Elephation, the US  
 Environment Films, the UK  
 Eurogroup for Animals, Belgium  
 FAADA (Fundación para el Asesoramiento y Acción en Defensa de los Animales), Spain  
 Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organisations, India  
 Fish Welfare Initiative, the US  
 FLIGHT  
 Orca Research Trust, New Zealand  
 Pan African Sanctuary Alliance  
 PAWS Bangkok, Thailand  
 PEACE (Put an END to Animal Cruelty and Exploitation), Japan  
 People for Animal Care and Kindness  
 People for Animals Odisha, India  
 Performing Animal Welfare Society (PAWS), the US  
 Peta Asia  
 Plant and Animals Welfare Society (PAWS), India  
 Pro Wildlife, Germany  
 Projeto Verde Mar, Brazil  
 PSS Educational Development Society, India  
 PupAid, the UK  
 RAKSHA, India  
 Rede Ambiental do Piauí, Brazil  
 ReEarth, the US  
 RSPCA UK  
 Sahabat Alam Malaysia  
 SAI (Save Animals Initiative) Sanctuary Trust, India  
 Sanctuary for Health and Reconnection to Animals & Nature, India  
 Sarawak Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Malaysia  
 Scorpion Foundation, Indonesia  
 Sea Shepherd Brasil  
 SEY Animal Welfare, Finland  
 Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, Kenya  
 Showing Animals Respect and Kindness (SHARK), US  
 Shree Karuna Foundation Trust, Animal Helpline Rajkot  
 Society for Animal Welfare and Management, Nepal  
 Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Hong Kong  
 Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Penang  
 Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Selangor  
 Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Singapore  
 Society for the Protection of Animals Ljubimci  
 Society for Travellers Respecting Animal Welfare, Canada  
 Soi Dog Foundation, Thailand  
 Southern African Fight for Rhinos, South Africa  
 SPCA Taiwan  
 SPCA Zimbabwe  
 Stichting SPOTS, the Netherlands  
 Stray Relief and Animal Welfare, India  
 Sun Bear Centre, Kalimantan  
 The Animal Rights Alliance, Sweden

Fondation Birgitte Bardot, France  
 Forgotten Animals, Russia (and the UK)  
 Forum Nacional de Proteção e Defesa Animal, Brazil  
 Four Paws International  
 Franciscan Order, Hong Kong  
 Fraternité pour le respect animal, France  
 Free Morgan Foundation  
 Freeland Brasil  
 Friends of the Orangutans, Malaysia  
 Future for Elephants, Germany  
 Future 4 Wildlife, South Africa  
 Global Action in the Interest of Animals, Belgium  
 Global Animal Welfare  
 Global March for Elephants and Rhinos, the US  
 Global Sanctuary for Elephants, the US  
 Green Girls in Africa  
 Grey2K USA Worldwide  
 Greyhound Compassion, the UK  
 Help Animals India  
 Himalayan Animal Rescue Trust, Nepal  
 Hollow Paws, France  
 Humane Society International  
 Humane Society International - Africa  
 Humane Society International - UK  
 In Defense of Animals, India  
 In Defense of Animals, USA  
 Instituto Arara Azul, Brazil  
 Instituto Ecos do Cerrado, Brazil  
 Instituto Mira-Serra, Brazil  
 Instituto Vida Livre, Brazil  
 International Animal Rescue, the UK  
 International Otter Survival Fund, the UK

The Cattitude Trust, Chennai  
 The Corbett Foundation, India  
 The Humane League, Japan  
 The Jane Goodall Institute, Nepal  
 The Kerulos Centre for Nonviolence, the US  
 The Philippines Animal Welfare Society, the Philippines  
 The Winsome Constance Kindness Act, Australia  
 Tree of Compassion, Australia  
 Unexpected Wildlife Refuge, the US  
 Vegan-it  
 Velvet Monkey Foundation, South Africa  
 Vier Pfoten, Germany  
 VIVA Instituto Verde Azul, Brazil  
 Voice for Dogs Abroad, Australia  
 Voice for Lions  
 Voice for Zoo Animals, Japan  
 Vshine Animal Protection Association, China  
 We Animals Media  
 Whale and Dolphin Conservation, International  
 Whale Rescue, New Zealand  
 Wild & Free - Rehabilitation and Release, the UK  
 Wild Futures, the UK  
 Wild Welfare, the UK  
 Wildlife Alliance, Cambodia  
 Wildlife Friends Foundation, Thailand  
 Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Center  
 Working for Animals, Australia  
 World Animal Net, the US  
 World Cetacean Alliance, International  
 World for all Animal Care and Adoptions, India  
 Yangon Animal Shelter, Myanmar  
 Zoocheck Inc., Canada

## Travel and Tourism Organisations

Airbnb  
 ANVR, the Netherlands  
 ANWB Reizen, the Netherlands  
 Apollo, Sweden  
 Atlantis Rejser, Denmark  
 Booking.com  
 Coletivo Muda!, Brazil  
 Corendon, the Netherlands  
 Estação Gabiraba, Brazil  
 Footprint Travel, the Netherlands  
 Gondwana Brasil, Brazil  
 Intrepid Travel, Canada and Australia  
 Inverted America, Brazil

NZ Travel Brokers, New Zealand  
 Responsible Tourism Partnership, UK  
 Rickshaw Travel, UK  
 SATSA, South Africa  
 Spies, Denmark  
 Tourism Cares, the US  
 Travelombia, Colombia  
 Turismo Consciente, Brazil  
 Turismo de Experiência, Brazil  
 Viare Travel, Brazil  
 Vivejar, Brazil  
 Williams Rejser, Denmark  
 World Expeditions, Australia

## Appendix: The case for phasing out captive wildlife entertainment in tourism as an essential element of 'growing back better' and preparing for responsible and sustainable tourism tomorrow

### Public health

The emergence of the One Health concept reflects the growing recognition that the health and welfare of humans, animals and ecosystems are interconnected. Humans, animals and their pathogens have coexisted for millennia, but recent economic, institutional and environmental trends are creating new disease risks and intensifying old ones.

One trend is the growing exploitation of wildlife for food, tourism, entertainment, traditional medicine and as exotic pets. This often involves acute cruelty in the capture, transport and handling of wildlife. The stress induced by such cruelty and poor living conditions exacerbates the likelihood of disease emergence and spread. The recent outbreaks of Ebola and the coronavirus (COVID-19) are just some examples of how the lack of protection of wildlife is causing significant risk for human health on a global scale.

The COVID-19 outbreak is believed to have originated at wildlife markets in China, and transmitted to humans as a result of close proximity between wildlife and people.<sup>4</sup> The significance of wildlife as a reservoir of emerging infectious diseases is high with 60% of emerging infectious diseases being zoonotic and 70% of these are thought to originate from wildlife.<sup>8</sup> In the case of COVID-19, it is important to stress that it was the actions of people that created the environment in which disease transmission was possible. Tourists interacting with captive wild animals must therefore be of particular concern when it comes to protecting global health.

Visits to wildlife tourist attractions may account for up to 20-40% of international tourism globally.<sup>1</sup> Some of these attractions can be considered humane and ethical and may benefit the protection of wild animal populations when tourism's full potential as an economic rationale for protecting nature is harnessed. Such attractions may include viewing animals at genuine sanctuaries, wildlife-friendly facilities and observing animals responsibly in their natural wild habitats from a safe and respectful distance. However, many others rely on practices that require keeping wild animals in captivity for tourist entertainment - for handling, posing with, riding, or for performing in shows.

These wildlife entertainment tourism attractions have substantial negative effects both on animal welfare and conservation that are unrecognised by most tourists. An estimated 230,000-550,000 individual animals are kept at tourism attractions that negatively affect their welfare.<sup>1</sup> Each of these can be a source of emerging infectious diseases. Some selected examples with particular risks follow below.

- Encounters with marine mammals such as dolphins pose a risk for zoonotic disease transmission. The list of transferrable diseases is growing and includes several potentially life-threatening" diseases.<sup>7</sup> It is a highly questionable policy and practice to regularly expose visitors to risks that may result in people unwittingly carrying contracted diseases away with them.
- Captive elephants, often tourist magnets in Asia and Africa, are recognised as carriers of tuberculosis. They will usually have contracted this from people and are suspected to be able to spread it to uninfected people

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<sup>7</sup> Waltzek, T.B., et al. (2012) Marine mammal zoonoses: A review of disease manifestations. *Zoonoses and Public Health* 59:521-535. 2012.

through close contact.<sup>8,9,10</sup> In 2018, 10 elephants at Amer Fort in India – one of the country’s most visited tourist attractions – tested positive for tuberculosis.<sup>11</sup> We estimate that more than 12 million tourists are exposed to health risks annually by going on elephant rides or attending activities that include close encounters with captive elephants.<sup>12</sup>

- Tourism has also fuelled the increase in selfies with wild animals. Between 2014 and 2017 the number of wildlife selfies posted on Instagram increased by 292%. More than 40% of these involved hugging, holding or inappropriately interacting with a wild animal.<sup>13</sup> Typical species for tourist interaction included sloths, toucans, anacondas, ocelots and anteaters. Nine out of 10 tourist excursions in Manaus offered opportunities to hold and touch wild animals. The risk of transmitting potential zoonoses to tourists must be considered a significant public health risk and the suffering of those wild animals is severe and entirely unnecessary.

### Animal protection/sector sustainability

The UNWTO Global Code of Ethics for Tourism emphasises the importance of preserving endangered species of wildlife. However, we strongly believe it should be amended to recognise the importance of protecting wildlife from the risk of becoming endangered in the first place. It should also be amended to protect animals from needlessly suffering for tourist entertainment.

There is little to no logic, from either an ethical, sustainability or tourism perspective, to limit the protection of wildlife to those species that are endangered or wait for individual species to become endangered before they warrant protection or preservation.

Preventing the decline of abundant wildlife species as well as preserving endangered species, is crucial to maintaining responsible wildlife tourism opportunities and promoting sustainable economic growth in the sector in addition to the protection and preservation of current existing ecosystems and biodiversity.

Throughout the world, there are examples of how tourism is driving the wildlife trade.

- In Thailand, the booming tourism industry has led to an increase in elephant tourism venues by 130% in 10 years. Most elephants are bred purely for commercial tourism use. Trade prices of elephants have skyrocketed to over US\$50,000, placing a dangerous price-tag on an endangered species. It also led to the dependency of more than 2,500 endangered captive elephants on tourism. Due to the COVID-19 crisis they are now threatened with starvation as they require more than US\$1 million per month in upkeep.
- The popularity of marine theme parks also drives the wildlife trade. The Mexico, Caribbean, Bahamas and Bermuda region accounts for one-fifth of all captive dolphins globally. Comparatively small countries within

<sup>8</sup> Lyashchenko, K.P., Greenwald, R., et al. (2006) Tuberculosis in Elephants: Antibody Responses to Defined Antigens of Mycobacterium tuberculosis, Potential for Early Diagnosis and Monitoring of Treatment; Clinical and Vaccine Immunology

<sup>9</sup> Angkawanish, T., Waijwalku, W., et al. (2010) Mycobacterium tuberculosis Infection of Domesticated Asian Elephants. Thailand. Emerging Infectious Diseases.

<sup>10</sup> Ong, B.L., Ngeow, Y.F., et al. (2013) Tuberculosis in captive Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*) in Peninsular Malaysia. Epidemiology and Infection.

<sup>11</sup> Anon. (2018) “Report Shows Elephants Giving Rides to Tourists at Amer Suffer from TB, Blindness.” Hindustan Times. April 24, 2018. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/jaipur/report-shows-elephants-giving-rides-to-tourists-at-amer-suffer-from-tb-blindness/story-4l2At1a78YfC3qmtvBMzCN.html>

<sup>12</sup> Schmidt-Burbach, J. (2017) Taken for a ride – The conditions for elephants used in tourism in Asia. World Animal Protection.

<sup>13</sup> World Animal Protection (2018) A close up on cruelty: The harmful impact of wildlife selfies in the Amazon.



this region keep large numbers of captive dolphins directly driven by tourism demand fuelled by cruise ships and tour operators offering travel itineraries which often include dolphin interactions and shows.

- Dolphins continue to be captured from wild populations for use in dolphinariums often not meeting international requirements to safeguard their survival.<sup>14</sup> In 2017/2018, 96 dolphins were taken from the wild in Taiji, Japan, for use in the multi-billion dollar dolphin entertainment industry.<sup>15</sup> Given a single dolphin can generate between US\$400,000 and US\$2 million per year for a venue, there is clear financial incentive to capture and trade dolphins.<sup>16</sup>
- Tourism is fuelling the keeping of thousands of big cats, such as tigers and lions in facilities in Thailand, China, South Africa and the United States of America, where feeding of or posing with cubs is offered. Once fully grown these animals may be culled or are destined for trophy hunting or fed into the trade of tiger and lion bones to China for consumptive use.<sup>17,18,19</sup>

### Climate change and biodiversity loss

Wildlife entertainment activities involving captive animals often depend on the removal of that wildlife from the wild which directly diminishes climate mitigation and leads to biodiversity loss.

The two largest carbon sinks on the planet, namely the ocean and the tropical forests, both depend largely on the free movement of animals to maintain their capacity to sequester carbon. Oceans and terrestrial ecosystems sequester approximately 5.6 gigatons of carbon per year. This is the equivalent of 60% of global anthropogenic emissions.<sup>20</sup> Many large tropical trees with a sizable contribution to carbon stock (for instance, 50% of all trees in the Amazon forest) rely on large vertebrate animals for seed dispersal and regeneration. A recent study has found that defaunation (ie the reduction of large vertebrate animals through hunting, illegal trade and habitat loss) has the potential to significantly erode carbon storage.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, marine animals are responsible for much of the carbon sequestration in the ocean. According to UNEP, a new concept, 'fish carbon', recognises the potential of marine life to address the climate change challenge and prevent global biodiversity loss.<sup>22</sup> The role of animals in maintaining the capacity of the ocean as a carbon sink is significant. Examples include whales providing phytoplankton (which absorb carbon) with necessary nutrients; fish and other marine animals eating the phytoplankton and depositing stored carbon as faecal pellets on ocean floor; or sea otters eating sea urchins which allow kelp forests to grow.

<sup>14</sup> Rose, N.A., Parsons, E.C.M. (2019) The Case Against Marine Mammals in Captivity. Animal Welfare Institute and World Animal Protection.  
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Data gather from land-based observers - [www.cetabase.org/taiji/driveresults/](http://www.cetabase.org/taiji/driveresults/)

<sup>16</sup> World Animal Protection (2019) Behind the Smile - The multi-billion dollar dolphin entertainment industry.

<sup>17</sup> World Animal Protection (2016) Tiger selfies exposed - A portrait of Thailand's tiger entertainment industry.

<sup>18</sup> Villalva, P., Moracho, E. (2019) Tiger trade threatens big cats worldwide. *Science*. 364:6442.

<sup>19</sup> Environmental Investigation Agency (2019) Demand reduction 'impossible' where government policies endorse use of big cat parts. EIA International.

<sup>20</sup> IPBES (2019). The global assessment report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services - [https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/2020-02/ipbes\\_global\\_assessment\\_report\\_summary\\_for\\_policymakers\\_en.pdf](https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/2020-02/ipbes_global_assessment_report_summary_for_policymakers_en.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Bello et al. (2015). Defaunation affects carbon storage in tropical forests. *Science Advances*. 1. e1501105.

<https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.1501105> - <https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/1/11/e1501105>

<sup>22</sup> UNEP (2018) Business unusual: How "fish carbon" stabilizes our climate - <https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/business-unusual-how-fish-carbon-stabilizes-our-climate>

The most recent global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services<sup>23</sup> has determined that “around 25 percent of animal and plant species are threatened with extinction, many within decades, unless action is taken to reduce the intensity of the drivers of biodiversity loss.” The same report notes that “for terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems, land use change has had the largest relative negative impact on nature since 1970, followed by the direct exploitation, in particular overexploitation, of animals, plants and other organisms”.

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Eco-system Services (IPBES) assesses that current negative trends in biodiversity and ecosystems will undermine progress towards 80% of the relevant targets in SDGs related to poverty, hunger, health, water, cities, climate, oceans and land.

### Culling or starvation

COVID-19’s impact has presented a truly devastating situation for animals and people. It has caused great loss of human life, severely damaged physical and mental health, the global economy, livelihoods and the quality of public life.

As a result of the global halt in tourism and in response to social distancing directives, captive wildlife facilities across the globe are closed to the public. Without income, facilities are reporting that they are unable to feed their animals. This could lead to the tragic situation of them considering culling their animals – culling is the term used when otherwise healthy animals are deliberately killed.

Wild animals like elephants, dolphins and tigers in captivity suffer chronically from poor and insufficient conditions that inherently compromise their welfare. However, starvation is a form of acute suffering that no sentient being should ever have to face. This choice between culling and starvation within an already compromised situation becomes more likely the longer the economy remains in lockdown. This tragic truth underscores the no-win situation for wildlife held captive for tourism – they suffer for tourism, and they suffer when tourism dries up.

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<sup>23</sup> IPBES (2019). The global assessment report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services - [https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/2020-02/ipbes\\_global\\_assessment\\_report\\_summary\\_for\\_policymakers\\_en.pdf](https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/2020-02/ipbes_global_assessment_report_summary_for_policymakers_en.pdf)