

THE PREFERENCE FOR THE EXOTIC IN WILDLIFE BROADCAST FILM

by

Ryan Patrick Fitzgibbons

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree

of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Science and Natural History Filmmaking

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

April 2007

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Ronald Tobias

Approved for the Department of Media and Theater Arts

Dr. Walter C. Metz

Approved for the Division of Graduate Education

Dr. Carl A. Fox

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Ryan Patrick Fitzgibbons

April 2007

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GLOSSARY

Tourist ethic: a way of understanding wildlife as mainly a visual novelty, preferring rarer, exotic wildlife to domestic wildlife.

Pristine: a mostly conceptual realm of untouched wild lands filled with megafauna and devoid of humans.

Wildness: a state encompassing the flora, fauna, and ecological processes of a natural area; as opposed to “wilderness” which may be in reference to only the land.

Encounterability: frequency with which the general public has a direct experience (i.e., not mediated through television, film, or another image source) with a particular animal.

Recognizability: the level at which the general public identifies an animal and has some knowledge of the animals' habits and conservation status.

Wildlife value orientations: how a person forms the core of individual beliefs and attitudes, which, in turn, influence behavior toward wildlife.

Spectacularization: embellishment through the manipulation of the formal codes of presentation (Papson 78).

Charismatic megafauna: large, usually mammalian, aesthetically-appealing animals with which the general public has a heightened recognition and empathetic attitude; often animals designated as endangered or threatened (Barney et al. 41).

Wildlife: non-plant members of the biotic community.

Availability of wildlife programming: abundance, variety, and airing frequency of wildlife programming that is readily accessible to American households.

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ABSTRACT

American wildlife broadcast film has exhibited a preference for exotic fauna, leaving much of North American wildlife underappreciated. The American preference for the exotic finds its roots in the early African hunting films of Cherry Kearton, John Hemment, and Martin Johnson. These films became manifestations of the Pristine, a conceptual realm of untouched wildness filled with aesthetically-pleasing megafauna. Since then, visions of the Pristine, through the exotic wildlife and landscape, have remained popular in American broadcast viewing, as seen in Animal Planet's programming. Exotic wildlife broadcast film encourages viewers to engage in the roles of tourist, refugee, and conservationist. These roles, in turn, foster an understanding of nature that is dominated by seemingly plentiful megafauna, disconnected from humans and valued through a nature-importing model. The challenge in viewing domestic wildlife in broadcast film is that Americans cannot engage in the tourist role, one that highly values novelty and exceptionalism. In addition, Americans have become increasingly urbanized and separate from their natural surroundings. This separation between Americans and domestic wildlife may foster negative attitudes toward and misinformation of domestic fauna. Despite small steps in presenting domestic wildlife in Animal Planet programming, the prevalence of exotic-focused wildlife film has done little to bridge the gap between Americans and domestic wildlife. Filmmakers should reconsider the appeal of exotic wildlife (novelty and rarity) in order to foster interest in the vast array of generally unknown domestic wildlife. In a way films can encourage American viewers to become "tourists" to their own country's wildlife and foster the same positive values Americans hold for exotic fauna.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout its history, wildlife broadcast film has exhibited a strong preference for exotic fauna, leaving domestic fauna underappreciated. The United States in particular has had a long-standing love affair with the exotic, which Africa has often embodied, a legacy that dates back to the films of Cherry Kearton, John Hemment, and Martin Johnson at the beginning of the twentieth century. Nearly a century later, the allure of the exotic is alive and well, and on broadcast networks such as Animal Planet. In this thesis I shall argue that, by focusing on the exotic, broadcast television may be perpetuating a view of wildlife that is dominated by seemingly plentiful megafauna, disconnected from humans, and valued through a nature-importing model. As a result, we need to encourage filmmakers to value North American wildlife as film subjects so that we may foster an appreciation of domestic fauna.

Programs that appear regularly on Animal Planet (hereinafter APL), such as Wild Kingdom, Meerkat Manor, Crocodile Hunter, and Growing Up: "Gorilla," present the American viewer with an intimate window to exotic animals and habitats. These shows often highlight large, aesthetically-pleasing, and rare animals, which authors often term "charismatic megafauna" (Barney, Mintzes, and Chiung-Fen 41; Foale and Macintyre). These films feature habitats that are strikingly different from that of North America. The look of the exotic is hot, expansive, lush, and most notably, devoid of humans. The absence of humans and the rare, impressive animals roaming the vast landscape evoke a sense of timelessness. These features of exotic wildlife film create a contrived vision of a

pristine and harmonious wilderness. Based on the wildlife programming on Animal Planet throughout November 2006, American viewers prefer this televisual manifestation of Eden over a more human-inclusive view of domestic wildlife. North American fauna does not fit the vision of the Pristine because human presence negates any possibility of “untouched wildness” (Nash 3).

Through their human-free and megafauna-filled images, exotic wildlife film makes a certain scope of wildlife information available to American viewers and therefore may influence the way Americans understand nature. However, these programs also influence an understanding of nature through their images that *are not* presented as well. Wildlife film that frequently focuses on the exotic instead of the domestic may foster an ethic of neglect, fear, and ennui with regard to North American wildlife.

Shifting a focus to American domestic wildlife involves more than just the placement of the lens. It may be more difficult for an American viewer to search of a vision of the Pristine in the modern United States than in an exotic land. Judging from a profile of popular wildlife broadcast film that I created as a narrow gauge readily available to American viewers, Americans generally prefer watching exotic wildlife over domestic wildlife. Many Americans perceive wildlife through a “tourist ethic,” a way of understanding that values novelty, rarity, and exceptionalism over other scientific values. The continual allure of exotic lands has sustained the tourist ethic for decades.

The physical disconnect between Americans and domestic wildlife, or low “encounterability,” contributes to the preference against North American fauna on broadcast film. In addition, there is an even greater disconnect between Americans and

exotic wildlife than between Americans and domestic wildlife. However, a high “recognizability” of exotic “charismatic megafauna” by Americans offsets the lower encounterability of exotic wildlife. Recognizability is the degree with which people identify and possess some knowledge of an animal. Conservation advocates have often used the recognizability of the exotic animal through images in film, television, web sites, toys, and logos in order to capture the public’s imagination and direct attention toward conservation issues (Barney, Mintzes, and Chiung-Fen 41).

The potential encounterability of some domestic megafauna by Americans creates difficulty in maintaining a pure tourist ethic. North American megafauna elicit widely divergent attitudes toward wildlife for Americans. Across the American spectrum, viewers perceive wolves, bears, mountain lions, and similar large animals with both reverence and aversion (Kellert et al. 979). Campers and other outdoor recreationists, for instance, consider bears and mountain lions to be a nuisance and a looming threat to safety. In addition, wolves are the focus of hotly-debated management issues between ranchers and conservationists. When compared to exotic wildlife, the political and social aspects of domestic wildlife seem more tangible to many American viewers. These negative real-world ties to domestic wildlife may impede the viewer from fully engaging in a tourist role.

In this essay, I will use APL’s prime time programming schedule as a gauge of the current state of wildlife broadcast film. Using these shows I intend to illustrate the elements of the exotic focus, the preference for the Pristine, and the perpetuation of the tourist ethic in viewing wildlife on film. Although a discussion of a cable channel’s

wildlife content is only one influencing factor in American's attitudes and knowledge of wildlife, I shall argue that APL is a significant and influential source of information about wildlife for the public (Dingwall and Aldridge 132). As Chris observes in Watching Wildlife, APL has become a global brand name in wildlife and a source with "cultural currency" for American viewers (120).

PROFILE OF AMERICAN WILDLIFE BROADCAST FILM

Wildlife broadcast films are a significant source of information about biology and conservation, especially for today's increasingly urbanized American society (King 61). It is difficult to determine how much and how often American viewers watch nature programs on these channels, and so I have made conclusions based on the potential effects of programming typically being broadcast on APL. Because of the difficulty in obtaining reliable viewership data, a similar study by Dingwall and Aldridge focuses on the potential audience—the “reach”—rather than the actual audience of natural history broadcast films. In their analysis of the topic of evolution in natural history broadcast films, the researchers make observations based on the reach of the programming (Dingwall and Aldridge 132).

Discovery Channel, National Geographic Channel, Animal Planet, and PBS Nature all offer some form of nature program as part of their broadcast schedule. In November 2006, I found that APL had the greatest *available* wildlife programming. Availability is the abundance, variety, and airing frequency of wildlife programming that is readily accessible to American households. To determine availability, I looked at the number of different shows, the frequency in which they aired in prime time (6PM to 11PM, Sunday through Saturday), and the estimated number of American households that carry the wildlife-oriented channels.

Both Animal Planet and National Geographic Channel (NGC) outweigh the remaining channels in terms of the number of programs within their daily schedule that

contain wildlife. However, APL has a dedicated 24-hour format for wildlife programs, whereas NGC also includes programs about engineering, anthropology, medicine, and geology in their prime time schedule. As Chris observes, APL may be the “new primary loci for representations of nature and animals in widely dispersed cultural corners” (xiv).

Estimates of channel subscription and viewing among American households provide an idea of why APL may be a more available source of wildlife information. First, APL reaches 88 million American households¹ as opposed to the 62 million households of NGC². Second, media research groups have found that more households watch APL than NGC. Between September 25 and December 31, 2006, APL received an average cable universe rating of 0.5 while NGC received a 0.4 rating. These ratings roughly translate into an average of 449,000 households watching APL and 256,000 households watching NGC (Goldstein).

I conclude that APL is the most available source of wildlife information for American viewing households. As Dingwall and Aldridge note, however, these household statistics are estimates of *potential* audience. “They do not, of course, provide any evidence on whether members of the audience situate themselves primarily as being entertained or as being informed—or indeed both at once” (132).

To narrow my observations of APL’s diverse array of show formats I eliminated shows that deal with domestic pets (Animal Cops, Emergency Vets) and dinosaurs (Prehistoric Park). Human-pet relationships demand a complex social and cultural discourse, which is beyond the scope of this wildlife-focused essay. Also, in the case of Prehistoric Park, viewers will never encounter a dinosaur, and so a “zero

encounterability” would have little or no influence on how the general public feels toward *extant* wildlife.

I chose the APL programs for discussion based on airing frequency in prime time and on the frequency of public critique (Table 1). For instance, Wild Kingdom and Crocodile Hunter air most frequently in prime time. A relatively newer series, Meerkat Manor, does not air as frequently as Wild Kingdom or Crocodile Hunter, but references to the show in magazine articles and internet blogs (Oldenburg; Valmart; Jet in Columbus) have earned the young series a fan base of repeat viewers. Even as the broadcast schedule adds newer series, APL continues to highlight Meerkat Manor, giving the show “cultural currency” beyond the indications of ratings (Chris, Discovery Communications, Inc.).

Table 1. Abundance and variety of Animal Planet prime time programs in November 2006³.

Show title	Prime time airings	No. episodes
Crocodile Hunter	25	22
Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom	24	11
Most Extreme	21	18
Meerkat Manor	10	6
Up Close and Dangerous	8	6
Blue Planet: Seas of Life	6	6
Buggin’ with Ruud	6	5
Growing Up	4	2

In addition to Wild Kingdom, Crocodile Hunter, and Meerkat Manor, several non-episodic shows fill the prime time schedule. These shows usually highlight an exotic megafauna species, such as big cats (Swamp Cats, Night Cats on the Prowl), elephants (Killer Elephants, Escape the Elephants), and primates (Growing Up: “Gorilla,” Growing

Up: “Orangutan,” Gorillas Revisited with Sigourney Weaver). Shows featuring North American wildlife appear less frequently. In November 2006, from a total of 129 shows, there were four domestic-focused wildlife programs, each of which aired only once⁴.

Wildlife broadcast film is a significant source of information on biological and conservation issues for Americans. Although a number of broadcast outlets offer natural history programs, APL is the most available source of wildlife programming. Their programming is available in terms of distribution and viewing frequency in American households, as well as in abundance, variety, and airing frequency. Animal Planet has become a global name in wildlife broadcast film, and it is an appropriate outlet to explore America’s ongoing preference of exotic over domestic wildlife.

A HISTORY OF THE EXOTIC IN WILDLIFE FILM

Construction of the Pristine

Viewers have come to expect a distinctive look from exotic-focused film. The locales may be Africa, Australia, Southeast Asia, or the Amazon Basin, but the landscapes are substantively different from North America. Typically, these exotic locales appear arid with striking, expansive landscapes. There may be scrubby, low vegetation or densely-wooded, lush forests, as seen in programs like Meerkat Manor, Swamp Cats, Crocodile Hunter, and Wild Kingdom: "Kalahari Supercat."

Exotic-focused wildlife films are televisual efforts in recreating the Pristine, a conceptual realm of untouched wildness filled with megafauna and devoid of humans (Bousé 14-15). There are three elements in the construction of the Pristine in exotic wildlife film. First is the presence of charismatic megafauna, which are large, rare, and aesthetically pleasing animals. By virtue of their sheer rarity, charismatic megafauna are symbols of the Pristine. They are the animals that have retreated furthest from the grasp of the industrialized Westerner (Foale and Macintyre).

The second element in the construction of the Pristine is the absence of humans (Chris 60). Exotic-focused wildlife film often presents the animals as separate from human influence. A third element of the Pristine is the evocation of timelessness. Exotic locales present a sense of serene timelessness by omitting the images of human influence (modern clothing, buildings, automobiles, advertising and products) (Bousé 15; Mittman

208). For example, BBC's Blue Planet: Seas of Life evokes a timeless presence in the narratives of marine and coastal animal life. Many of the episodes take place in the open ocean or remote coastal regions where the absence of human referents avoids dating the show to a particular time.

The Exotic in Early Natural History Film

The construction of the Pristine has had a long history in the United States. America's love affair with the exotic began in the late nineteenth century as a response to the disappearing American frontier (Nash 145). The frontier was more than land untamed by white man; it was the encoding of values of progress, individualism, and fortitude. During this era, Theodore Roosevelt most notably sought to revive the hunt and "purify and restore masculine virtues corrupted by artificial surroundings..." (Mittman 16). For Roosevelt, and soon the American movie-goers, the revival of frontier values would take place in Africa.

The films of Cherry Kearton and John Hemment transplanted the frontier and revived the hunt in Africa. When Kearton's Roosevelt in Africa opened in 1909, middle-class Americans had little knowledge of Africa aside from myths and sensational tales (Mittman 19). Roosevelt in Africa and Lassoing Wild Animals in Africa (1911) presented a new view of Africa as a thrilling stage for reenacting the frontier (Tobias). However, Hemment's Paul Rainey's African Hunt (1912) achieved commercial success with American audiences who were eager to see Rainey's dogs hunt African game (Mittman 18; Tobias). Audiences also responded enthusiastically to idyllic scenes of African wildlife at a water hole, which Rainey obtained with advanced camera lenses. The old veil of the "Dark Continent" began to give way to an Africa that possessed the adventure of the frontier and the serenity of Eden.

Around the same time as Kearton and Hemment made their films, Carl Akeley and the American Museum of Natural History set the precedent for the gaze upon

the exotic. Akeley designed highly-stylized dioramas for the museum, which he described as “peepholes” into the natural world (Haraway 34). The dioramas depicted a “hyper-realized” vision of nature (Tobias). The vision was one of dramatically-posed, spectacular animals in a humanless, pseudo-fantastic world (Haraway 35). Akeley’s work strongly influenced not only America’s yen for the rare and spectacular animals but also the way in which the audience viewed the animals.

Akeley turned to the showmanship and cinematic talent of Martin and Osa Johnson in hopes of transforming the grand vision of exotic wildlife into a commercial success (Mittman 28). The Johnsons’ films succeeded in creating visions of an African paradise and “not of jungle horrors and impenetrable forests” (Mittman 30). Trailing African Wild Animals (1923) followed the Johnsons on a quest for “Lake Paradise,” an Eden teeming with megafauna. Simba (1928) presented an “authentic record” of a lion living in “unspoiled freedom of his native wild” (Mittman 32). The highly-contrived narratives of the Johnsons’ films helped establish a legacy of intimacy and identification with African wildlife and solidified America’s love affair with the Pristine. The continued fascination with the Pristine has sustained a strong tourist ethic over the decades. “Wildlife films,” as Mittman writes, “would act as the messenger, fulfilling the dreams of Americans to experience a type of nature not found in their backyards” (181).

Viewer Roles in Exotic-focused Wildlife Film

The allure of exotic wildlife remains a mainstay in current wildlife programming. Viewers still desire to view the rare megafauna in wild, untouched habitats, and APL continues to frequently deliver exotic-focused programs. Viewers are aware that television is the most feasible means of fulfilling this preference for the exotic (King 60). Lacking the financial means, the majority of American viewers will not travel to Africa, Australia, or the Amazon Basin to see the desired animals; rather, wildlife television fills the needs of this breed of “armchair naturalists” (Seibert 47; Nash 343).

Exotic wildlife television is a “vacation” of images for American viewers. The lack of pervasive Western influences in many tropical countries provides a fantasy image of a primeval world (Bousé 15). The glossy, airbrushed exotic landscape—the “spectacularization” of wildlife (Papson 78)—consistently encourages viewers to assume three interrelated roles: the tourist, the refugee, and the conservationist. These roles explain why exotic-focused films appeal to American viewers and may perpetuate certain views of wildlife beyond the television screen.

The first viewer role is the tourist. The desire to see rare megafauna and wildness most strongly draws American viewers to exotic-focused film. The rarity of an animal is essential to its appeal (Foale and Macintyre). Conservationist and author Aldo Leopold described this yen for the rare as “trophy recreationism.” The novelty of the animal (the “trophy”) matters more than the actual experience with the animal (Lemelin and Smale).

Other authors have argued that exotic megafauna may fulfill desires beyond the need to see something rare. These animals are symbols of the Pristine. The megafauna

have retreated furthest from the grasp of industrialized Westerners and provide tangible evidence of untouched wildness (Foale and Macintyre). Kellert observes that these “trophy” animals possess aesthetic qualities that fulfill the search for human ideals, such as physical symmetry and social order (50). For example, the appeal of a lion may come from its physical form, which humans intuitively recognize as “beauty.” Exotic-focused wildlife film is a means by which Americans can engage in the tourist role and experience the rare animals they greatly desire.

While the tourist viewer desires to see something, the viewer also desires *not to see* something, namely other humans. Therefore, the second viewer role is the refugee. Viewers watch exotic-focused wildlife film to escape humans and the pressures of human society. Viewing the exotic offers “jaded Westerners” a respite from the frustrations of a corporate and crowded American society (Foale and Macintyre; Mittman 131). According to Henry David Thoreau, Americans need a regular escape from civilization into the wilderness (Nash 94). For many Americans, viewing exotic-focused wildlife film may be a form of escape from the stresses of Western society.

The third viewer role is the conservationist, which combines elements of the tourist and refugee roles. Not only does the viewer desire to see an animal (the tourist role), the viewer desires to preserve the animal to ensure future sightings. The conservationist role is just one element of a wider phenomenon, “nature importing” (Nash 343). Nature importing treats exotic fauna as a globally traded commodity, and the economic value of exotic wildlife lays in rarity. Therefore, the conservationist role

expresses a desire to preserve the rarity of an animal that makes exotic-focused wildlife film appealing to Americans.

It is difficult to determine if viewers consciously engage in the roles of tourist, refugee, and conservationist, but these roles may provide reasons for the significant appeal of the exotic over the domestic. However, wildlife programming that is predominantly focused on the exotic may perpetuate negative attitudes toward a broader concept of wildlife.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF EXOTIC-FOCUSED WILDLIFE FILM

The tourist, refugee, and conservationist viewer roles perpetuate the exotic-focused representation wildlife on broadcast television and, as a result, may influence the way Americans understand wildlife. The tourist role, for example, perpetuates a view of wildlife that is heavily focused on the aesthetically-striking or rare animals. Consequently, the tourist role gives less attention to North American wildlife. In both the refugee and conservationist roles, the disconnect widens between humans and wildlife. These common viewer roles maintain a view of the natural that is discrete from humans, rather than part of a spectrum (Nash 6).

The tourist ethic in wildlife film may be the most influential upon wildlife attitudes and knowledge. Primarily, the tourist ethic places a disproportionate focus on the exceptional megafauna. Overrepresentation is at the heart of the problem. Bousé observed that wildlife television often creates an “illusion of plenty,” a misleading abundance of animals, which may be quite rare in actuality (15-16). Exotic-focused wildlife television is a form of Foucault’s “heterotopia,” which is a collection of normally unrelated life forms presented in a “fundamentally unreal space” (Chris xi). The entirety of Animal Planet’s programming is a heterotopia giving the false impression of abundance, hinting at a state of a natural world that does not exist.

The tourist approach to wildlife television also promotes a superficial connection with wildlife. Americans may connect with “trophy” species and concern themselves with little other wildlife or environmental issues (Lemelin and Smale). Other authors

observe that megafauna-focused environmentalism often champions certain “flagship species” without concern for those species’ ecological importance (Foale and Macintyre; Walpole and Leader-Williams 546).

The tourist approach does not work well with regard to domestic wildlife, and this superficial environmentalism may promote negative attitudes toward North American fauna. Some environmental writers observe attitudes of boredom, apathy, and fear toward domestic wildlife. There has existed a widespread sentiment of fear and aversion toward American megafauna, such as grizzly bears, mountain lions, and wolves (Kellert et al. 978). Other authors believe that the general public may face disappointment in encountering North American wildlife. The domestic wildlife cannot match the excitement and aesthetic appeal generated by exotic-focused wildlife television (Siebert 48, King 66). MacDonald observed the disparity between expectations and actualities with regard to North American desert fauna. He found that the film Sonoran Desert: A Violent Eden presented a far more dangerous and exciting version of the desert than it is in reality (12). The film omitted certain desert animals, such as rabbits and songbirds, because these creatures did not appear dangerous or exciting. MacDonald fears that visitors to the Sonoran Desert would find the ecosystem quite boring in comparison to the film version (13).

The refugee role reinforces a view of wildlife that is separate from humans. Exotic-focused wildlife television builds upon the human-free images of wildlife promoted by Akeley’s stylized dioramas. Consequently, wildlife television may not give access to a definition of nature that includes urban and suburban habitats because these

habitat types are too closely connected to humans. Omitting certain wildlife because of its ties to human civilization significantly limits the scope of nature presented to viewers. In fact, researchers argue that urban habitats support thriving populations of certain domestic wildlife (Wexler 13). Exotic-focused wildlife film does represent humans living *with* wildlife, and therefore viewers further separate themselves from the natural world.

When humans occasionally appear on screen in a wildlife program, the human often fills the role of a manager or savior. In this way, humans remain separate from wildlife, reinforcing the “pathetic fallacy.” The pathetic fallacy is a view of nature that dictates human intervention is necessary to the survival of nature (King 67). Shows such as Crocodile Hunter and Growing Up: “Gorilla” present researchers and advocates in critical roles to the survival of a particular animal or small population. These kinds of shows create the impression that nature is incapable of supporting itself. Nature *needs* the hand of man to intervene from a *separate natural realm* and set the young gorilla or lion cub back on the road to survival. When humans appear in exotic-focused film they appear *outside of* the natural world, thus reinforcing the disconnect between humans and wildlife.

The conservationist role combines aspects of the tourist and the refugee roles and reinforces the “nature importing” aspect of wildlife attitudes. Above all, a viewer in the conservationist role seeks to *continue viewing* spectacular exotic fauna in a setting absent of human interference. As Nash writes in Wilderness and the American Mind, we can understand the Western value of exotic wildness in an importer-exporter economic

model. “As a rule, the nations that have wilderness do not want it [Africa], and those that want it do not have it [the West]” (343). The exotic animals are symbols of that desired wildness (Foale and Macintyre), and those animals must be saved, contained, and quarantined to ensure their continued Western value.

The Western desire to preserve exotic wildness finds cultural roots in European landscape art and in the national parks established in exotic lands. The static, humanless, pictorialized nature captured in European landscape art of the eighteenth-century provided a conceptual model for establishing national parks in Africa (Neumann 16). In an age of British imperialism, establishing national parks was a way of proving cultural dominance over its African colonies. Neumann writes in Imposing Wilderness that national parks constructed class and racial identity by “eliminating the record of indigenous history and culture, replacing it with a vacant landscape...” (33).

As Nash argues, the national park model worked to create more than cultural dominance in an age of rampant imperialism; national parks protected a valuable economic commodity. “To extend the export-import metaphor, national parks and wilderness systems might be thought of as institutional ‘containers’ that developed nations send to underdeveloped ones for the purpose of ‘packaging’ a fragile resource” (Nash 344). In addition to the establishment of national parks, Nash also includes the consumption of film, books, magazines, and nature philanthropy as part of nature importing. A legacy of quarantining rare and valuable exotic fauna drives viewer consumption of exotic wildlife film.

The problem with a wildlife view focused on the pooling of a “fragile resource” is that exotic-focused film only superficially connects Americans with international conservation issues. This kind of connection gives little concern to the realities of the human-wildlife relationships of indigenous peoples. Americans are “merely informed viewers, estranged from material relationships” (Mittman 202), and the “complex histories and ecological knowledge of local peoples are deemed irrelevant” (Vivanco 1199). Beyond the economic benefit to Western nature importers and indigenous nature exporters, the conservationist role does little to foster ecological, spiritual, and cultural connections between humans and wildlife (Nash 345).

CHALLENGES WITH DOMESTIC-FOCUSED WILDLIFE FILM

Encounterability and Recognizability of Domestic Wildlife

The primary challenge in presenting domestic wildlife on television is that viewers cannot engage as easily in a tourist role with images of domestic fauna.

Returning to the nature importing-exporting metaphor, Nash writes,

Africans, for example, have lived with wild animals as long as they can remember. You cannot interest a Masai in seeing and photographing a giraffe any more than you can interest a New Yorker in a taxicab (344).

Nash has chosen an “urban animal,” the taxicab, to make his point humorously, but the lack of desire for most domestic fauna is clear.

“Encounterability” and “recognizability” drive the desire, or lack thereof, to see a particular animal. For the native African, the encounterability of a giraffe is high, just as the taxicab is highly encounterable for the urban American. Neither person greatly desires to see the animal of his or her homeland. Julius Nyerere, the president of former Tanganyika, wrote in response to the influx of wealthy American and European tourists, “I personally am not very interested in animals. I do not want to spend my holidays watching crocodiles.” However, Nyerere admits the economic value of his nation’s fauna and welcomes the Westerner’s “strange urge to see these animals” (Nash 342). Exotic fauna enjoys a high recognizability by Americans through popular media (film, books, magazines, logos). In addition, the rarity of exotic fauna creates both low encounterability and great appeal.

Exotic wildlife does not completely saturate wildlife broadcast film. North American charismatic megafauna fascinate viewers as well. Like the allure of the exotic, rarity and aesthetics make animals such as grizzly bears, mountain lions, wolves, and bison popular subjects on the North American landscape. In particular bears are popular subjects in wildlife films. A sample of Animal Planet's bear-focused catalogue includes Papa Bear, Wildlife Journal: "Bear Dog," Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom: "Grizzly Encounters," Growing Up: "Polar Bear," "Grizzly," and "Grizzly 2."

The preference for exotic-focused programming on APL is one reason for the low recognizability of North American fauna. In addition, North American fauna has *potentially* high encounterability for Americans, but the increased disconnect between the urbanized American population and wildlife lessens the *actual* encounterability of domestic wildlife.

Researchers have found that urbanization, the physical distancing of people from their natural surroundings, has continually isolated Americans from wildlife. This physical and cultural distance between Americans and American fauna maintains the barriers to knowledge of and positive attitudes toward wildlife (DeRuiter and Donnelly 252; Van Velsor and Nilon 359; McCleery et al. 537). Direct and frequent encounters are essential in developing an appreciation of wildlife, particularly for children and adolescents (Bixler and Carlisle 33; Kassilly 297; Palmer et al. 199).

The lack of novelty in seeing domestic fauna (like the New Yorker and the taxicab) makes domestic wildlife an unlikely tourist desire. However, a lack of novelty may not be sufficient in fostering fear or boredom toward domestic fauna. It is the lack

of frequent and direct experience of wildlife by urbanized Americans which transcends a tourist desire and fosters negative attitudes toward and misinformation of domestic wildlife. These are the attitudes that may negatively influence an understanding of nature.

For many Americans wildlife broadcast film has become a substitute for the direct and frequent experience with the natural world (Bousé 5; King 60; Siebert 48; Papson 76). Books, magazines, film, and cable outlets like Discovery Channel and Animal Planet influence wildlife value orientations (DeRuiter and Donnely 268). However, the preference for exotic over domestic wildlife on these cable outlets has produced little influence on American values of North American wildlife. Urbanization increases the physical and cultural disconnect between Americans and domestic wildlife. Exotic-focused wildlife film has done little to counter this disconnect and promote the potential encounterability of North American wildlife.

Domestic Wildlife in Current Programming

Animal Planet has taken small steps in presenting North American wildlife and human-inclusive views of nature. Two programs, Backyard Habitat and Leave It to the Real Beavers, opt for raising the potential encounterability of common North American wildlife instead of adding to the high recognizability of exotic species. Both programs also present human-inclusive views of nature in situations that transcend the manager-savior role of humans. Backyard Habitat focuses on common but regionally-specific species in various regions of the United States. The animal subjects are species with high potential encounterability, such as hummingbirds, Florida scrub jays, American toads, and osprey. The “home make-over” format of Backyard Habitat allows for the human families to share equal screen time with the animal subjects. The show creates an impression of animals cohabiting with humans, rather than living in opposition with each other. The show presents humans as part of a *spectrum* of wildness rather than parts in discrete realms of natural and artificial (Nash 6).

Leave It to the Real Beavers focuses on humans and animals living together, often in conflict. However, Beavers also explores how their ecological role in wetland succession can often clash with human infrastructure, such as the maintenance of roads. The show discusses the impact of the beaver and human population on one another, but the show does not represent one species as *the* source of blame. Instead, Leave It to the Real Beavers follows a small group of grassroots environmental activists as they develop innovative yet simple technology which allows beavers and humans to coexist.

Although they have made ambitious steps toward presenting alternative views of wildlife, Backyard Habitat and Leave It to the Real Beavers made up a small minority of domestic-focused wildlife films on APL in November 2006. The fact remains that no single program can substitute for direct experience with wildlife, which researchers and wildlife professionals cite as the most influential method of fostering appreciation and knowledge of nature (Van Velson and Nilon 368; DeRuiter and Donnelly 267). However, additional domestic-focused wildlife programming may promote the recognizability of North American fauna to its human cohabiters, creating a greater desire to experience North American wildness.

Millions of Americans encounter North American wildness with birds. Birds comprise one area of relatively unexplored domestic wildlife in broadcast film. The U.S. is home to four major migratory flyways which encompass nearly all of the country and its diverse habitats. The American tourist ethic is alive and well for birds. Bird-related ecotourism is an \$85 billion dollar-a-year industry in the U.S. (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 15). The enthusiasm for birds in the wild should translate into a similar enthusiasm for birds on broadcast film. For example, if the tourist-viewer seeks novelty, then the recent rediscovery of the allegedly-extinct Ivory-billed Woodpecker may fulfill that viewer desire (Cornell Lab of Ornithology).

CONCLUSION

The allure of exotic wildlife has remained strong over the last century because viewers enjoy the novelty of exotic wildlife. Using APL's programming for November 2006 as a narrow gauge, I conclude that many Americans prefer to engage in the tourist role, collecting visual “trophy” of rare and aesthetically-pleasing animals. North American wildlife, for the most part, does not enjoy the same degree of viewing fervor because of the lack of novelty and depth with which broadcast film has traditionally presented domestic wildlife.

Real-world ties between wildlife and their human cohabiters present obstacles to encountering domestic wildlife in a purely tourist-viewer mode. For example, prairie dogs of the North American plains are similar to the meerkats of the popular Meerkat Manor series. Although the two species are not closely related, prairie dogs and meerkats exhibit similar morphologies and social structures. Prairie dogs possess the characteristics—expressive faces and animated behaviors—that could allow filmmakers to create a popular stateside version of Meerkat Manor.

Like wolves and bears, however, controversy surrounds prairie dogs in many parts of the U.S. Prairie dog habitat—and consequently management plans—often clashes with rancher livelihoods and housing developers in the American West. Americans do not possess an entirely negative attitude toward prairie dogs, but the presence of *some* controversial human-animal conflict makes these creatures a “harder sell” than meerkats for broadcast film. Americans generally do not encounter meerkats,

making these diminutive African animals a greater novelty with an allure free from controversy.

Nash writes, “As a rule, nations that have wilderness do not want it and those that want it do not have it” (343). I would amend his observation to reflect the vast wealth of “wilderness” unknown to the general public. “Nations that *think they know* their wilderness do not want it...” provides a starting point from which filmmakers can reinvigorate viewer interest in North American fauna. Perhaps broadcast film’s limited scope on domestic species has produced boredom toward American fauna. There is more to the wealth of North American wildlife than just grizzly bears, wolves, and other charismatic megafauna. Both filmmakers and broadcasters should recognize the opportunity to present to the uninformed American public a greater depth of wildlife and conservation issues.

The diverse geographic and cultural aspects of North America make it a rich resource for wildlife broadcast film. The United States possesses a combination of a large land mass with widely diverse ecosystems, large human population, First World wealth and capital, and leading wildlife researchers. These elements allow filmmakers and viewers access to new and emerging wildlife studies that cover an entire continent.

Relative to nations in Africa or Amazonia, the large U.S. population presents a diverse situation in which to explore human-inclusive views of wildlife. The human element introduces an array of new stories to the viewer, some of which touch on both the detrimental and redemptive aspects of human impact. The Rocky Mountain Arsenal

National Wildlife Refuge is a prime case of both detrimental and redemptive human impact. After decades of hazardous chemical production, the once “most polluted square mile in the nation” now supports a thriving shortgrass prairie ecosystem (Cronon 66). Due in part to a multi-agency cleanup program, the Arsenal is home to a host of species, such as burrowing owls, mule deer, rattlesnakes, and numerous birds of prey. These species have received little attention on broadcast film and may prove attractive to curious tourist-viewers.

Bringing North American wildlife to American viewers demands that filmmakers and broadcasters present the fauna in a new way for viewing audiences. The unknown or underappreciated domestic wildlife can easily have the same appeal as the newness of exotic wildlife. Wildlife filmmakers and television broadcasters should take creative risks in presenting engaging stories gleaned from the vast array of species, habitats, climates, and human situations. As a result domestic fauna become desirable “trophies.” Unlike exotic lions, sharks, and gorillas, however, these domestic trophies have greater potential encounterability by Americans, a trait that may foster appreciation toward North American wildlife.

The problem with preference may stem from labels. The word “domestic” carries a connotation of the mundane and does not create excitement nor urge one to take a second look. In the case of domestic wildlife, however, there is a disparity between what one thinks exists and the breadth of what actually exists. In a sense much of domestic wildlife *is* exotic and new to the uninformed American public. In addition to the megafauna, domestic wildlife offers a multitude of species and communities to pique the

interest of the tourist-viewer. A large population and varied demography in the U.S. presents ways to explore a human-inclusive view of nature that focuses on positive effects of humans. Leave It to the Real Beavers, Backyard Habitat, and the account of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR attest to a vision of humans living *with* as opposed to *outside of* wildlife. There is still much the American public does not know about North American wildlife. Filmmakers and broadcasters should take advantage of unexplored domestic species and reconsider domestic wildlife's place in broadcast film.

ENDNOTES

¹Discovery Communications, Inc. “U.S. Networks: Animal Planet.” Discovery Channel, Inc.: Businesses and Brands. 4 November 2006. <<http://corporate.discovery.com/brands/animalplanet.html>>.

²“National Geographic Channel: Press Release NGC-304-110706.” National Geographic Channel. 7 November 2006.

³Animal.discovery.com. Weekly TV Schedule. <<http://animal.discovery.com/tvlistings/calendar.jsp>> 4 November 2006.

⁴Backyard Habitat, Leave It to the Real Beavers, Papa Bear, Profiles of Nature: “Badgers: Dishing the Dirt.”

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