

# The Mis-Advertisement of Wildlife Tourism: A Media Investigation into the Conservation Threats Facing Wildlife from Two-Shot Imagery Posted on Zoo Websites and Social Media.

## Introduction

**Aim:** To identify potential issues caused by posting two-shot images on zoo websites and social media (Figure 1).

Properly managed wildlife tourism can have potential economic benefit to communities without compromising animal welfare, however, this is rarely the case, and exotic animals used for tourism purposes are subject to unethical treatment (Moorhouse *et al.*, 2015). Focusing specifically on zoos in the British Isles, and elephant volunteerism in Thailand, I evaluated the potential impact that both two-shot imagery on zoo websites, and user generated content on social media, has on the portrayal of wildlife tourism.

## Case Study: Thailand Elephant Sanctuary Volunteers

Thailand offers tourists opportunities to participate in 'once-in-a-lifetime' experiences that interact with elephants (Figure 2) and primates, however, tourists are often unaware that these industries are highly unethical (Figure 4). Post-experience photographs published online can advertise these experiences to prospective travellers and have damaging effects to wildlife (Leighty *et al.*, 2015).

## Methods & Results

- I analysed two-shot images on twenty-five zoo websites (Figure 3).
  - Why? To evaluate the impact images have on visitors' education.
- I collected survey results from twelve volunteers at an elephant sanctuary in Chang Mai.
  - Why? To understand the motivation behind post-experience social media usage.
- The time frame extended from June 2018 to January 2019.

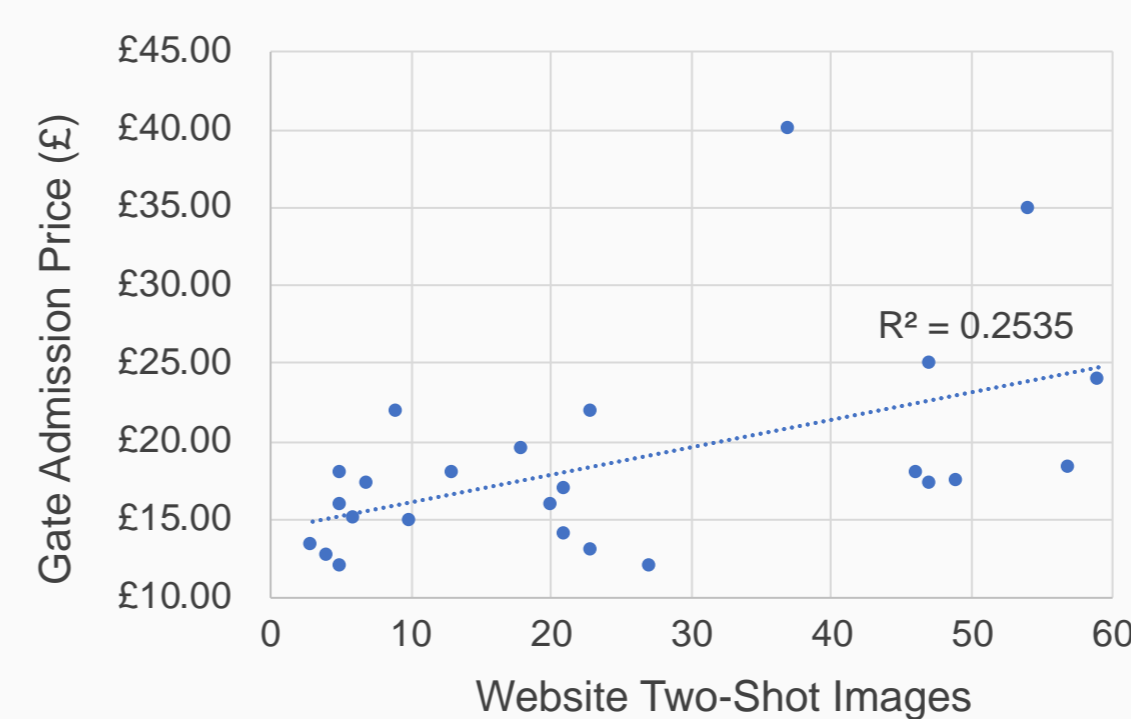
**Key Finding:** Those who have conservation at the heart of their motivation are unintentionally counteracting this conservation endeavour, inadvertently promoting unethical wildlife-tourism online.

## Discussion & Conclusion

- Zoo visitors enjoy personal connection with animals and engagement increases educational potential (Luebke and Matiasek, 2013). However, such closeness to zoo visitors is a source of stress to captive animals (Morgan and Tromborg, 2007).
- Expectation of closeness generated by two-shot photographs posted online can lead to mis-advertisement and the financial support of unethical wildlife tourism when travelling abroad, hindering conservation efforts.
- This research is important for determining threats to wildlife within the tourism industry, including how both organisations and individuals with positive intentions could be hindering conservation efforts through their online portrayal of human-animal interactions.



**Figure 2.** An example of a two-shot image which is taken at an elephant sanctuary in Northern Thailand. Images of this kind on social media can promote touristic experiences to others, which could inadvertently promote unethical wildlife tourism.



**Figure 3.** Scatter graph demonstrating that zoos with a high gate admission price are likely to display more two-shot images on their website.



**Figure 4.** Photographs taken from an elephant camp in Northern Thailand, with the advertising slogan 'Save the Elephant', which demonstrates problems with mis-advertising unethical wildlife tourism and two-shot images. Figure 2 is categorised as a similar camp to Figure 4, yet Figure 4 displays cruelty, picturing hooks and elephant riding.

### Two-Shot Image

Two-shot imagery refers to photographic images containing both a human and an animal in the same frame.

### Social Media

An online information sharing platform used to connect the world.

### Volunteerism

Traveller's pay money to provide help to societies, which also involves aspects of self-discovery and selflessness

### Modern Zoos

Evolved from upper class menageries to an educational resource available to the public. The primary aim is to promote conservation awareness.

### Photo-prop

An animal used as a prop for photographs with tourists. The animals are kept in unethical conditions and often illegally captured from the wild.

### Wildlife Tourism

Providing tourists with the opportunity for close encounters with rare animals.

**Figure 1.** Key word definitions used as the basis for this research.