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ECOTOURISTS DON'T BUG WILDLIFE: GOOD NEWS FOR A PREMIER AFRICAN PROTECTED AREA

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Background: Does Wildlife Perceive All Humans as Predators?

- Fear of predators is a bad thing as it can dramatically reduce the reproduction and survival of wildlife, and cause cascading effects through ecosystems and down food webs (Zanette *et al.* 2011, *Science* 334:1398).
- Humans are a “super-predator” who kills wildlife disproportionately (Darimont *et al.* 2015, *Science* 349: 858).
- Ecotourists are assumed to be benign, but can have potentially averse effects if wildlife perceive ecotourists as predators.



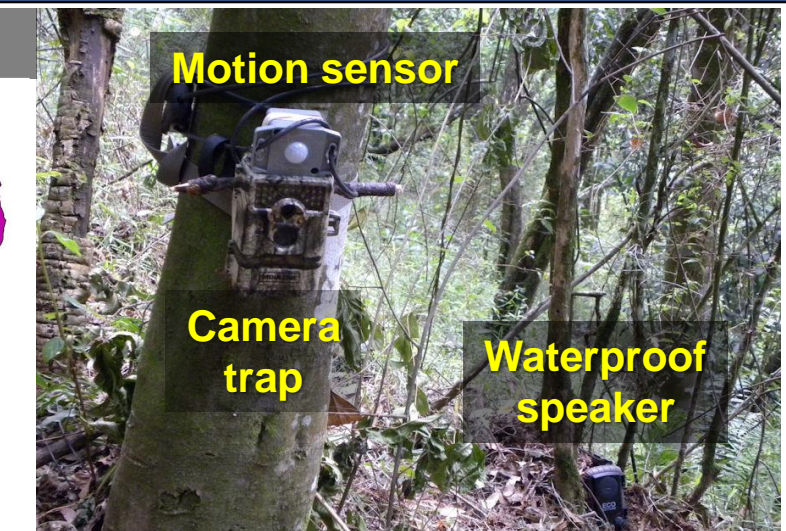
Gorilla ecotourism
Ecotourists add value to wildlife



Diane Fossey with a poached gorilla
Poachers reduce value to wildlife

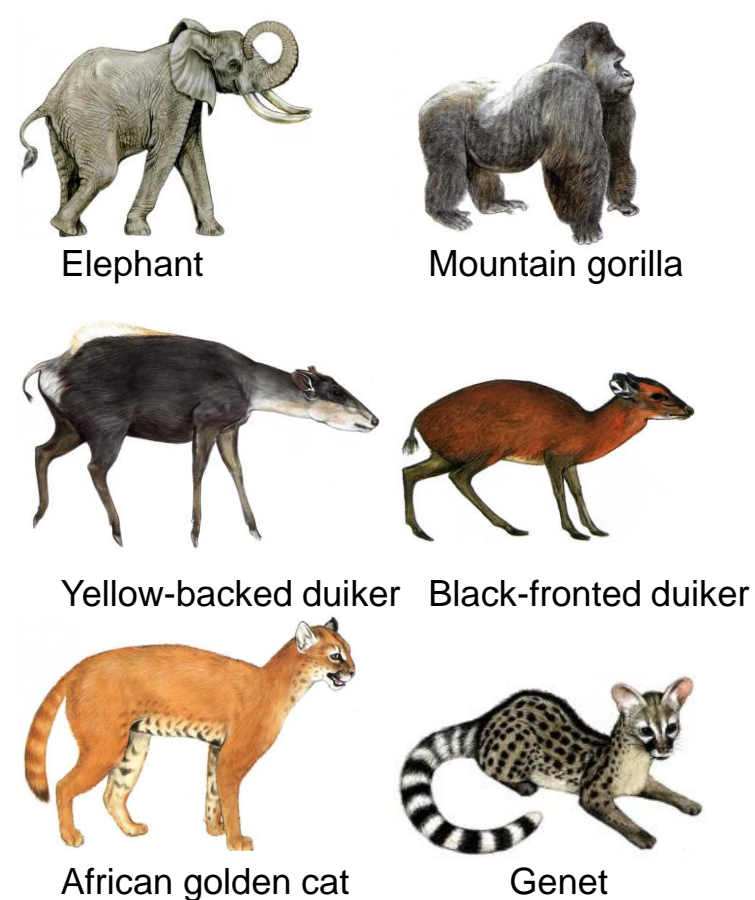
Methods: Filmed Reactions of Wildlife to Audio Playbacks

- Animals know their enemies and flee to sounds of their predators.
- We compared reactions of wildlife to known predators (poaching dogs and leopards), humans and insects.
- We conducted this research in Uganda’s Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (Bwindi) – a premier African protected area for mountain gorilla ecotourism and main source of Uganda’s ecotourism revenue.

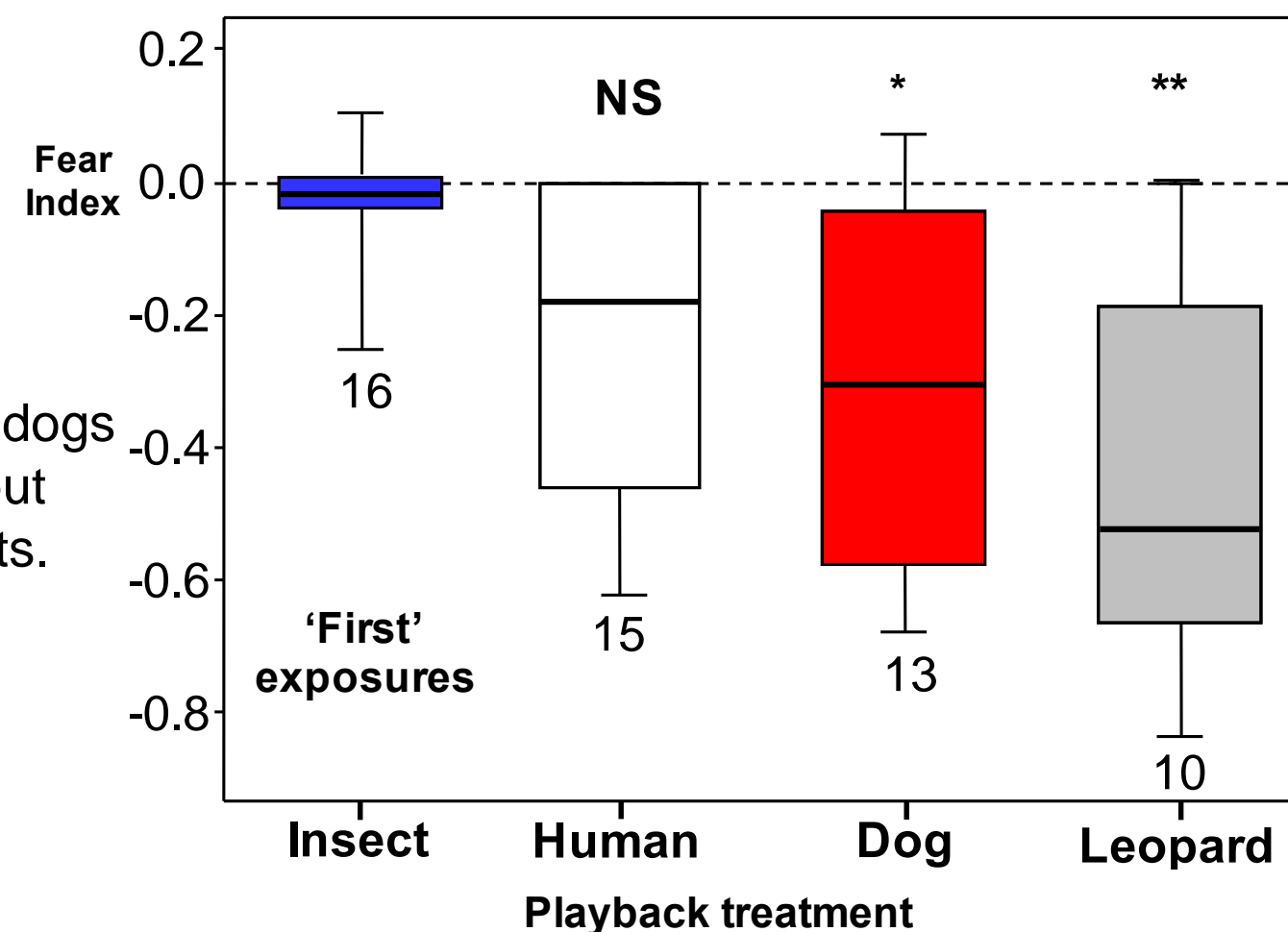


Results: Bwindi Wildlife Did NOT Perceive Ecotourists as Predators

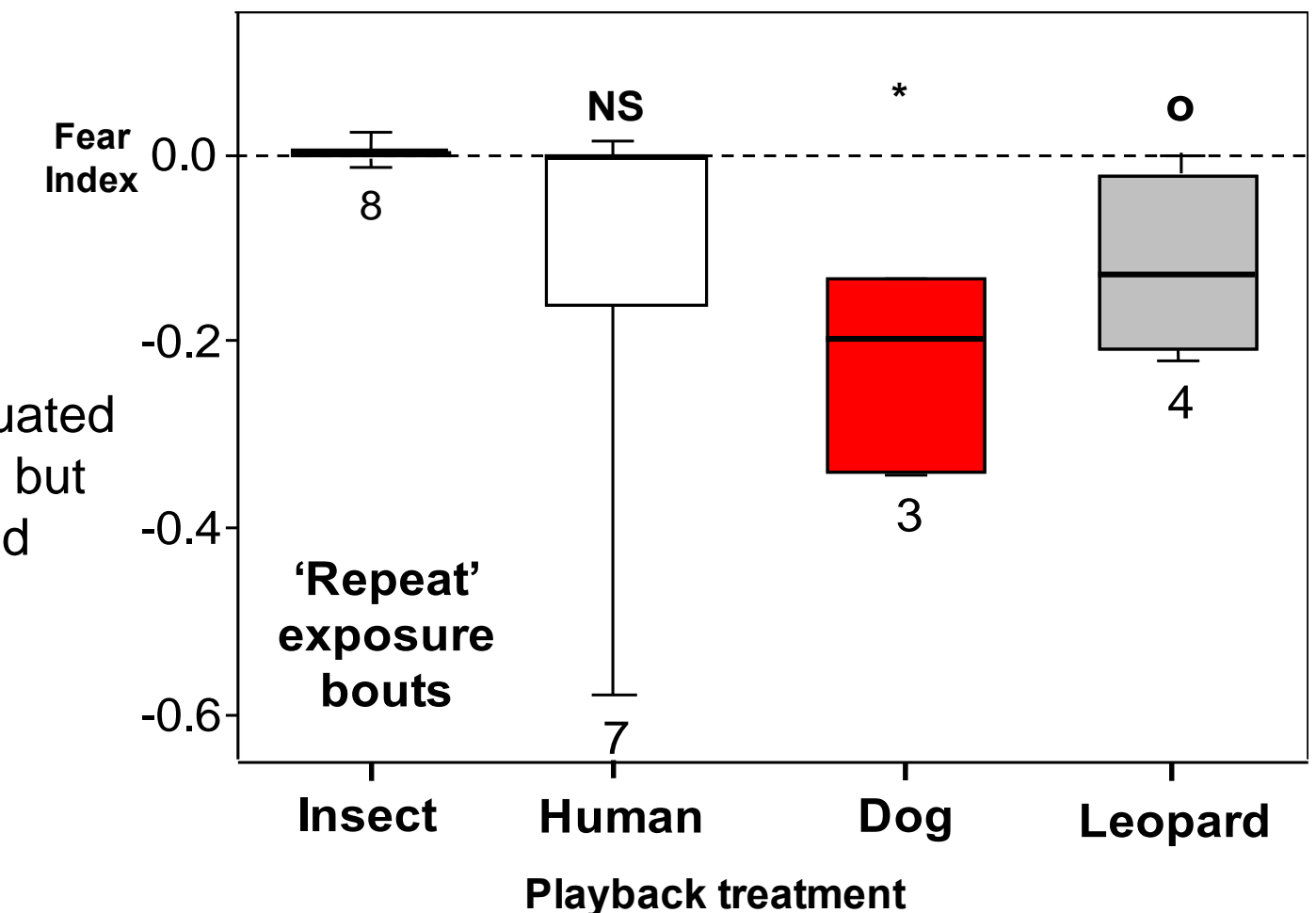
We filmed 14 species including elephants



Wildlife feared dogs and leopards but **NOT** ecotourists.



Wildlife habituated to ecotourists but **NOT** dogs and leopards.

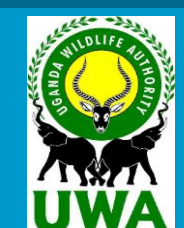


Conclusion: No Ecological Downsides to Ecotourism Revenue

- Bwindi wildlife did not perceive ecotourists as a threat, which is good news for gorilla ecotourism revenue and the Uganda Wildlife Authority.
- Bwindi wildlife perceive dogs as a threat consistent with their use for poaching. The fear of dogs is bad for wildlife and wildlife management.
- Bwindi wildlife most feared their native predator, the leopard even though its been extinct in the park for over 40 years.

Affiliations & Acknowledgements

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