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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 entertainment¹.

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.² 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"*³ 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.

¹ 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.

² 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.

³ 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 services⁴ 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.⁵

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)⁶. 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,

⁴ 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

⁵ 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>

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



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Animal Protection Groups and NGOs

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

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
 Fondation Birgitte Bardot, France
 Forgotten Animals, Russia (and the UK)
 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
 The Cattitude Trust, Chennai
 The Corbett Foundation, India

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 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
 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.⁴ 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.⁸ 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.¹ 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.¹ 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.⁷ 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

⁷ 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.^{8,9,10} In 2018, 10 elephants at Amer Fort in India – one of the country’s most visited tourist attractions – tested positive for tuberculosis.¹¹ 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.¹²

- 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.¹³ 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

⁸ 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

⁹ Angkawanish, T., Wajjwalku, W., et al. (2010) Mycobacterium tuberculosis Infection of Domesticated Asian Elephants. Thailand. Emerging Infectious Diseases.

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

¹¹ 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>

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

¹³ 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.¹⁴ In 2017/2018, 96 dolphins were taken from the wild in Taiji, Japan, for use in the multi-billion dollar dolphin entertainment industry.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶
- 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.^{17,18,19}

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.²⁰ 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.²¹

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.²² 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.

¹⁴ Rose, N.A., Parsons, E.C.M. (2019) The Case Against Marine Mammals in Captivity. Animal Welfare Institute and World Animal Protection.
15

Data gather from land-based observers - www.cetabase.org/taiji/driveresults/

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

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

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

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

²⁰ 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

²¹ 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>

²² 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 services²³ 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.

²³ 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