

**Exploring the Motivations of Participants in
Volunteer Conservation Tourism and their Understandings of
Biodiversity Conservation**

Student Registration Number: 4129172

**A dissertation submitted to the School of International Development
Studies of the University of East Anglia in part-fulfilment of the
requirements for the Degree of Master of Science**

September 2009

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Abstract

This Dissertation seeks to explore what understandings of biodiversity conservation are gained by participants on volunteer conservation projects. As an increasingly popular sector of ecotourism, volunteer conservation projects have been promoted as a means of disseminating greater environmental awareness amongst the general public, as well as acting as a source of research funding, and sustainable economic development in and around protected areas. Building upon previous studies examining volunteer motivations this study seeks to explore the understandings of conservation gained by volunteers through participation on projects. Qualitative in nature, the study engages questionnaires of previous volunteers, as well as semi-structured interviews conducted in the field with current volunteers and project staff. The study identifies how volunteers rationalise and understand issues faced in wildlife conservation. The outcome of this study is the identification of how volunteers situate indigenous people as problematic in attaining the goal of wildlife conservation. This situation risks perpetuating division between stakeholders in natural resource management and utilisation while reinforcing prejudices that have long persisted in the field of wildlife conservation.

Key Words: volunteer tourism, conservation, understanding, motivations

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to all the staff and management at the African Lion and Environmental Research Trust for facilitating my research. I would like to thank Dr. Adrian Martin for his advice and guidance, as well as Dr. Thomas Sikor for introducing me to the politics of ecology. Thanks also to Iain Thomson for his assistance in sorting out the logistics of travelling to Zambia. A special word of appreciation to Hannah Thomson without whose encouragement and support this study would not have taken place.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Subject of Study

Since the 1980s a growing number of people have travelled to developing world countries to participate as volunteers on wildlife conservation projects. These volunteers are not necessarily scientists or students drawn from the field of natural sciences, or formally employed in professions that involve working with animals. Rather they come from a varied range of backgrounds, and pay to spend their vacations from work or study *in situ* on conservation projects contributing to some aspect of day to day duties such as data collection for research or maintenance of facilities (Campbell & Smith, 2006; Brightsmith et al, 2008).

Recently this growing phenomenon, which is most commonly referred to as volunteer conservation tourism, has drawn the attention of academic interest, notably from researchers engaged in biodiversity conservation as paying volunteers open up new opportunities for funding research and project implementation. In addition, this revenue potential may also be channelled into conservation as a means of promoting sustainable economic development in and surrounding protected areas. Furthermore, at a time of increasing concern over ongoing biodiversity loss, volunteer conservation tourism, as part of the overall ecotourism industry, is being proffered as a means of disseminating awareness amongst the general public of the threats to the world's eco-systems. Thus volunteer conservation tourism would appear to contribute towards a number of conservation goals simultaneously (Campbell & Smith, 2006; Cousins, 2007; Brightsmith et al, 2008; Lorimer, 2009).

However, as this sector of the ecotourist industry becomes increasingly popular it is important to establish in greater detail what exactly volunteer conservation projects entail, particularly if they are to serve as a means of spreading environmental knowledge to society at large. For example, what sort of understandings of issues faced in conservation do volunteers gain? This is the fundamental question that this dissertation seeks to explore and address.

1.2 Hypotheses and Outline of Dissertation

Though research into the contribution of volunteer tourism has only recently begun to emerge, studies thus far have been focused on identifying motivational trends in a quantitative manner rather than examining what lies behind or the implications of the motivations that volunteers claim as being the reason for their participation (Ellis, 2003; Bruyere & Rappe, 2007). This dissertation aims to contribute to addressing this gap in the literature. This is an important task as within the very limited research conducted into volunteer tourism thus far there has been some identification of potentially problematic aspects of volunteer participation in projects situated amongst indigenous communities in the developing world. In particular, there has been the suggestion that a lack of sensitivity towards or appreciation by volunteers of host communities understandings and perspectives on natural resource utilisation maybe contributing to a renewed form of neo-colonialism, whereby local knowledge is subjugated by "superior" western views of natural resource management (Simpson, 2004; Guttentag, 2009). This is a significant issue especially in relation to wildlife conservation and the history of antagonism between the various stakeholders engaged within and affected by conservation programmes (Adams, 2008).

Over the course of the following chapters this dissertation, drawing on grounded theory research approaches to qualitative analysis, and guided by a constructivist/interpretive viewpoint, will seek to address the issue of what understandings of conservation do volunteers gain through participation on projects. What are their motivations, and are these reflected in their actual experiences? Are volunteers reported reasons for participation reflective of their attitudes and application whilst working on projects? What are the implications of these attitudes for volunteer tourism as a tool for conservation?

Chapter two details the rise and significance of volunteer conservation tourism, expanding on the reasons why it is worthy of study, the key issues, and the arguments raised thus far in the literature.

Chapter three explains the methods used in this study, detailing the research undertaken including online surveys of previous volunteers and interviews with current volunteers and conservation project staff. While chapter four presents the findings and analysis that emerged from the research, highlighting the important issues and concepts identified.

Chapter five concludes the study presenting a summation of the overall studies findings and discusses the implications of these findings, as well as suggesting avenues for future research in this field.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Article 13 of the Convention on Biological Diversity calls for the promotion amongst the general public of a greater understanding of measures required for the conservation of biological diversity (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2001; Cousins, 2007). Increasingly, a varied range of actors including non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and biologists working within the academy are advocating an active engagement with the ecotourism industry as a means of achieving this objective (Duffy, 2002; Scherl et al, 2004; Tisdell & Wilson, 2005).

In particular there is growing awareness and discussion regarding a specific sub-section of the ecotourist industry that sees travellers pay to volunteer on conservation based projects, generally in overseas destinations (Lorimer, 2009).

Advocates of volunteer conservation tourism see it as a means not only of encouraging environmental awareness amongst the general public but also as a way of addressing several fundamental challenges to biodiversity conservation. These include sourcing funding for research, accessing skilled labour, and providing economic incentives for locals to forgo consumption of natural resources (Campbell & Smith, 2006; Coghlan, 2007; Brightsmith et al, 2008).

However, this favourable portrayal of the multifaceted benefits of volunteer conservation tourism is open to question regarding a number of underlying assumptions, including the long term reliable flow of tourists. Furthermore, while motivational studies have identified a high level of normative desires from volunteers asked as to why they participate on such projects, including an apparent strong desire to gain a greater understanding of conservation issues, few studies to date have sought to gain insight into exactly what sort of understanding volunteers are receiving from their experiences (Gray & Campbell, 2007).

Gaining this insight should be prioritised as part of evaluating the potential of these new conservation initiatives. For example, it is important to establish if this offshoot of the ecotourist sector actually does provide greater environmental awareness. What issues are being identified and passed on to participating volunteers? Do participants gain

an understanding of the complexity of conservation debates such as how different stakeholders view natural resources and their usage, and the trade-offs that may be required in achieving conservation goals? (Homewood & Brockington, 1999; Brown, 2002; Guttentag, 2009).

For example, as recent studies of "gap-year" travellers from the United Kingdom have illustrated, volunteer placements have the potential to reinforce negative stereotyping of indigenous communities in the developing world as primitive locals in need of paternal care from western nations (Simpson, 2004; Guttentag, 2009). Within the context of conservation such perspectives risk perpetuating the mentality of conflict between stakeholders that resides largely as a legacy of fortress conservation approaches to environmental management, where local communities were viewed by conservation actors in an inherently negative manner with little regard for any environmental knowledge or management strategies they may have possessed (Brockington, 2002; Adams, 2008). Such perspectives contributed to the implementation of policies that were often ill suited to local contexts and at times made enemies of local communities whose cooperation should have been realised as fundamental to achieving conservation objectives (Abrams et al, 2009). The importance of ensuring this conflict is not perpetuated should be understood as key to achieving lasting success in biodiversity conservation, as the effective implementation of environmental policy is more likely to bear fruit when stakeholders can cooperate and exchange knowledge and expertise rather than stand in hostile opposition to each other (Colchester, 2004).

Thus it is important to establish from the outset what exactly is entailed in the detail of potentially creative conservation initiatives such as volunteer conservation tourism.

2.2 The Rationale Behind Conservation and Tourist Industry Partnership

Conservation and tourism have a long and controversial association. This is evident, for example, in the history of the establishment of southern and eastern Africa's national parks and the continued debates surrounding the issue of human population relocations from protected areas

(Carruthers, 1995; 2007; Neumann, 1997; Brockington & Igoe, 2006; Rangarajan & Shahabuddin, 2006).

In the post-colonial era advocates of protected areas, including national governments, have sought to redress the colonial period's methods of conservation which saw the impoverishment and forced relocation of indigenous people, the denial of access to natural resources, and the desire to create edenic wilderness for consumption by white, colonial elites (Matheka, 2008).

The era of sustainable and free market orientated development policies witnessed a concerted focus on re-engaging indigenous communities within conservation policy. Though some conservationists argued that development was being promoted at the expense of biodiversity policy, discourse under the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) agenda saw a concerted effort to re-emphasise the importance of biodiversity conservation in human development (Adams et al, 2004). An example of which is the promotion of the potential of protected areas to generate income through tourism. The argument proposed by both conservationists and international development institutions, such as the World Bank, is that it is possible to create "win-win" scenarios whereby indigenous communities can construct local economies based upon nature tourism. Such economies, it is proposed, creates a sustainable form of development were natural resources are utilised in a predominantly non-extractive manner whilst providing the opportunity for rural communities to prosper economically. Furthermore, such initiatives, by increasing the level of local community input into the management of protected areas, and moving away from western models of conservation to include a greater space for indigenous knowledge and participation are advocated as alleviating social tensions relating to access and ownership of natural resources. A partnership oriented environment, it is suggested, is more likely to result in long lasting policy successes in biodiversity conservation (Bookbinder, 1998; Aylward, 2003; Millennium Eco-Assessment, 2005; Crane, 2006; UNTWO, 2008).

The attractiveness of tourism's potential to act as a tool for protecting biodiversity is not limited to *in situ* conservation projects. In light of concerns relating to global environmental change and the loss of

biodiversity the scope for tourism to benefit biodiversity conservation has also focused on its potential to disseminate understandings of contemporary environmental issues to the general public (Isaacs, 2000; Wearing, 2001). The growing market of volunteer conservation tourism, in particular, with participants apparently motivated by altruistic ideals and a desire for greater environmental understandings offers a potentially rich source of volunteers to expand awareness of issues such as biodiversity loss amongst the general public. Volunteers could gain greater awareness of issues such as the impacts of policy initiatives on developing world communities, and acquire an appreciation of the knowledge and understandings of the environment held by these communities. Having gained this knowledge of environmental issues in the developing world, volunteers could then disseminate a greater awareness of the true complexity of biodiversity conservation and potentially open new channels for creating innovative conservation strategies (Bruyere & Rappe, 2007).

2.3 Volunteer Tourism and its Potential as a Tool of Conservation

Volunteer tourism can be understood as a branch of the broader ecotourism industry. Exact, universally agreed definitions of ecotourism are problematic but the phenomenon can be basically understood as tourism that entails a nature-based element at its core. There should be a concentrated focus on raising natural and cultural awareness, and tourist activities should be managed in an ecologically sensitive and sustainable manner (Gosling, 1999; Cousins, 2007).

Volunteer tourism is generally marketed as deepening the experience of the tourist's emersion into the natural environment beyond conventional ecotourism by giving travellers the opportunity to actively participate on conservation projects. Hence, by volunteering the tourist moves beyond passive consumption of the natural world to become engaged in its management and utilisation. These placements are obtained either directly from a conservation organisation or via a facilitating agent (Wearing, 2001; Cousins, 2007).

Volunteering has been central to the evolution of environmental movements throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, however, volunteer conservation tourism, as a recognisably distinct entity appears to have

emerged in the early 1980's pioneered by not-for-profit organisations such as Earthwatch and Coral Cay Conservation (Lorimer, 2009). The phenomenon has grown steadily since with an increasing number of commercial operators providing conservation holidays in numerous locations across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, as well as placements within Europe and North America (Cousins, 2007). Exact estimates for the number of volunteers participating in overseas projects are difficult to produce, largely as a result of the large and varied nature of sending organisations, Lorimer (2009) reported a figure of 12 195 volunteers travelling from the United Kingdom during 2006-07. These volunteers generated an estimated GBP 17.27 million in fees paid to sending organisations. The overwhelming majority of both commercial and non-profit operators originate in Western Europe and the United States of America (Lorimer, 2009).

Equally, if not more important as physical location in the marketing of volunteer conservation projects is the actual animal species upon which the project focuses. Notably, the majority of projects concentrate upon charismatic species such as the African lion (*Panthera leo*), African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*), and marine species such as leatherback turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*). This concentration on large charismatic species results in Sub-Saharan Africa being the most common destination for volunteers (Campbell & Smith, 2006; Cousins, 2007; Lorimer, 2009).

Although published studies of volunteer conservation tourism have only recently begun to emerge, one theme that has been emphasised within this research is the potential of this industry to act as a positive channel for raising environmental consciousness in the general public as well as acting as a direct tool for conservation actors (Brightsmith et al, 2008).

Brightsmith et al (2008: 2832) illustrate this point in presenting what they describe as a "mutually beneficial triumvirate" between conservationists, ecotourist operators, and the travelling public. This concept of a beneficial triumvirate is based upon a relationship between researchers and conservationists working in partnership with tour operators, whereby tourists are channelled to projects that require funding and labour in order to achieve their conservation objectives. Thus,

in an environment where research funding grants can be difficult to obtain the fees paid by tourists seeking an experience of the natural world can act as a proxy for grants. Travellers from western countries, it is proposed, may also be able to provide skills such as information technology knowledge and data processing abilities that may be in short supply in remote, rural communities. Tour operators benefit by being able to penetrate a growing sector of the ecotourist market offering an ongoing varied source of destinations, while local communities are presented with the opportunity to develop a sustainable, environmentally oriented economy. Tourists also benefit as they are provided with the opportunity to actively participate in and gain an understanding of environmental conservation often in exotic locations within the developing world (Brightsmith et al, 2008).

In doing so, it is argued, they are exposed to a number of important challenges faced in biodiversity conservation such as habitat preservation and human-animal conflict, all while actively contributing towards sustainable development (Campbell & Smith, 2006; Brightsmith et al, 2008). Furthermore, tourists not only experience the natural world at close proximity, upon return home they represent a potential pool of environmental knowledge for their families and associates, promoting the goal of increased public awareness of the threats posed to biodiversity and the means necessary to secure its preservation (Ryan, 2001; Raymond & Hall, 2008).

Central to the promotion of volunteer conservation tourism's attractiveness as a conservation tool, and underpinning the idea of the industry as a means of disseminating greater environmental awareness is the belief that volunteers are motivated by largely altruistic desires to understand and contribute towards biodiversity conservation. Wearing (2001: 214) defines volunteer tourists as:

persons seeking a tourist experience that is mutually beneficial that will contribute not only to their individual development, but also positively and directly to the social, natural and economic context in which they are involved

Thus, volunteer tourists are identified as seeking a meaningful experience that will allow them to broaden their personal horizons while making a valuable contribution to the world around them, to make a difference (Ellis, 2003; Coghlan, 2006).

Such conclusions are drawn from a limited number of motivational studies of environmental volunteers (Bruyere & Rappe, 2006).

The most commonly identified rationale in these studies are based upon ideals related to altruism such as the desire to expand one's understanding of the environment and participate in activities or causes that are of value to the volunteer, such as saving endangered species (Brown, 2005; Campbell & Smith, 2006; McIntosh & Zahra, 2007; Zahra & McIntosh, 2007).

However, there remains the issue of what exactly the understanding sought and gained by volunteers actually entails. Campbell & Smith's (2006) survey of conservation volunteer tourists identified responses by volunteers that portray an element of nuance to the understandings of conservation gained at a turtle project.

In contrast to current sustainable development discourse wishes to incorporate indigenous peoples into the realm of conservation respondents to Campbell & Smith's (2006) questioning commonly identified local peoples' extractive use of natural resources as a major cause of concern. Indeed, the majority of volunteers who expressed concern on the issue of extractive use identified "poaching" by local residents as the most significant threat to the survival of turtles. In actual fact, the level of hostility towards the host community led the authors to question the vaunted concept of volunteer tourism promoting an exchange of knowledge between host communities and tourists (Wearing, 2001; Campbell & Smith, 2006; Gray & Campbell, 2007; Guttentag, 2009).

This is a significant issue in the promotion of volunteer conservation tourism. Bearing in mind that conservation initiatives have been dogged by conflict between indigenous communities and conservationists, practices that repeat this experience are likely to be of diminished value. Furthermore, as the actual quality of the work carried out by volunteers has produced mixed results, notably in the case of data

collection for scientific research (Foster-Smith & Evans, 2003; Newman, 2003; Bell, 2007; Bremer, 2007; Brightsmith et al, 2008), the main selling point for volunteer conservation tourism is arguably the knowledge gained and understandings derived by volunteers from their interaction with the natural environment and host community (Jones 2005; Guttentag, 2009). Therefore, if volunteer tourist conservation projects are failing to provide understandings that help stimulate an appreciation of the complex nature of environmental change and the everyday interaction of indigenous communities with the environment they live in the worthiness of such projects must inevitably be called into question (Guttentag, 2009).

For example, Simpson (2004) concluded how volunteer tourists rationalise their experiences may actually reinforce negative, simplistic views of indigenous people coupled with misunderstandings of how people in the developing world interact with their environment. As stated earlier such views have in the past facilitated the impoverishment, both economically and culturally, of indigenous people, and led to the implementation of ineffective conservation policies (Colchester, 1996).

Rather than question how and why poor communities lived in what were quite often conditions of abject poverty, Simpson (2004) found volunteers rationalised indigenous poverty as not only being determined by fate, but also something that was inherently part of the culture of indigenous community life. Volunteers saw how people, though poor, were actually happy, even empowered by being free from the trappings of modernity and the worries of a western lifestyle. The study also suggested that the opinions of volunteers may be influenced by the content of promotional literature produced by organisations seeking volunteers, suggesting that many organisations represent the people and environment of the developing world in simplistic terms that fosters paternalistic attitudes in western travellers (Simpson, 2004).

This view coincides with Neumann's (1997; 2002) conclusion that issues of paternalism remain an ongoing process in our understandings of the environment in general, as we construct both problems and solutions based upon dichotomies of developed and undeveloped worlds where

western intervention and control is needed to protect the environment and educate the indigenous local.

Therefore, within the context of volunteer conservation tourism, it is necessary to consider what understandings volunteers are taking to and from their project experiences. If volunteer tourists are returning home with simple one dimensional answers to the complex range of issues affecting levels of biodiversity across the globe, their experience may prove to be of little value in terms of achieving the aims of Article 13 of the Convention on Biodiversity. In fact their experience may help perpetuate the cycle of dismissing the deleterious impact on indigenous people's lives that western models of conservation have so often produced (Guttentag, 2009).

2.4 Conclusion

The challenges posed to biodiversity conservation by global environmental change, including climate change, consumptive pressures on natural resources, and changing population demographics are complex and require dynamic responses. The declaration within the Convention on Biological Diversity to increase public awareness of these issues should be included as a fundamental element in responding to these challenges.

It is not unreasonable to postulate that ecotourism and specifically conservation programmes that engage volunteer tourism can contribute to the goal of disseminating greater public awareness of these issues. Furthermore, volunteer tourism does have the potential to act as an important source of revenue for funding conservation research, while adding to income generating potential within protected areas.

However, it should not be assumed that volunteer projects or volunteers themselves automatically espouse understandings of conservation issues and human interaction with the environment that rest neatly with progressive discourses of development and conservation. It is entirely possible that rather than act as a new enlightened conduit for environmental knowledge, volunteers end up reinforcing the perceptions of previous eras of conservation that have too often had disproportionately negative impacts on the livelihoods of indigenous people, impacts that have contributed to the ongoing tensions between conservationists and communities.

Therefore, this dissertation will explore the important issue of what understandings of conservation volunteer tourists gain while undertaking placements on projects. The following chapter details and explains the methods chosen for this study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The following sections outline the overall methodological approach of the study, the rationale behind methods chosen, a description of the design and application of these methods, as well as briefly discussing the limitations of the research.

3.2 A Qualitative Research Approach

This dissertation engages a qualitative approach to explore the understandings of conservation issues as found amongst volunteer tourists. Qualitative research methods have been commonly used to investigate the interpretations and meanings derived from peoples experiences (Seale, 1999; Gray & Campbell, 2007; Bryman, 2008). The choice of methods was selected within the context of the limited time frame available for conducting the research and analysis, approximately three months.

The research has been guided by interpretations of grounded theory, including a constructivist/interpretive view of grounded theory proposed by Charmaz (2001). Constructivist researchers interpret the studied world in order to build a conceptual analysis of how we understand our social experiences and interactions. This is undertaken with the implicit understanding that the social world is constructed by actors, such as researchers and research participants, and that meaning and therefore understanding of the social world exists in a state of constant revision (Charmaz, 2001; Bryman, 2008).

By drawing from a grounded theory approach the researcher was able to utilise flexible strategies in the short time frame available. This approach also facilitated the adaptation of research tools, such as the focus of semi-structured interviews, as key concepts and themes emerged from the study (Charmaz, 2001).

3.3 Research Design

Initially the primary concern for this study was gaining access to conservation volunteer tourists upon which research could be based. In consideration of the temporal limits of the research it was decided that a case study setting would provide the most suitable means of realizing the research objective, interpreting the understandings gained by volunteers

through their experiences on conservation projects. Case studies have been regarded as suitable contexts for the study of spatially and temporally located phenomena such as volunteer tourism, and are suitable for research that draws on grounded theory (Loftland & Loftland, 1995; Charmaz, 2001; Campbell & Smith, 2006).

In recognition of the growth of commercial operators within the field of volunteer conservation tourism (Lorimer, 2009) it was decided that an organisation operating within the commercial sector would provide the most relevant basis for study. A commercially operating organisation was also deemed the more likely to attract volunteer tourists from the general public rather than from volunteers formally engaged in the field of conservation (Cousins, 2007). This was a relevant point considering the studies interest in the understanding gained by the general public.

The exact choice of organisation was directed by the researcher's previous experience working on volunteer conservation projects within South Africa and personal contacts established there. This was not only necessary in terms of facilitating access to an organisation but also in choosing a project that operated in a manner reasonably typical of the industry as a whole. Furthermore, the organisation chosen would have to have an active volunteer program, and have been operating for a number of years in order to be able to provide access to both current and previous volunteers. This access needed to be attainable during the restricted time frame of the study.

With these considerations in mind arrangements to carry out the study were made with the African Lion & Environmental Research Trust (ALERT), a non-profit conservation organisation based in Zambia. Via ALERT's facilitation the researcher was able to gain access to a volunteer conservation tourist project operated by Lion Encounter (LE), a commercial organisation that works in partnership with ALERT. Importantly the LE project would be able to meet the requirements of the research design.

LE operates a number of volunteer conservation programmes across southern Africa. This study focuses on a project based in Zambia, located within the Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park.

LE promote the Zambian based project, via a sister company African Impact that acts as an internet based marketing agent, as a conservation programme focused on the long term reintroduction of African Lion (*Panthera leo*) into national parks as a means of mitigating against the ongoing decline of lion populations across the continent (Chardonnet, 2002; Bauer & Van Der Merwe, 2004; African Impact, 2009; Guo, 2009). The organisation advocates a holistic approach to conservation through the incorporation of environmental awareness initiatives and the promotion of community development in its projects (African Impact, 2009).

In keeping with the concepts derived from grounded theory the research tools applied in this study were adapted as concepts and themes emerged (Charmaz, 2001). Overall, participants in the study were drawn from a purposive sample. A purposive sample was the logical choice of sampling method as the study required insights from a specific group, namely participants from volunteer conservation projects. By choosing volunteers from one organisation it was possible to place the volunteers experience and understandings of conservation within an identifiable spatial and temporal context (Campbell & Smith, 2006; Bryman, 2008). Instruments chosen for the research included an online questionnaire, while further questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation were engaged *in situ* on the volunteer conservation project.

All participants were clearly informed as to the nature and purpose of the research prior to participation and all responses have been anonymised. The research was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the University of East Anglia's School of International Development, and ethical clearance was obtained prior to commencement of research (appendix 1).

3.4 Questionnaire Development

In order to initially establish the motivational reasoning reported by volunteers participating on LE projects an online questionnaire was created for completion by previous volunteers from conservation projects. A request was placed on ALERTs Facebook homepage, a popular social networking website, asking for previous volunteers to participate (appendix 2). Membership of ALERTs Facebook group is predominantly

made up of previous LE volunteers who have participated on lion based projects (personal communication with ALERT staff member, 15-06-2009). The same request was also placed within the May & June 2009 editions of ALERTs online newsletter which is also emailed to previous volunteers.

The online questionnaire was adapted from the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) devised by Clary et al (1998)(Appendix 3). VFI based questionnaires have been adopted among studies seeking to identify motivational trends within volunteer programmes (Clary et al, 1998; Clary & Snyder, 1999; Campbell & Smith, 2006).

VFI questionnaires are psychometric surveys consisting of a selection of statements which have been designed in order to illicit responses that can be collated into functional categories. These functional categories serve to describe the psychological role played by undertaking volunteer activity. Clary et al (1998) identified six distinct motivational functions served by volunteerism. These were described as values, understanding, social, career, protective, and enhancement. Depending on how respondents complete the questionnaire it is theoretically possible to identify the function served by their volunteering activity. For example, career needs, or personal enhancement. In the context of this study responses that fall into the understanding category would imply a desire on the part of the volunteer to gain greater understanding of conservation issues.

As this study sought to identify and explore the concepts behind volunteers reported motivations rather than measure motivational response rates in a quantitative manner the questionnaire was adapted to include open ended questions. This was done in order to allow respondents the opportunity to express in their own words why they volunteered, and to discuss some of the insights they gained whilst volunteering.

Responses from the questionnaire were analysed and coded which facilitated the creation of a preliminary interview format to be engaged *in situ* with current volunteers and project staff (appendix 4, 5). The online questionnaire received 164 visits, returning 127 completed responses. Of these 124 were useable.

3.5 Field Research

Field research took place at a volunteer conservation project; focused on lion reintroduction, operated by LE located within the Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park, part of the proposed Kavango-Zambezi (KAZA) Trans Frontier Conservation Area, in Zambia's Southern Province (Murphy, 2008; Peaceparks.org, 2009). The research took place over a period of 30 days spanning the months of June and July 2009.

According to the promotional literature produced by African Impact the volunteer project offers the opportunity to work on a number of conservation based activities. These include interaction with lions through participation in the day-to-day tasks required in managing captive animals; and participation in research through the supervised collection of data relating to the behaviour and physical development of the lions. Further activities described include data collection from within the national park including game counts, and monitoring of elephant (*Loxodonta africana*), and painted hunting dog (*Lycaon pictus*) populations. The project also offers the opportunity to participate in conservation education classes with local school children. These classes are organised in conjunction with the Zambian Wildlife Authority (ZAWA). ZAWA is the principal authority responsible for managing the national park, and all project activities are arranged with their prior consent (Personal communication with ZAWA chief area warden, 03-07-2009).

Overall, volunteer activity is divided into three aspects:

1. Lion rehabilitation work
2. Conservation work within the national park
3. Conservation education

3.6 Profile of Sample and Nature of In Situ Interviews

Interviews conducted in the field consisted of semi-structured interviews with volunteers, project management and staff, and ZAWA officials. Volunteers were interviewed in small groups, while staff and ZAWA officials were interviewed on an individual basis.

A total of 10 volunteers were interviewed in 2 separate groups. The first consisting of 4 volunteers who were coming towards the end of their placements [duration of which was 2 weeks for 1 volunteer, and 1 month

for the remaining 3]. The second group of volunteers were interviewed at the start of their second week on the project.

As stated previously interviews followed a semi-structured process, and were preceded by asking the volunteers to complete a hard copy of the online questionnaire administered to previous volunteers. This not only helped frame the context of the discussions but also allowed comparison between current and previous volunteers. The interviews were initially framed to allow volunteers to expand on topics raised in the questionnaire and to elaborate on why they had come on the project; what they thought of the project; what they felt they might have learned; and what if any influence on their lives they felt their experience would have upon their return home. They were also asked to share any thoughts they had relating to conservation, the environment, and what they thought about Zambia, and the African continent in general. By interviewing the second group separately the researcher hoped to gain insight into the attitudes and understandings of volunteers at different stages of their stay on the project.

In interviewing the volunteers in small groups the researcher hoped to draw upon the potential interaction of participants that would encourage conversation and expansion of topics covered, it would also possibly counter the overt influence of the researcher in determining the exact trajectory of discussion, thus potentially allowing for a greater range of ideas to be elicited (McGehee & Santos, 2005).

Project staff were also interviewed following a semi-structured format on an individual basis in order to allow staff to express views in a discreet manner.

Further semi-structured interviews were conducted with the ZAWA chief area warden and community liaison official in order to gain an insight into the relationship between LE and ZAWA and also to confirm the claims made by LE in relation to the work the project carried out in the national park.

Participant observation took place in the sense that the researcher accompanied volunteers during the course of the activities they undertook. This also included spending time with volunteers after the end

of their formal work day, and accompanying volunteers on visits to neighbouring tourist attractions and social gatherings.

3.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis took place both in the field and upon return to the United Kingdom. All interviews were recorded using a digital Dictaphone, and upon completion, immediately transcribed. Initial coding also took place at this point. These initial codes were subsequently refined into focused codes in order to develop analytic categories. Field notes were also taken in order to record a rich account of activities and experiences.

The online questionnaire was analysed with the aid of analytic software provided by the service provider (Zoomerang.com). Qualitative analysis software was not used for analysing interviews due to the lack of availability of information technology in the field, coupled with the limited time frame available which would not have allowed the researcher to gain a sufficient level of proficiency in software usage.

3.8 Study Limitations

As stated above the most significant limitation placed on the research was the short time scale within which the research and analysis took place. This limited the scope of research and restricted both sample size and methods that could be effectively engaged. For example, it was not possible to conduct interviews with volunteers before, during, and after their placements. This may have added to the analysis in terms of extrapolating what influence volunteering activity had on individuals understanding. However, to compensate volunteers were included in the analyses that were beginning their volunteer experience, coming towards the completion of their placements, and also previous volunteers.

There was the possibility that respondents to the questionnaire may have been biased in their views towards the projects, however, the purpose of the research was to examine and interpret the content of volunteers perceptions. Thus whether volunteers were supportive or dismissive was not necessarily the point, rather the study was more concerned with in what way respondents expressed their views and how ideas were rationalised.

A common criticism of qualitative research especially when case studies are engaged relates to their general applicability to broader

experiences. However, as Mitchel (2000) argues extrapolation in qualitative studies is based on the validity and rigour of analysis rather than the representativeness of particular events. What is of importance is the use of data and the claims subsequently made to support theoretical conclusions.

The following chapter presents the findings that emerged from the research with discussion of the implications of these findings.

Chapter Four: Findings & Analysis

4.1 Introduction

The following chapter details the concepts that emerged from surveys and interviews held with volunteers and project staff engaged in volunteer conservation tourism. These concepts highlighted the understanding of conservation held by both past and current participants. These concepts are analysed from the perspective of what they entail for the efficacy of volunteer tourism as an emerging tool for biodiversity conservation.

4.2 Online Questionnaire

The online questionnaire received 164 visits, returning 127 completed responses. Of these 124 were useable. As stated previously the questionnaire had been adapted from a VFI devised by Clary et al (1998). The VFI was derived from six conceptualizations of psychological and social functions served by engaging in volunteer activity (Clary et al, 1998; Clary & Snyder, 1999).

In the questionnaire respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 7 the importance of suggested possible reasons for volunteering; 1 being not at all important, to 7 being extremely important. 30 possible reasons were given in total, 5 from each of the functional categories. Participants were given the opportunity to respond to two open-ended questions. The first asking them to comment in their own words as to why they had volunteered on conservation projects, and the second asking them to comment on what they thought of wildlife conservation in Africa in general.

4.3 Demographics of respondents

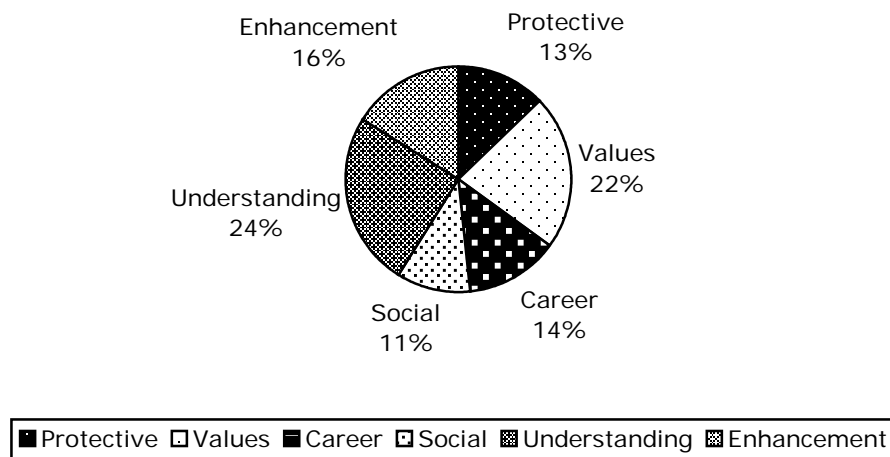
84 per cent of respondents were female, which reflects the overall gender make-up for LE conservation projects (Personal communication with project management, 26-06-09). Although the age of respondents ranged from 18 to 60 or older, the largest number 46 per cent were aged between 18 and 25. In terms of educational status 73 per cent of respondents were either university educated or currently attending university. The majority of respondents, 67 per cent, were from the United Kingdom and Europe with 21 per cent from North America. There were no respondents from Africa. These figures reflected the general

make-up of LE volunteers and are also reflective of the overall demographic make-up of volunteer tourism in general (Cousins, 2007; Lorimer, 2009; Personal communication with project management, 28-06-09).

4.4 Results of Questionnaire

After collating the total scores received for each of the six possible motivational functions, the functions that were found to score highest were “understanding”, and “values”. These accounted for 24 per cent and 22 per cent of all scores respectively (see graph 4.1). These scores are indicative of participants seeking greater knowledge through volunteering and also participating because of normative values.

Graph 4.1 Percentage Score of Motivational Functions for Previous Volunteers



Results based on 124 completed questionnaires

This would also appear to be reflected in the themes emerging from open-ended responses. For example, a common theme that emerged was volunteers expressing the idea that they were engaging in something that went beyond conventional tourism:

I personally volunteered as opposed to just travel because I wanted to feel I was making some kind of difference, however small, to the environment, and I have a passion for wildlife and animals
(Response No. 1, Q.31)

I want to become more involved with the communities and animals through volunteering than just passing through on a safari or similar
(Response No. 21, Q.31)

I want to spend time learning and understanding the animals that are close to my heart. I want to do what I can to help. They have no voice.
(Response No. 40, Q.31)

A further concept that emerged from respondent's desire for understanding was the attraction of having "contact" with animals, and indeed, Africa. This was illustrated by responses such as:

Love lions. Ability to have a hands on experience.
(Response No. 47, Q.31)

to have a hands on experience in Africa and feel like I'm making a small difference to conservation
(Response No. 62, Q.31)

A possible indication of how a selection of the survey respondents saw their role within conservation and how these respondents felt conservation initiatives should be practiced began to emerge from volunteers responses when asked to comment on conservation in Africa.

The predominant concept revealed was that volunteers perceived Africa and it's wildlife to be in dire need of protection and education from the developed world. In a recurring theme respondents saw themselves as playing a role in saving African wildlife, and in doing so, guiding Africans in how to care for the environment. For example:

Africa needs our help to preserve their lands and animals
(Response No. 5, Q.32)

In doing so we should not forget that:

an important part of volunteering includes spreading the message
(Response No. 7, Q.32)

And this message entails:

African wildlife needs to be protected in order that we do not loose this continent and its natural jewels
(Response No. 25, Q.32)

However, the problem with protecting the environment in Africa is:

poor national leadership and local conservation ideals
(Response No. 25, Q.32)

Indeed reaching out to educate local people seems to be a prime concern as:

wildlife in third world countries are under
greater threats from humans than other
countries
(Response No. 34, Q.32)

Ultimately:

volunteers are essential to conservation in
Africa. I would encourage anyone in my position
to take their life experience to Africa- it adds a
different dimension and gives enormous
personal satisfaction
(Response No. 43, Q.32)

The main concepts that appeared from the online survey revealed how volunteers felt or at least sought to express the idea that they were motivated by, and took part in an activity that was more than just tourism. It was important to respondents values that they were going beyond observation to participate and physically contact African wildlife. This concept was expanded to the belief that volunteers were helping to make a difference to the threatened African environment by giving their time and effort to educating locals in how to protect endangered wildlife. These volunteers saw an Africa that was under threat, and understood that without outside guidance, local Africans were going to lose the continent's most precious resources.

The question that was clear is whether such paternalistically tinged views and fears for the environment would be present in volunteers currently participating on a conservation project. Also, although the online survey drew responses expressing concerns about threats to the environment, respondents did not provide any detailed elaboration of what these threats consisted of beyond the idea of them originating from local African populations or indeed, any detail of specific activities they had undertaken that was achieving their goals of helping conservation. The field research with volunteers presented the opportunity to see if

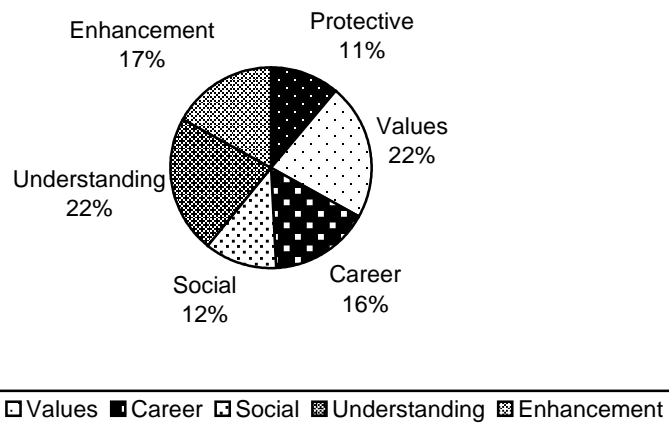
current volunteers also held similar perspectives and perhaps gain an insight as to how these perspectives were formed.

4.5 Findings from Volunteer Interviews

As part of the interview process volunteers were asked to complete a hard copy of the VFI questionnaire. This served two purposes. Firstly it helped stimulate volunteers to reflect upon their reasons for participation, and secondly, allowed for comparison with previous volunteers.

The results to the VFI in this case were quite similar to the online survey, with “understanding” and “values” again the prominent functions (see graph 4.2).

Graph 4.2 Percentage Score of Motivational Functions for Current Volunteers



Results based on 10 completed questionnaires

Responses to open-ended questions were also similar to previous volunteers with the desire to do something different that went beyond conventional tourism and gain physical contact featuring in volunteer’s rationale.

As with previous volunteers when asked to reflect on conservation in Africa responses focused on the need to educate Africans:

Through classroom lessons we are giving to the school children. We can teach them the importance of conservation within their community
(Current vol. questionnaire respondent No.1, Q.32)

Upon completion of the questionnaire informal semi-structured interviews took place with the volunteers. During these interviews volunteers were given the opportunity to expand on discussing their motivations, their experience on the project, and their thoughts and feelings about conservation and their views of Africa in general.

Interviews revealed an element of nuance to volunteer's motivations. Though similar concepts such as doing something more than tourism, and seeking contact were apparent in discussions, as the interviews developed volunteers became more candid in expressing reasons for travelling. This included describing how volunteers could be motivated by less altruistic desires:

For this personal volunteer project I think you are going to have a lot of people with two reasons because as much as it is a volunteer project, at the same time it is very self serving. There's a lot of people who want to come and work with lions on a more personal gratifying basis than a volunteering basis. As I'm helping save a lion they're thinking I'm playing with cuddly lions
(Volunteer A, 1st group; 11-06-09)

Or, as a volunteer from the second group stated more bluntly:

Well we all think like conservation is important and everything but I think the main reason why everyone chose this project is because lions are cuddly, like, you want to conserve them but also it's a good time to come see some lions
(Volunteer F, 2nd group; 21-06-09)

In terms of an understanding of conservation issues gained on the project, the volunteers from both groups stated that they were acquiring knowledge that they did not previously hold. However, based on their discussions, this appeared to be limited to basic information regarding lions and was open to misinterpretation, for example there was an understanding amongst the volunteers that lions were an endangered species*. However, if the group discussions conducted with volunteers revealed little evidence of a sophisticated understanding with regard to specific conservation issues, one topic upon which the interviewees from

* Lions are listed by the IUCN (2009) as a vulnerable species rather than endangered

both groups agreed was the importance of educating Africans in conservation.

Repeatedly, the education of Africans was emphasised:

I think it's an important thing that they're doing, the education of the children, because they need to actually involve the Africans.
(Volunteer E, 2nd group, 21-06-09)

I'd easily say that [educating locals] was number one.
(Volunteer A, 1st group, 11-06-09)

In terms of what the future holds for Africa and biodiversity conservation, the volunteer's views held to broad generalisations. Several participants expressed concern over economic development on the continent and what this might entail for what they perceived as African culture, which they saw as being synonymous with wilderness and images of rural life. As the volunteers discussions progressed it became more apparent that the groups saw an inherent link with what they regarded as a traditional African way of life and the protection of wildlife. For example, two of the volunteers from group one expressed their concerns on this matter basing their views on a meeting with individuals whilst volunteering in Zanzibar, where the volunteers had previously spent time on a separate volunteer project marketed by African Impact:

Vol A: Like with the Maasai people right?

Vol B: Yeah, the Maasai people leave their village now

Vol A: Yeah, to get involved with tourism

Vol B: And work as security guards and stuff like that and turn to drinking and everything. We worked closely with three Maasai guys who were saying all the problems as half the family is still traditional and half the family is rocking with ipods and cell phones and working with tourists in communities

Vol A: And partying
(Discussion between volunteer A & B, from 1st group, 11-06-09)

Overall, the volunteers were anxious as to the future development of African society and what this might entail, as one volunteer expressed:

If they do get a lot then they just fall apart in my opinion, like the government in most countries
(Volunteer B, from 1st group, 11-06-09)

As conversation amongst the volunteers progressed, and this issue was particularly evident from group one, they discussed their sense of uncertainty regarding development and the progression of innovations such as tourism and what this might entail. Concern regarding development led some volunteers to question whether Africans would be better off without the trappings of modernity. These considerations were framed by the impression these volunteers had of Africans being happy with their lives, when free from the complications of modern living.

A volunteer from group one recalled an encounter they had with a woman in Zimbabwe, whilst participating on a LE sister project, who worked as a receptionist and compared this to people the volunteer had seen living within a rural area of Zimbabwe:

She was looking after her brother 'cause her parents had got killed...she had to pay this bill which was twice her monthly wage. But she told me that with a smile.

And that something I found was going through the middle of nowhere seeing people that didn't have anything. That didn't have electricity. That had to get their water and seeing how happy they were and stuff, and then just going if you do have something that could actually be a lot harder than not having something, if that makes sense...they all get through it. They do it in their own ways. I think their culture at the moment is great.
(Volunteer C, 1st group, 11-06-09).

Taken collectively these views sit alongside the opinions of previous volunteers that placed Africans in a subservient position in need of education and protection. If conservation was to succeed in Africa it clearly depended on the influence of the non-African world.

Overall, the current volunteers felt they were learning and gaining knowledge but did not express any detailed understanding of biodiversity

conservation other than simplistic notions of wildlife being under threat, a threat, which in the views of both discussion groups, was inherently linked with economic development and the possible loss of traditional African culture. The volunteers rationalised this understanding of a traditional way of life in a manner that viewed development as potentially detrimental to the happiness they saw in the simple African life.

The conclusion the researcher drew from these discussions was that volunteers had a view of Africa that required wilderness and an absence of modernity. Yet this view was complicated by meeting Africans that had moved beyond the volunteer's conceptualisation of what Africa should be. Thus volunteers began to intertwine their preconception of what Africa should be with the idea of wilderness under threat and the encroachment of modernity and development. What was needed was preservation of wilderness, facilitated by educating Africans as to what they stood to lose by abandoning their traditional way of life, a life which provided them, after all, with a happy, uncomplicated existence.

4.6 Findings from Staff Interviews

As discussions were undertaken with volunteers separate semi-structured interviews took place with project staff and management. Five of the seven staff were themselves former volunteers from the United Kingdom who had volunteered at the first conservation project established by LE at a private game reserve near Gweru in Zimbabwe.

The concepts that arose from these interviews were somewhat striking, particularly from the perspective of how staff viewed volunteers. These concepts included problems with the attitudes and work application of volunteers, this included having to tailor the experience provided to volunteers in order to avoid issues that the volunteers were not comfortable with. However, what also emerged from the interviews was the realisation that some staff held views which would present problems for the idea of conservation volunteer projects acting as conduits for disseminating progressive ideas of working inclusively with indigenous communities.

The first concept that soon became apparent was that staff generally expressed a sense of dissatisfaction with volunteers and regarded their own volunteering experience as having taken place in a

different era when volunteers were genuinely engaged in altruistic behaviour. Although they acknowledged some volunteers still came to work and engage with conservation this was a decreasing trend. The majority of volunteers arriving now were here for leisure.

The first couple of years that I was out here people really were conservationists. They were vet students, they were animal behaviour students...they wanted to work in conservation...now some people come out because it's sunny
(Staff member E, 04-07-09)

While it was thought that the motivations of volunteers had changed it was also felt that upon arrival the volunteers were no longer engaging with the work ethic required:

The volunteers, like at the park now are just so, like lazy...if I was volunteering now I think I would get frustrated with other volunteers. They're so lazy and they're not here for the right reasons
(Staff Member B, 13-06-09)

The attitudes of volunteers were apparently impacting on the nature and content of the project. For example, when asked about the educational content of the project in terms of how many and what sort of educational lessons or experiences were provided for volunteers the researcher was informed by one member of staff:

I would probably say not enough but, yeah, I mean like going back to the whole industry has changed so much that the type of volunteers now compared to a couple of years ago, that they're not bothered
(Staff Member C, 17-06-09)

In stating that too often volunteers were participating as tourists on holiday with no serious interest in conservation the staff felt it necessary to avoid issues relating to conservation that they felt would upset or anger volunteers. A clear example of this was avoiding issues such as the potential of trophy hunting to act as a means of maintaining a sustainable income from protected areas.

As one member of staff who was attempting to reconcile their own misgivings about the role of hunting in conservation expressed:

you come out here you think conservation must be done here like this... from the western world hunting is a bad thing whatever it is, hunting is a bad thing... But I don't necessarily go up to a volunteer and start a conversation 'cause especially if they're from the western world. So say you've got an American. To be honest they've got some very strong views and I'm always concerned it's going to go into an argument. They're not going to fully understand my side and then their little feed back form comes back.
(Staff Member B, 13-06-09)

Such views reinforce the concept of volunteers having a preconception of what nature and the environment should be and how they seek to rationalise and immerse themselves within this environment free from actualities that do not fit within their vision of Africa. However, it also shows that the project itself, through a desire not to upset volunteers' sensibilities, was providing an experience of Africa that did not contradict or disturb the volunteers' beliefs, thus reinforcing the understandings that volunteers held rather than presenting them with alternative possibilities.

Furthermore, as the interviews progressed it became apparent that some members of staff also held views that positioned indigenous people as a fundamental problem in conservation, specifically in terms of attitudes to wildlife. As with the volunteers, the belief in the importance of changing the mindset of Africans was a key issue.

for me if conservation is going to work on this continent you need a complete and total cultural shift in the minds of all Africans because at the moment they just want to go kill everything.
(Staff Member E, 04-07-09)

The problem posed by Africans attitudes to wildlife, was viewed as being compounded by population growth:

Well, you know it's just like the population growth of indigenous native people... The question is, because where people live is expanding, so are we going to allow people to settle here in these areas or tell them no, this is a buffer zone between human land and national park. You guys must not move into this area. It's a question of how the government handles that...the

population growth of these countries over the next ten to twenty years because it's not really a long term plan to have people living in national parks
(Staff Member F, 28-06-09)

Indeed Africans relationship with the environment was viewed by one member of staff with deep cynicism:

There will be wildlife here because of the money it brings in, purely. Not because Africans see it as worthwhile having wildlife or any other kind of reason, that's that.
(Staff Member F, 28-06-09)

When asked as to where they drew their ideas about conservation from the common reply from staff was that they had formed their views whilst participating on the conservation project:

I suppose just working with the volunteers day in, day out. Learned a lot about how we can make things work. What doesn't work, and how you can, yeah, 'cause I've been working with the volunteers.
(Staff Member F, 28-06-09)

Thus at least one member who acted as a focal point for coordinating the volunteers held deeply negative views of indigenous communities and saw them as a fundamental problem in achieving desired conservation outcomes rather than as partners or actors with any meaningful contribution to make. Overall, conservation was being conceptualised around the idea of protected areas where people were excluded. The choices were limited, protected areas free from humans or the continued loss of wildlife. These views were reminiscent of the attitudes of previous western orientated understandings of conservation that alienated rural communities, situating them as environmentally destructive agents and thus perpetuated conflict amongst stakeholders.

These views coupled with the, at best, ambiguous understanding of conservation demonstrated by the volunteers, left the researcher to conclude that the understanding of conservation being disseminated via the volunteer programme was of questionable value in terms of corresponding to current ideals of sustainable development and increased cooperation between conservationists and rural communities. Certainly it was difficult to support the idea that volunteers were seeking out and

receiving the insights and expanded knowledge that proponents of volunteer conservation tourism would claim. Rather the volunteer experience was potentially reinforcing simplistic, negative stereotyping of indigenous people while ignoring the ecological and social complexities of managing natural resources.

4.7 Overall Findings

The objective of this study was to gain insight into the understandings of conservation held by volunteer conservation tourism participants. Having engaged surveys of previous volunteers and interviews with current volunteers and project staff, who themselves consisted mainly of previous volunteers; a number of salient concepts were identified. These concepts relate to the knowledge gained by volunteers, their attitudes to what they were engaged in, and in particular, how they perceived the role of indigenous people within biodiversity conservation.

In terms of the knowledge gained from their experience the volunteers claimed that they were achieving new understandings of both wildlife and Africa in general. However, there was no evidence of any detailed or comprehensive understanding of issues faced in biodiversity conservation being developed by the volunteers. They expressed their concern over the decreasing numbers of lions in the wild but elicited little understanding of why this might be other than that it was somehow linked to the loss of traditional African culture, coupled with a lack of understanding amongst Africans about the importance of environmental conservation.

Africans themselves were viewed as under threat from the advancement of modernity and social change. They were in need of education which if attained would be of much use to ensuring that Africans were in the future hopefully able to contribute in protecting the natural environment.

This negative view of indigenous communities was also evident amongst project staff. Though by no means all staff elicited such views the fact that those who did also claimed that they formed the majority of their views about conservation directly from their project experience raises the possibility that the nature of the project was serving to reinforce, if not create, this hostile view of host communities.

4.8 Broader Implications

This dissertation has detailed how volunteer conservation tourism is being promoted as an emerging opportunity for creating environmental awareness amongst the general public while also acting as a source of revenue generation and skilled labour for research in the field. The emergence of commercial organisations channelling volunteers to projects in the developing world potentially increases exponentially the pool of volunteers and at the same time vastly broadens the outreach of projects to the non-specialist general public.

However, what has been highlighted from this study's findings is that it cannot be automatically assumed that the environmental knowledge being disseminated to the general public participating as conservation volunteers, or indeed the publics' perception of what they are doing, fits with contemporary discourse of sustainable development and progressive initiatives in biodiversity conservation. The views and perceptions demonstrated in this study show that it is entirely possible that without due care and attention the volunteer experience leads to or at least reinforces the understanding of indigenous people as problematic consumers of natural resources with no conception of sustainability or appreciation of wildlife.

Neither can it be assumed that the self reported altruistic motivations of volunteers actually results in anything tangible, such as increased environmental awareness. The volunteers in this study, for example, showed little awareness of any broader environmental issues, for example, such as climate change. The volunteers did not consider what role, for instance, highly consumptive western lifestyles may place on developing world natural resources. The prevailing theme in volunteer discussion was how the threat to wildlife originated and was situated solely in Africa. Such views mean that an interesting opportunity for creating a genuine exchange of knowledge and understanding between western travellers and host communities is missed and instead may merely result in a reaffirmation of conflicting perspectives between local communities and external actors who regard themselves as conservationists.

Finally, while it is understandable that commercial operators need to consider the desires of their client base, in the case of volunteer conservation over compensation in this regard could have significant implications. For example, this study illustrated the volunteers association of conservation with images of primitive Africans or indeed the preservation of wildlife with no human involvement. If commercial operators continue to concentrate on the desires of volunteers own expectations of wilderness this could lead to the further exclusion of indigenous communities as these communities fail to fit into the preordained image of wilderness that volunteers seek to experience and pay to preserve.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

The objective of this study was to gain insight into the understandings of conservation held by volunteer conservation tourism participants. Having engaged surveys of previous volunteers as well as interviews with current volunteers and project staff, who themselves had also participated previously as volunteers; a number of salient concepts were identified.

These concepts relate to the knowledge gained by volunteers, their attitudes to what they were engaged in, and in particular, how they perceived the role of indigenous people within biodiversity conservation.

5.2 Findings

In relation to the issues discussed above this study has identified a number of relevant points regarding the motivations and perceptions found amongst participants in volunteer conservation tourism. These are identified as follows:

- In terms of the knowledge gained from their experience volunteers who participated in this study claimed that they were achieving new understandings of both wildlife and Africa in general. However, there was little evidence of any detailed or comprehensive understanding of issues faced in biodiversity conservation being developed by the volunteers. For example, volunteers expressed their concern over the decreasing numbers of lions in the wild but elicited little understanding of why this might be other than that it was somehow linked to the loss of traditional African culture, coupled with a lack of understanding amongst Africans about the importance of environmental conservation.
- Africans themselves were commonly viewed as under threat from the advancement of modernity and social change. They were in need of education which if attained would be of much use to ensuring that Africans were in the future hopefully able to contribute to protecting the natural environment.
- This negative view of indigenous communities was also evident amongst some project staff. Though not all staff elicited such views

the fact that those who did also claimed that they formed the majority of their views about conservation directly from their project experience raises the possibility that the nature of the project was serving to reinforce, if not create, this hostile view of host communities.

- Staff expressed dissatisfaction with the input of volunteers in terms of what they perceived to be a change in the attitudes of participants today compared to when the staff themselves first took part in conservation activities. The staff reported a general trend towards a greater number of volunteers coming to the project for overtly selfish reasons, such as the desire to play with wildlife rather than engage in actual conservation work.
- Staff reported having to tailor the content of information provided to volunteers so as to not cause offence. This potentially was resulting in a failure to engage participants preconceptions of natural resource management in the developing world and the complexity of relationships between stakeholders and the nuanced reality of compromises that conservation practitioners are required to engage in order to strive towards the objective of biodiversity conservation.

5.3 Implications for Volunteer Conservation Tourism

Within the limited number of studies conducted into volunteer conservation tourism thus far little attention has been paid to the actual concepts and understandings gained by volunteers. This is an important omission for it should not be assumed that self reported motives are automatically genuine, or that all participants are travelling for altruistic reasons. Furthermore, for those who do travel for altruistic reasons, it is necessary to discover what sort of understandings are driving this altruism, particularly if these understandings are widely disseminated among volunteers and subsequently their broader social networks (Simpson, 2004; Campbell & Smith, 2006).

Chapter two of this dissertation identified the argument for encouraging the development of volunteer conservation tourism, while also highlighting concerns that have arisen over the quality of experience and type of understanding disseminated by such projects. This study has reflected upon the idea that there is significant potential in this sector in terms of creating greater public awareness of environmental issues but that in the case of the volunteers studied this was not necessarily happening. Rather the rationale behind a significant proportion of volunteers' perspectives was reinforcing their own desired perceptions of how things should be in the wild, which included categorising indigenous people into a subservient withdrawn role, to be the receivers of western education regarding their environment, and certainly not as partners or equals in conservation management. Too often, Africans were simply regarded as the central problem facing biodiversity conservation initiatives. These views were expressed with little or no explanation or substantive argument.

If this pattern were to be repeated across the sector of volunteer conservation tourism the ultimate outcome may be a reinforcement of previous eras of conservation whereby indigenous communities are ostracized, with their knowledge of environmental management ignored and disregarded. Even if rural communities are contributing to biodiversity loss, viewing them as primitive simple communities that must have solutions imposed on them is likely to sustain the environment of mistrust and outright hostility between conservationists and communities impacting on the potential success of conservation initiatives.

Ultimately, lying at the heart of the findings of this study was the issue of how volunteers perceived the natural environment and people of Africa, what they experienced, and how this related to the way they wished the African environment to be.

The majority of volunteers wished to express their rationale for participation as being motivated by altruistic desires and a need to be engaged in something more substantial than conventional tourism. However, the flip side of this desire to make a difference is the need for there to be a host community to act as a receptor for the benevolence of the volunteer. This creates the necessity for a subservient community in need of education and enlightenment, which in the context of the history

of conservation in sub-Saharan Africa is potentially problematic. This is particularly so if the purveyors of enlightenment are themselves lacking in a comprehensive knowledge of the subject in which they seek to proselytize.

5.4 Future Research

The most obvious point of departure for future research would be to investigate the findings of this study over a broader sample and time frame in order to more conclusively define the understandings of conservation found among volunteer tourists. It would also be beneficial to explore whether the location or type of species upon which the conservation focused influenced volunteers attitudes. The internet is of growing importance in disseminating knowledge and understanding of environmental issues, future research could study in more detail the role of project marketing in beginning the process of environmental understanding in potential volunteers. It would, of course, be useful to study the impact of volunteer conservation tourism from the perspective of host communities, particularly in light of this studies conclusion.

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Zawa Chief Area Warden personal communication regarding LE operations
Mosi-oa-Tunya NP 03-07-2009

Appendices

Appendix 1

Consent Form

The role of private sector volunteer conservation tourism within the context of Southern Africa

Consent Form

Introduction

Hello, my name is John Peter Murphy. I am conducting research as part of my Masters dissertation at the University of East Anglia, UK. As such, I would like to invite you to take part in a small study.

Purpose of Study

The nature tourist market is of growing importance as African states seek to develop their natural resources in a sustainable manner. The organisations and individual travellers that make up this market have the potential to influence the future resources available to and structure of conservation projects with potential impacts for both conservation and rural development.

This study will seek to build an understanding of the motivations and rationale of volunteers and project managers/staff in engaging in conservation tourism and how this is reflected in the structure and aims of the conservation project.

As part of this study I am conducting interviews and discussions with previous and current volunteer conservation participants.

Upon completion of data collection, a case study will be engaged based on the information collected to form part of a study provisionally titled "The role of private sector volunteer conservation tourism within the context of Southern Africa".

Confidentiality

Your name or any facts that could identify you will not appear in any report of this study. All of your answers will be confidential and cannot be traced back to you. Completed questionnaires will be saved using password protection software. Should you wish to withdraw from the study you may do so by contacting me at the email address below before 20-07-2009 and all material relating to you shall be removed from the studies content.

Do you have any questions?

If at any time during this study you have questions you can contact me, John Peter, by email at john.murphy@gmail.com.

Agree to participate

Respondent agrees to participate in the study:

Yes No

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 2

Invitation issued to ALERT Facebook group members & e-newsletter subscribers

John Murphy is a student who is undertaking a study as part of his MSc in Environment & International Development at the University of East Anglia. The study which is being implemented through ALERT's facilitated research program (for more info see the front page of this group under the section "study with us") seeks to look at the role of volunteering in conservation initiatives in Africa.

As part of that he hopes to understand the motivations of volunteers in choosing to join a project and has produced a short survey for anyone who has volunteered with us.

We would be very grateful if you would support his study and take a few moments to complete the survey which you can find at <http://www.zoomerang.com/Survey/?p=WEB2298D39DCPS>. The survey is completely anonymous

Thank you.

ALERT

Appendix 3

Online Survey

Introduction page:

<http://www.zoomerang.com/Survey/?p=WEB2298D39DCPS>

Understanding the Motivations of Conservation Volunteers

Thank you for participating in our survey. Your feedback is very important.

This survey forms part of the research for a Masters of Science dissertation which seeks to explore the role of volunteer tourism in African conservation, a sector of growing significance.

By participating in our survey you will help add to knowledge about this important topic. Through this survey we are trying to understand the motivation's of volunteers who have taken part in volunteer-tourist conservation projects.

The survey is completely anonymous and takes less than 15 minutes to complete.

The statements on the following pages outline possible reasons for choosing to do volunteer conservation work.

Beneath each statement is a rating scale from 1 to 7. We would like you to rate the possible reasons in terms of how important they were to you when you chose to volunteer.

The rating scale is set from **1 = Not at all Important**, to **7 = Extremely Important**

So simply read the possible reason and rate its importance to you in your decision to volunteer from 1 to 7. Tick the box that corresponds to the number on the scale that you think represents the importance of the reason to you.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Volunteering can help me get a job at a place where I would like to work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 My friends volunteer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 I am concerned about the environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 People I am close to want me to volunteer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 Volunteering makes me feel important	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 People I know share an interest in conservation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 No matter how bad I've been feeling, volunteering helps me forget about it	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8 I am genuinely concerned about the animals I am volunteering to conserve	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9 By volunteering I feel less lonely	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10 I can make new contacts that might help my career	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11 Doing volunteer work relieves me of some of the guilt over being more fortunate than others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12 I can learn more about conservation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13 Volunteering increases my self-esteem	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14 Volunteering allows me to gain a new perspective on things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15 Volunteering allows me to explore different career options	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16 I feel compassion towards animals in need	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17 Others with whom I am close place a high value on the environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18 Volunteering lets me learn things through direct, hands on experience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19 I feel it is important to help conservation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20 Volunteering helps me work through my own personal problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21 Volunteering will help me to succeed in my chosen profession/career	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22 I can do something for a cause that is important to me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23 Volunteering is an important activity to the people I know best	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24 Volunteering is/was a good escape from my own troubles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25 I can learn about a variety of environments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26 Volunteering makes feel needed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27 Volunteering makes me feel better about myself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28 Volunteering will look good on my CV/Resume	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29 Volunteering is a way to make new friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30 I can explore my own strengths	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Are there any comments you would like to make about why you volunteer?

Are there any comments you would like to add about conservation in Africa?

--

Finally, we would like to ask some questions to help understand about volunteer group profile. Remember, this survey is completely anonymous!

Are you female or male?

Female	<input type="checkbox"/>
Male	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please select from the following list the age bracket to which you correspond

18-21	<input type="checkbox"/>
22-25	<input type="checkbox"/>
26-30	<input type="checkbox"/>
31-34	<input type="checkbox"/>
35-39	<input type="checkbox"/>
40-44	<input type="checkbox"/>
45-49	<input type="checkbox"/>
50-54	<input type="checkbox"/>
55-60	<input type="checkbox"/>
60 or older	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please select from the following list the income bracket into which your own annual income fits

less than £14,000	<input type="checkbox"/>
£14,000-£18,000	<input type="checkbox"/>
£19,000-£23,000	<input type="checkbox"/>
£24,000-£28,000	<input type="checkbox"/>
£29,000-£33,000	<input type="checkbox"/>
£34,000-£38,000	<input type="checkbox"/>
£39,000-£43,000	<input type="checkbox"/>
£44,000 or more	<input type="checkbox"/>

Have you studied at university?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am currently studying at university	<input type="checkbox"/>
No, but I am planning to do so	<input type="checkbox"/>

What is your current occupation?

--

Please select from the following list the region that best describes your place of origin

Europe-UK	<input type="checkbox"/>
Europe	<input type="checkbox"/>
North America	<input type="checkbox"/>
South America	<input type="checkbox"/>
Africa	<input type="checkbox"/>
Australia/New Zealand	<input type="checkbox"/>
Asia	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix 4

Initial interview schedule for volunteers

Date:

Location:

Start time:

End time:

Q1: Do you think the questionnaire statements were relevant to the reasons you had for choosing to volunteer?

Q2: Why did you choose this project?

Q3: Has the project met your expectations?

Q4: What, if anything, have you gained from your time on the project?

Q5: Do you have an interest in wildlife in general?

Q6: What, if anything, will you take away from your time here?

Q7: Are you involved with conservation agencies or groups at home?

Q8: What would you say has influenced your interest in wildlife?

Q9: Has your view of Zambia, or Africa, been affected during your time on the project?

Q10: If so how?

Q11: What do you think the future holds for wildlife in Africa?

Q12: What do you think are the most important issues in conservation?

Appendix 5

Initial schedule for interviews with staff

Date: _____ **Location:** _____

Start time: _____ **End time:** _____

Q1: How did you come to be here on the project?

Q2: What is your role at the project?

Q3: What are your long term plans?

Q4: What do you think about the rationale of the project?

Q5: What do you think of the role of volunteering as a tool of conservation?

Q6: Do you think there's much variation between the attitudes of the volunteers when they arrive?

Q7: Do you find there's any difference between the volunteers in terms of gender or age?

Q8: or place of origin?

Q9: You seem to get a lot more females than males volunteering, do have any idea as to why this might be?

Q10: Do you find that volunteers are doing this project alone or are they combining it with other project placements?

Q11: Do you get many volunteers looking to stay on and look for jobs at the projects?

Q12: What year did Lion Encounter start offering international conservation holidays?

Q13: How would you describe the type of volunteering experience Lion Encounter offer?

Q14: Do you use agents?

Q15: The project here in Zambia employs a lot of former volunteers. Is that typical of these projects in general?

- Q16: Do you think people volunteer with thoughts about and preconceptions of conservation here?
- Q17: Do you try to incorporate any conservation education elements in to the project?
- Q18: In your opinion is there any noticeable change in the attitude or opinion of volunteers over the course of their placement here?
- Q19: Who are your main customers?
- Q20: How do you market the project?
- Q21: What are the goals of the project?
- Q21: In terms of your marketing is there any particular language or imagery that draws people in or that they respond to?
- Q22: What or who influences the content of your marketing?