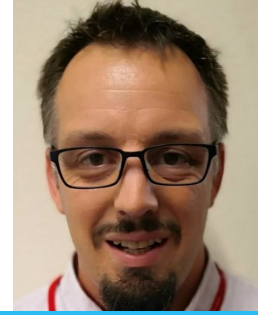


Professor JONES Thomas E.



Connecting Japanese Wildlife Tourism Research with the World

What is Wildlife Tourism?

Wildlife Tourism (WT) is a growing global market due to increased demand and declining biodiversity. WT seeks to mitigate human actions that can have negative impacts for wildlife as park managers aim to educate diversifying visitor segments. Hence WT is an emerging keyword at the intersection of sustainability and tourism-based research, as managers pioneer methods of persuasive communication that can encourage responsible tourist behaviour.

What are the research findings?

Findings show that the number of publications has doubled since 2010, indicating an increasing interest in WT research. The studies were mainly published in journals related to conservation and environmental sciences, with only 6 articles published in tourism-related journals, including only 2 written in Japanese. This result suggests that WT has not attracted much attention from Japanese tourism researchers but from conservation and environmental science fields. The term WT was not used explicitly in Japanese articles, instead many studies were discussed within an 'Ecotourism framework.' We conclude that WT research in Japan is at an early stage and requires more multidisciplinary approaches and global connectivity in the future.

What is our research aim?

The aim of this research was to critically review existing WT research conducted in Japan to discuss the current status and connect the future direction with global WT research. Together with co-researchers Dr. Rie USUI (Hiroshima University) and Dr. Takahiro KUBO (National Institute for Environmental Studies, Japan), we conducted a search of peer-reviewed academic articles written in Japanese and English using the following databases: CiNii (Japanese), Web of Science, EBSCOhost, SCOPUS (English).

WT Case Study 1: Monkey Mountain (Jones, 2019)

Wildlife tourism has the potential to engage visitors with nature, foster pro-conservation attitudes and generate economic benefits (Karanth et al, 2012). Yet despite the dynamics of visitation constantly changing, few prior studies adopted a segment-based approach to examine divergence in demand. Using evidence from interviews to address this gap, the current paper compares twin Macaque monkey park destinations in Japan's rural regions to investigate the longitudinal trends in respective visitor segments. In 1953, Japan's first monkey park opened in Takasakyama, a dormant volcano that rises steeply from the Pacific Ocean in the city of Ōita. Located on the Southern island of Kyushu, Ōita has a humid, sub-tropical climate distinct from the V-shaped valley in Nagano Prefecture, that hosts the "snow monkeys". Officially known as the Jigokudani Yaen Koen, the Snow Monkeys Park opened in 1964. Both represent popular attractions in which macaque troops can be viewed by visitors under open-range conditions (Knight, 2006). Provisioning strategies have evolved at both to facilitate wildlife tourism while diverting monkeys away from crop-raiding (Knight, 2017). But the snow monkeys' global reach soared following the 1998 Nagano Winter Olympics, resulting in increasing numbers of international tourists attracted to the park specifically to see the bathing macaques. Conversely, Takasakyama is an optional extra attraction where the mild upturn in international visitors is yet to compensate for the long-term decline in domestic demand. Future research threads are identified and implications drawn including the convergence of demand dynamics together with reduced provisioning and heightened efforts to prevent visitors feeding the macaques.



WT Case Study 2: Rabbit Island (Usui & Funck, 2020)

Human-rabbit interactions typically occur in captive settings, but the rabbits on Ōkunoshima Island in the Seto Inland Sea roam freely despite being identified by the Ministry of Environment as an 'invasive species.' The type of interactions that tourists seek are similar to those in a zoo or other captive WT setting, including feeding, petting, and taking photos, but as the island is a designated Special Conservation Zone it poses problems for the National Park.

References

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College of Affiliation

College of Sustainability and Tourism

Research Field

Environmental Policy, Nature-Based Tourism, Place Branding, Regional Revitalization