

## 177 Staging the wild: Photographers' behaviour and attitudes towards the use of bait, hides and landscape modifications in large carnivore photography

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Wildlife photography is a growing phenomenon in Scandinavia. As most forms of wildlife tourism, wildlife photography may have positive and negative effects, on both local communities and wildlife itself. Therefore, it is interesting to investigate tourists' ethics in relation to wildlife photography. My work explores photographers' perceptions on the phenomena "wildlife/wild animals" and "wilderness". These perceptions are also linked to the photographers' values. Furthermore, I investigate how they reflect upon facilitating or manipulating both the wildlife itself and the wilderness that serves as a backdrop, in wildlife photography. To investigate these issues, the main research questions applied were:

- What do the photographers think about (baiting) to make wild animals viewable?
- What do the photographers think about physical manipulation in the field?
- What do they think is "bad practice" in facilitation?

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to elaborate on topics they were more knowledgeable about. To facilitate in-depth conversations about the topic, semiprofessional photographers were interviewed. To get a broader sample of photographers, a few serious amateurs were also included. For example, some of the informants used to be photographers, but now work mostly as guides and facilitators of photography tours, and do not take as many photographs themselves anymore.

The informants mentioned that they often work with their own projects or that they work with costumers such as magazines, newspapers and book publishers, that need certain types of pictures. The photographers also take pictures that can hang on the wall and

they strive for taking pictures that no one has ever seen before. The photographers plan their projects carefully. They draw, dream about and plan their pictures a long time before they go out in the field. They know exactly what pictures they want and need to take. The informants mentioned some criteria for what makes a "good picture". They focused on photo-technical expressions like the golden ratio, perspective, angle and focus. Seasons also have an effect on the type of pictures the photographers get. The informants are well aware how seasons affects how animals behave (mating, cubs and feeding), how they look (summer or winter coat), and what surroundings the photographers get (snow, blizzard, cottongrass, rays of sun/ stray light). In Norway, some wild animals are difficult to capture on camera, among other things because there are strict regulations on baiting. Therefore, going to Finland with a guide is often the best opportunity to photograph the Scandinavian species. According to the informants, the most common bait used in Finland is pig, pellets, fish and honey. They place the bait strategically near, or on, locations (on a tree stump, by a waterhole, in-between the cotton grass) where they want the animal to come or pass by. Some of the informants said they were more or less free to place bait at whichever location they would like to use. This seems otherwise to be regulated.

The informants also mentioned so-called "disturbing elements" that were removed to improve the quality of their photos. To handle smaller disturbing elements right in front of the camera, the informants clean the foreground (e.g remove small branches, hair strands, leaves, cones). When the background for example includes power poles or is just not what the photographer wants, they move the camera away from the disturbing element. When the guides use snow mobiles to place big pigs in the marsh, the ground is being torn up. Most pictures are

taken where the marsh is less deteriorated. Additionally, when the photographers talk about photographing smaller animals, they often mention that they manipulate the area with branches and trees that they can move to get a suitable background. Though, some say that doing such manipulation as putting up branches and trees is only acceptable when photographing little birds in the garden. Props helps to enhance the feeling of a pristine environment. Paradoxically, the motives that seems to be pristine or natural, are in fact staged in some way to enhance the pristine.

The informants were aware of how the production of certain types of images create an experience that nature is in balance, in a non-hostile environment. They are torn between pleasing their audience and being first-line links to tell what is happening in nature.

Even though the informants tried to tread carefully and capture the animals on their premises, some photographers tried to challenge both themselves and the animals' boundaries in getting the best picture. I believe that the feelings of control, knowledge and competition affects the judgement that are made in the specific on-site situation. In worst case scenarios, bad judgement can lead to severe impacts for animals.

This means that many different assessments of these guidelines are exercised, and the only way to get a change is if they are exposed or confronted with it. Some of the informants said they tried to report if they saw ethical abuse being committed. Such whistleblowers are important contributors to develop better ethical judgement amongst the photographers.

The informants felt that the bait did not influence the feeling of the animal's natural behavior, hence the animal approached it by free will. The majority of the informants did not feel any ethical issues with using bait on wildlife. They highlighted 4 reasons for this; animals have a diverse nutrition, baiting has been legal for a long time in Scandinavia until recently (2020 in Norway), socially acceptable method in wildlife related activities and the spatial context of wildlife encounters.

Paradoxically, several of the informants expressed cognitive dissonance by wanting to meet and photograph the animals

at a random meeting, and not on bait. There is thus no unanimous agreement that bait is either good or bad practice. It is important to challenge the traditional values if human wildlife interactions are to develop in a sustainable direction that benefits animal welfare.

It is important that stakeholders are aware of the mentioned social, ecological and animal welfare consequences as popularity of wildlife photography increases. The practice of wildlife photography should involve the public in the process of making wildlife photography.