

Is one the loneliest number? How to scale empathic connections from individuals to ecosystems.

Jeffrey Skibins, Ph.D.
East Carolina University



OVERVIEW

Why you should care about caring

1. Key focus for majority of zoo visitors.
2. One of the strongest predictors of behavior participation.
3. Easy to interpret.

Today's agenda

WHO

WHAT

WHERE

WHEN

WHY

HOW



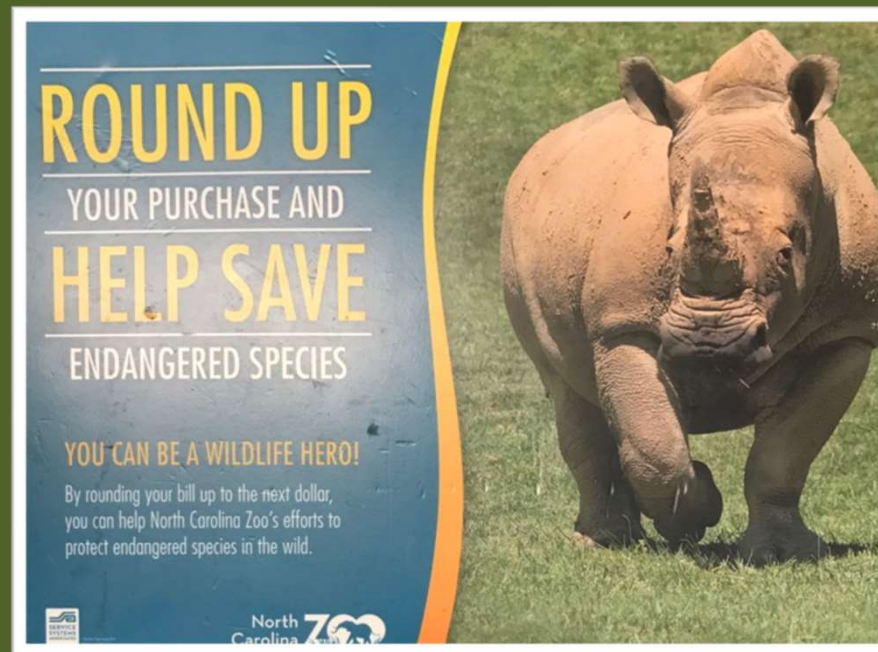
WHO

WHO CARES?

VISITORS...but who are your visitors?

Who could be other stakeholders?

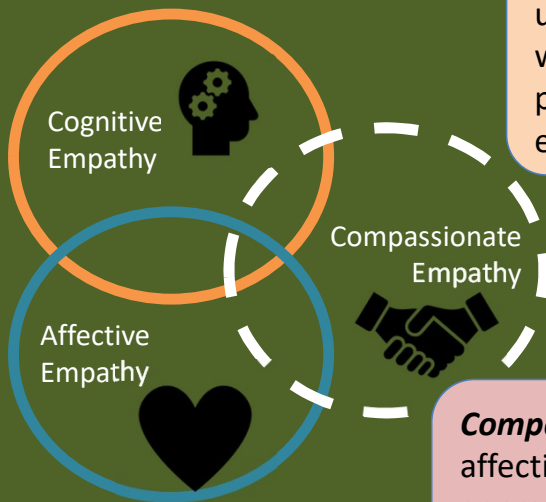
Need to clearly identify our audiences so that we can target interpretation.



WHAT

What is caring? Caring can be considered a form of empathy.

EMPATHY: A stimulated emotional state that relies on the ability to perceive, understand, and care about the experiences or perspectives of another person or animal.



Cognitive empathy is the ability to identify or understand another's emotions—the mental process where one is able to see things from another's perspective, but not necessarily experience that same emotion.

Affective empathy is described as the vicarious feelings or emotions that arise in response to observing the emotions or experience of another. In this construct one can physically feel the emotions or experience of another, sometimes as if they are contagious (e.g., crying in response to movie character).

Compassionate empathy, driven by cognitive and affective empathy, is the ability to feel and show appropriate concern in response to another's needs and be moved to help in some way. This construct can be a motivational basis for taking action to help others.

MEASURING EMPATHY

Rabb & Saunders (2005) proposed the theoretical construct of Conservation Caring:

Care That: cognitive elements and values of nature

Care About: affective items based on experience

Care For: behavior and opportunities for action

Aligns with conservation psychology goal of understanding how humans care about and value nature.

Skibins & Powell (2013) created six-item scale to measure conservation caring.



WHERE

Where do we see empathy?

Two general applications

1. Welfare of animals under care.
2. Connection between viewer and animal.

Connection between viewer and animal

- Concern for individual appears to be strongest.
- Leads to broader extrapolation to the species as a whole.
- Leads to broader extrapolation to biodiversity in general.

CARING FOR AN INDIVIDUAL

Recent data from online bear viewing in Katmai National Park (N = 3869)

- 70% reported ability (sometimes to always) identify individual bears.
- 45% reported ability to identify up to four different bears.
- 53% reported having a favorite bear.

Ability to identify individuals significantly improved

- Self-reported learning about bears.
- Willingness to support conservation programs.
- Conservation Caring scores.

Pattern repeats for having a favorite bear.



WHEN

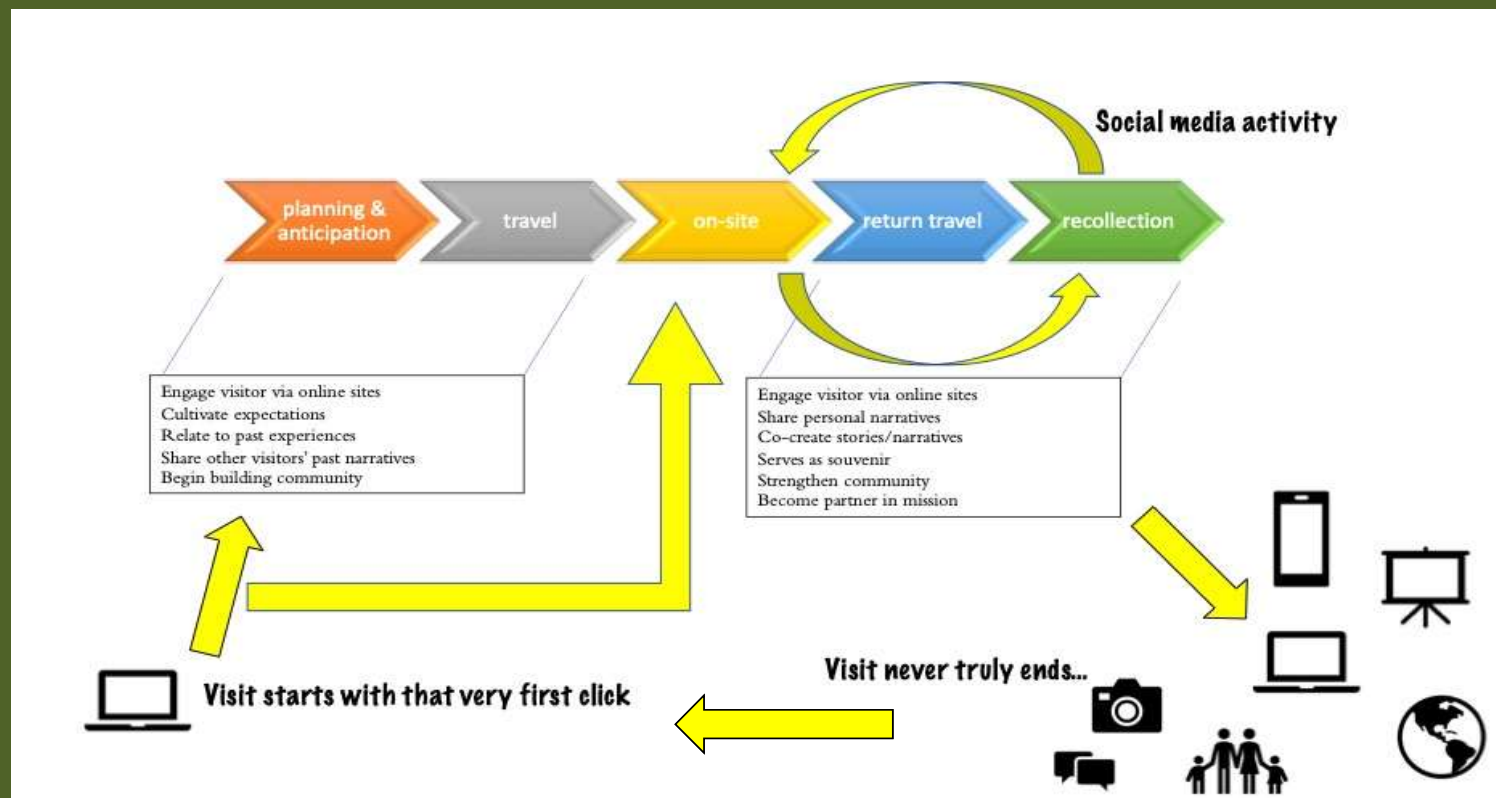
When is this happening? When do “visitors” care?

Let’s revisit visitors... this time not WHO, but WHEN...

On-site

Online

At other venues... systems level approach



WHY

EMPATHY CREATES ACTION!!

Empathy/emotional connection is single biggest factor for influencing pro-conservation behaviors

Empathy shown to increase visitor

- satisfaction,
- understanding,
- concern and
- awareness.

Empathy shown to increase institutional

- visitation rates,
- support networks,
- volunteering,
- activism and
- conservation impacts.



WHY

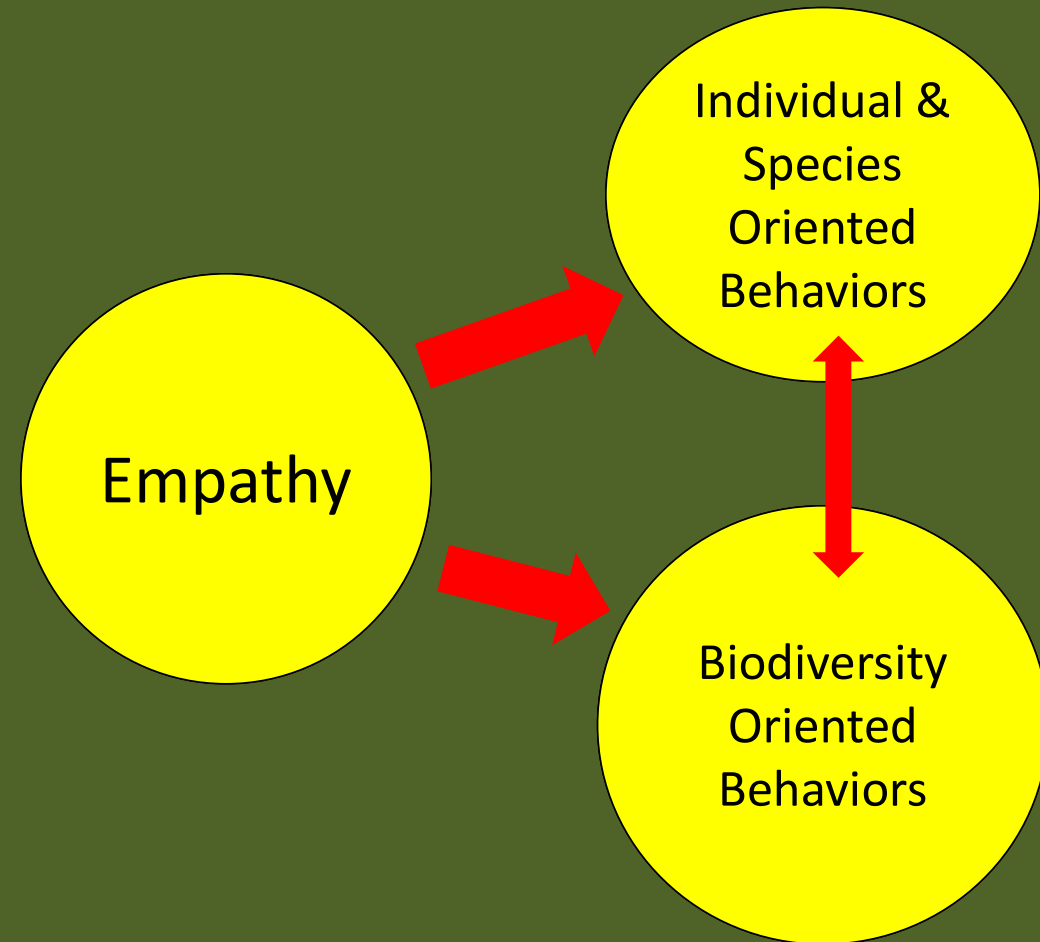
Empathy shown to increase care for individual, species, and biodiversity.

BUT

Visitors are NOT predisposed to action.

Need to develop empathy FIRST.

In most models, emotional connection ONLY predictor of behavior.



HOW

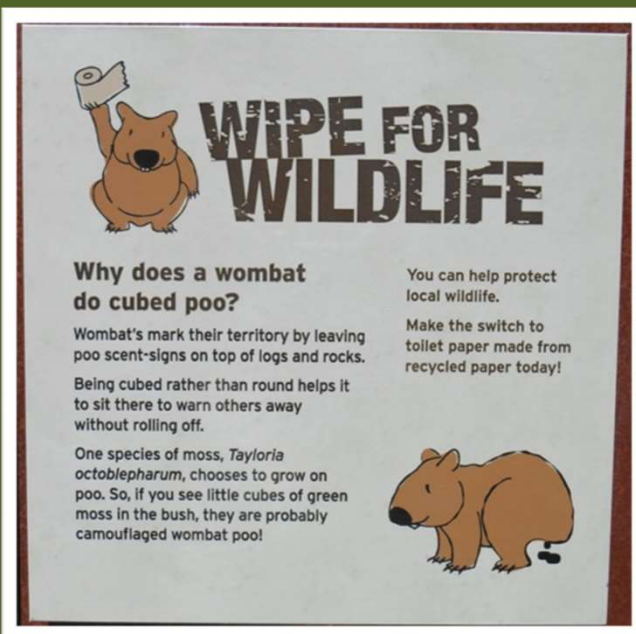
Interpretation: an educational activity that aims to reveal meanings about cultural and natural resources. Through various media (e.g., talks, guided tours and exhibits) interpretation enhances our understanding, appreciation, and therefore, protection of historic sites and natural wonders. (Beck & Cable, 2011)

empathy

action

Best practices

- ✓ Know your audience.
- ✓ Link tangibles to intangibles.
- ✓ Use universals.
- ✓ Be thematic.



HOW

Species characteristics known to simulate empathy

Cultural relationships with species

- Geographical distribution.
- Ecological role.
- Cultural associations.
- National symbols.

Overall relatability

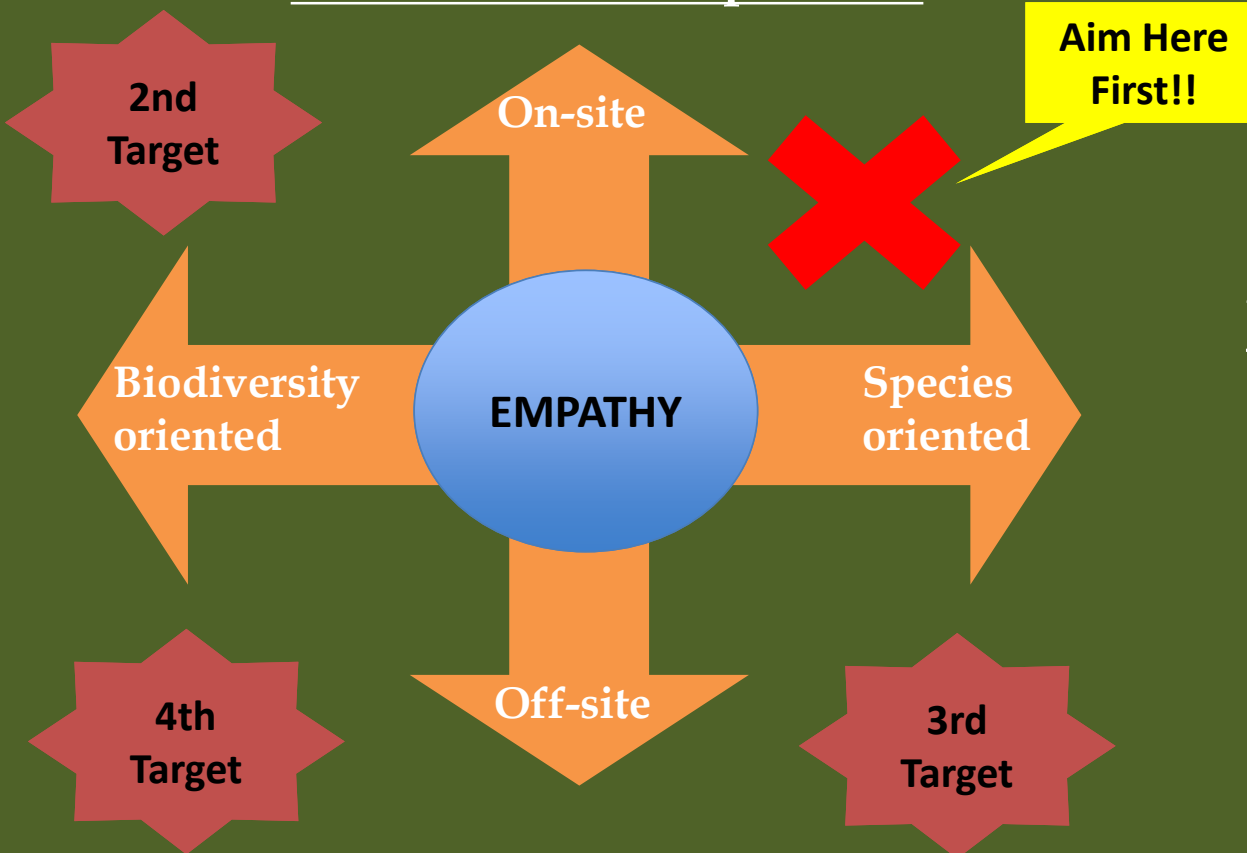
- Cute and cuddly.
- Attractiveness.
- Body size.
- **Anthropomorphic elements.**
- Disgust.

Conservation status



HOW

Visitor behavior spectrum



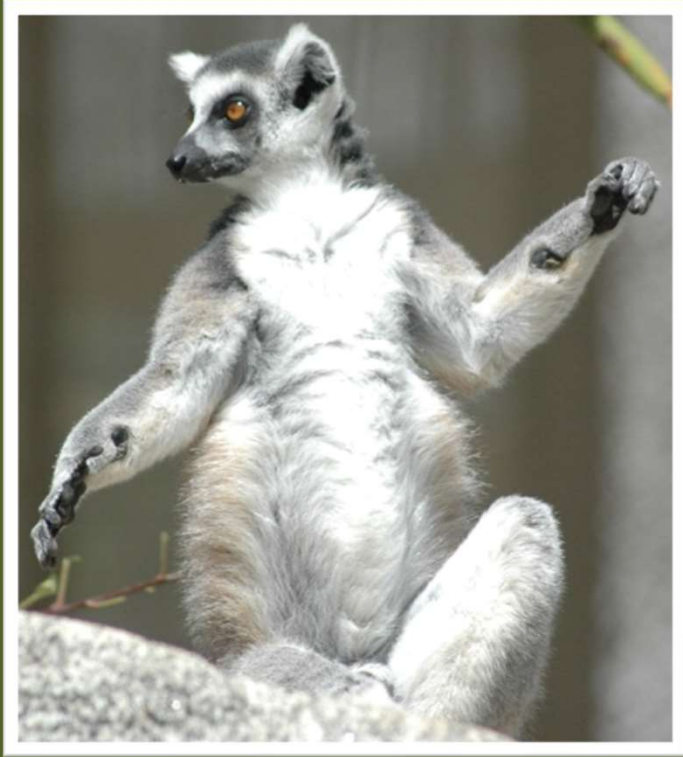
Visitors prefer

- ✓ Species-specific options.
- ✓ Targeted philanthropy.
- ✓ Volunteering.
- ✓ Shopping.

What YOU should do:

- ✓ Provide opportunities on-site.
- ✓ Make species specific.
- ✓ Demonstrate how to perform behavior beyond visit.

QUESTIONS



Jeffrey Skibins

skibinsj18@ecu.edu

Phone: (252) 737-1374

Follow me on:

ResearchGate



academia.edu
who's researching what

