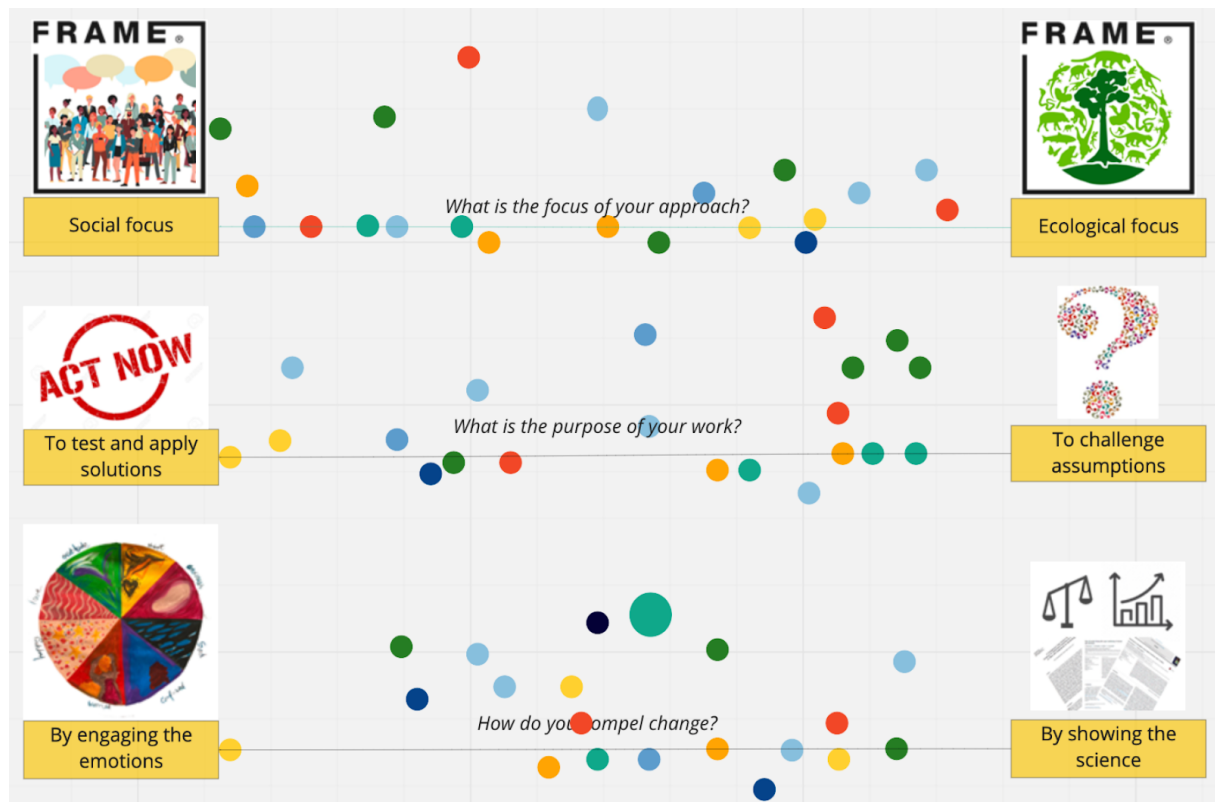


Summary 'WILD' IDEAS DIALOGUES | Session III | 28-1-2021

This session was 3 of 4 and organized by Josie Chambers and Jeanne Nel to explore some of the diverse approaches to connecting research on human wildlife interactions (HWIs) at Wageningen University & Research to shifts in policy and practice. Close to 50 colleagues from all corners of WUR (and the world) participated in the third session. The full recording can be found [here](#), also the summaries and recordings of the other sessions can be found there.

To open the session, all participants looked at three main points of difference that have emerged from discussions so far, and placed a dot to illustrate the emphasis of their approach.

Check-in: *In your approach to human wildlife interactions, where do you place your emphasis?*



Josie Chambers then introduced the session, explaining that it aims to build on the previous two sessions (see recordings and summaries [here](#)) by exploring different approaches to fostering connection between research on HWIs and more transformative action. The three polls were put into context of the series so far. The first poll – 'what is the focus of your approach?' – reflects some differences between two talks during session II by Lerato Thakholi and Marc Naguib. Lerato showed how nature conservation efforts can actually exacerbate existing social inequalities, such as by poor black people being evicted to make way for ecotourism development in South Africa, and that it is therefore crucial to take social justice seriously. From a more ecological perspective, Marc explored how tolerant certain wildlife populations are to human disturbance, and then examined how human values relate to those dynamics. The second poll – 'what is the purpose of your work?' – reflects some differences between the other two talks during session II by Liesbeth Bakker and Clemens Driessen. While Liesbeth focused on taking active steps to allow more natural processes in human dominated landscape, Clemens opened up questions around what is 'wild' or an 'animal' to examine how these categories might constrain or enable what solutions are even thought possible. The final poll explored how people try to compel change through their research in different ways – by engaging with emotions or showing the science. This was raised as a potential interesting point of difference among the speakers for the third session.

Jeanne Nel followed with the purpose and plan for the session. The purpose was to foster reflection and dialogue related to the questions: What is your approach and what values and assumptions underpin it? What does it include and exclude, and what are the consequences of that? And how can we connect and broaden our approaches to improve HWIs? To explore these questions four speakers were invited from across WUR with very different approaches to connecting HWI research to processes of change. Two breakout session built on the speakers' contributions to discuss the following questions:

- **Broaden our minds:** How does your approach connect or conflict with the speakers' approaches?
- **Broaden our actions:** What steps could you take to broaden y(our) research approach to improve human wildlife interactions?

Valentina Fiasco (MSc graduate of the Wildlife Ecology & Conservation group and Sociology of Development and Change group)

Valentina spoke about her journey into interdisciplinarity. She had a very traditional ecological training at Mweka college of African Wildlife, including military training for anti-poaching. During her field training there, she was involved in the arresting of poachers and confiscating snares. She was struck that they seemed to be subsistence poachers, and started questioning whether excluding people from protected areas was really the right approach. She moved on to study Ethnography at WUR in the BWINDI protected area in Uganda. For her Masters she studied human-carnivore conflict, examining: To what extent and in what way do predator deterrent lights play a role in moving conflict to coexistence? The assumption was that reduced carnivore predation and livestock losses would reduce human-carnivore conflict. Her case study was the Maasai of Enduimet WMA. She designed a mixed methods approach in which she combined the human cultural and value dimensions from interviews with more quantitative data from camera traps. She found that although people felt safer, communities held suspicions about the lights. She also found that most carnivore killings had little to do with livestock, and could rather be considered retaliatory killings resulting from distrust in the government and acts of political dissent. Reflecting on her findings and experience she explained that: The camera traps evidence did not give many results; the interviews gave a little more; but the most informative findings came from the informal discussions with people, when she was just 'hanging out' – this is where she seemed to learn the most. For her future she would like to use multispecies ethnography to understand how people and animals relate to each other and their mutual ecologies. Valentina later clarified that this is an approach that puts other species into the human ethnography framing.

Questions to Valentina from chat box/plenary:

- Was it difficult to limit/set boundaries to your study - which is I think the most difficult when understanding complexity? Yes – she would have liked to add more communities, but she was only able to focus on one.

Maarten Jacobs (Assistant professor at the Cultural Geography group)

Maarten's research interrogates unsupported assumptions in conservation science by engaging with human emotions. There is a commonly held narrative among conservation scientists and practitioners that people are the problem in conservation. Maarten discussed the example of "Fear" : without explicitly stating it, conservation practitioners assume that when it comes to large predators, the driving force is fear. Yet, his research on this showed that people actually have high levels of joy and interest when they engage with wildlife, and not fear. His research also shows that fear does not predict acceptance of management actions. Buijs et al. (2021; *Ambio*:50) suggest that conservation is hampered by negativity bias: "There is so much emphasis on conflict with wildlife that you get the impression that there are a lot of problems, but actually there are very positive interactions too". Both ecological and social sciences are associated with negativity bias. His research indicates that there are extremely positive attitudes and behaviors to mitigate the negativity bias. Reflecting on his approach: (1) Maarten made a plea for more approaches that focus on the positive human-wildlife interactions and keep challenging the assumptions we make about these interactions; (2) He acknowledged that his approach is a psychological approach and just one angle to human-wildlife interactions; and (3) highlighted the tensions that arise on purely ecological framing, making the point that when the framing of problems is purely ecological and social sciences are only asked to contribute after this framing is done, it is too late because by then people are already framed as a problem. So you need earlier framing together. He also highlighted that the methodological approaches also fuel these "social science wars" and he has found that ecologists tend to find it easier to bridge with psychological approaches.

Questions to Maarten from chat/plenary:

- How does the positivity figure presented in the *Ambio* article relate to cultural aspects. Maarten: it is not about changing behavior but looking at the psychological pleasures people get.
- Is the negativity in the social sciences because of huge problems with framing the overwhelming social injustices that need to be fixed before we can move forward? [not addressed in the plenary]
- Who are the negative people? Researchers, managers, practitioners? [not addressed in the plenary]
- How do you quantify positivity? Natural scientists are wondering about the methods for this. [not addressed in the plenary]

In interactive breakout session A, people considered how their own approach connects to or conflicts with the speakers' approaches. Suggestions are provided below:

Connect	Conflict
Ecological approach on how to mitigate livestock loss (e.g. through deterrents)	Purely ecological approach
Multi-species ethnography: combining ecology and sociology	Changing problematic animal behavior: what about framing/ethics? And what is natural behavior?
Positivity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maybe the emotional approach relates to the spiritual value of nature • Excitement and love for nature • Story of hope connects with rewilding principles. Can potentially map nature reserves based on crowd-sourced photographs. • Focus on positive examples and stories 	Positivity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive look on conservation, but positive for who? • Positivity can be enhanced, but needs to be balanced with what are critical issues, such as the spatial injustices of Lerato's presentation in Session II • Media thrives on conflict and escalation and damages. Some groups can create a negative attitude of the media • People do not see the problem so it needs to be made clear in the media • We focus on how to solve a problem so there's no positive framing.
Evidence-based conservation connects with whether policies and strategies achieve what they promise	With quantitative evidence-based research approaches it is important not to lose sight of the qualitative side of conflict
If we agree with the positivity debate, how to deal with the urgency then?	Does public opinion matter?
Value of diverse approaches	Approach is dictated by situation

In the plenary discussion after Breakout 1, we discussed the potential of multi-species ethnography – to contribute a non-human species perspective to approaches that analyse the human perspective. Both are complementary, and could potentially be used as early interdisciplinary framing.

Lysanne Snijders (Lecturer at the Behavioral Ecology group)

Lysanne explained that there are several problematic ways in which animal behavior is understood, with important consequences for human-wildlife interactions. First, behavioral rigidity can limit animals' abilities to adapt fast enough to new situations. Second, a lack of behavioral plasticity can exacerbate conflicts between people and wildlife. She explained how there are various ways in which management approaches can better account for animal behaviour - for example, by only using wind turbines at high speeds to avoid collisions with bats, or by using mapping tools to help farmers reduce livestock losses to cheetahs in Namibia by 86%. In some cases, the behavior of animals can be modified by stimulus interventions in order to reduce conflict. Lysanne's main point was that there is currently a lack of evidence for what approaches work for what species to reduce human-wildlife conflict, and thus that there is a need to come together to receive training in systematic evidence synthesis. She provided an overview of some of the main steps in evidence synthesis, from appraising studies to writing a review and communicating this to stakeholders. Lysanne closed by suggesting that there is a diverse set of experiences in WUR that could be used to more effectively evaluate the effectiveness of HWI conservation interventions, drawing upon the expertise of all groups to identify what works, what doesn't and what needs more evidence. She finished by explaining that she sees an evidence-based approach as just one important part of a bigger approach.

Questions to Lysanne from chat box/plenary:

- Linking back to Valentina's presentation, I would love to know what Lysanne thinks of the idea of multi-species ethnography, which can bring together behavioural ecology and sociology. Do you think it would support the work you are doing? Lysanne: Yes, multi-disciplines are very important
- Did you find any human-wild animal conflict that led into emerging infectious disease? [not addressed in the plenary]

- Do you also explore the effect of the effective measures on the local communities? [not addressed in the plenary]

Rob Fletcher (Associate professor at the Sociology of Development and Change group)

Rob began with the statement that human-wildlife interactions are often about human interest groups coming into conflict, and that we need to 'stop hiding behind the wildlife'. He said that it is critical that we focus more on the overarching political economic structures that constrain or influence the actions of actors on the ground. Rob dove into the case of conflicts between jaguars and people on the outskirts of Corcovado National Park in the Osa peninsula, Costa Rica. In recent years there have been 12 reported killings of jaguars, and there are now only 10-20 left. He explains the historical and political economic structures that have led to this conflict situation today. Related to Costa Rica's emphasis on producing raw material for export, they underwent structural readjustment which encouraged many non-traditional exports and relaxed foreign ownership regulations to improve the country's economic situation. This had the effect of large scale expansion of cash crops such as pineapple, oil palm and cattle ranching, whilst foreign conservationists came to establish large ecotourism projects. This had the effect of squeezing spaces for both jaguars and local farmers to co-exist in, given neither group benefited from these broader trends, leading to increasing conflict. Rob therefore argued that it is essential to 'close the tap' (i.e. address the broad political economic drivers that hinder people and wildlife's ability to coexist together) instead of 'mopping the floor while the tap is still running' (i.e. intervene in ways that don't address these structural issues). Through their CONVIVA project, they are working in four different sites around the world to try to identify the sources of different political economic forces that hamper conservation to find ways to intervene to diminish conflict and provide more possibilities for coexistence.

Questions to Rob from chat box/plenary:

- Is neo-liberalism the evil? Rob: it is not inherently good or bad, but it can be dangerous.
- What tangible steps can we take as researchers to begin the overwhelming journey of unlocking some of these huge global structures. Rob: engage with influential conservation organizations, especially in their partnerships with big businesses to try and build much more symmetrical relations and tone back their unquestioning alliances with them
- In these case studies, what actions are you investigating to reduce the pressure of these drivers?
 - At local level understanding the extent of the political-economic pressures, and what the state can do to address these, and what can be done at the international level – especially about how the big, influential international conservation networks go about their business.
 - I think the big conservation resources are not very useful to engage with, but with the local actors we have a huge resource – from a psychological perspective we have a HUGE resource and a starting point – people love wildlife. By framing people as a problem, we distance ourselves from this. So for practice we need to find ways of interacting with people that embrace the positive stories.
 - The question about negativity and positivity is really difficult, you actually want "to stay with the trouble and do justice to the seriousness of the problem, but not to the point that you are hopelessly paralysed". Rather than shying away from these conversations, we need to persist with them in a message over and over again, which then does shift the frame of the conversation in the long run.
 - Do you think big wildlife conservation organizations are already aware of the work of *conviva*, and if so how do they respond to it? I can imagine it's a big elephant in the room. [not addressed in plenary]
- Can we perhaps learn from / borrow from "climate psychology"? <https://www.climatepsychologyalliance.org/events/489-through-the-door-a-therapeutic-practice-for-the-commons-next-event-insert-date-here>
- I also get overwhelmed, and find it also difficult to address the urgent problems from only a positive mode.
- Does someone recognize the frame 'that people are the problem' and can elaborate why?
- Is part of the problem with the framing of it as a "people problem" is that it lumps everyone in the world together, when really it is usually select groups of people that are causing the problem(s)?

In interactive breakout session B, the focus was on the question of how to broaden our actions (i.e. What steps could you take to broaden y(our) research approach to improve human wildlife interactions?). People shared a range of suggestions (all of them can be found on the Miro board). Some main points raised include:

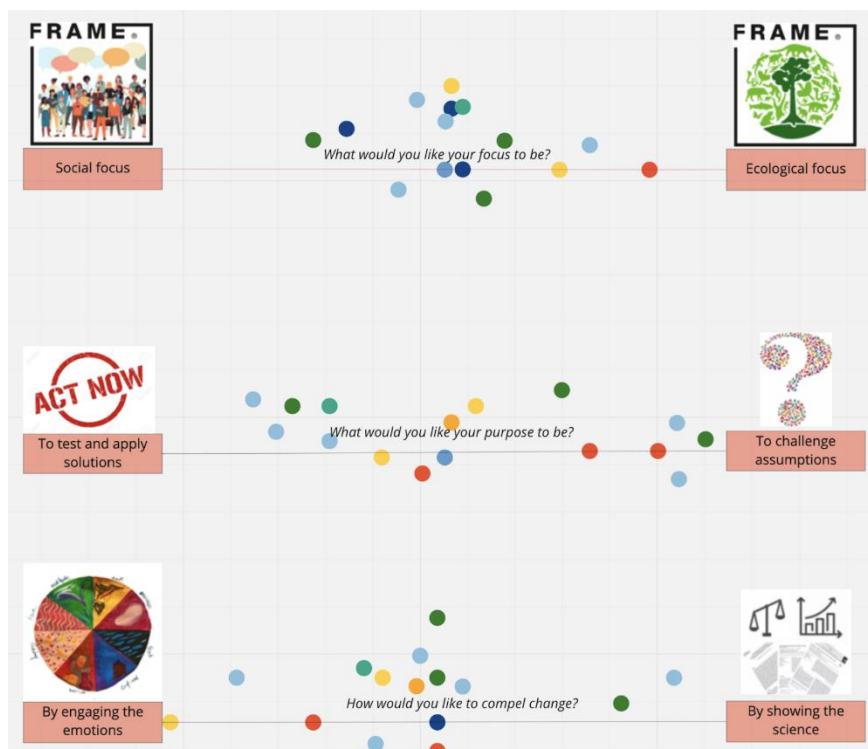
- Awareness that as an individual researcher you cannot be a specialist in everything so collaboration and broadening disciplinary horizons is necessary
- In some cases trying to reconcile different views and values, and in other cases pragmatically accepting that differences in views will remain
- Getting at the roots of problems, such as broad political economic issues (i.e. "turning off the tap")

- Engaging stakeholders more heavily and going beyond an emphasis on researchers just producing papers and knowledge alone (which is not really changing the situation)
- The role of narratives around positive human wildlife interactions and what works to motivate change among all people, instead of only focusing on problem situations
- Reflect on the morality of your own choices and the ethics of your involvement by listening without judgment and encouraging others to do so
- Breaking down bubbles within WUR by more room for interactions across corridors and buildings, and co-supervising research by both ecologists and sociologists, and WU and WR
- Being more careful about the assumptions we make about local resource users.
- Getting rid of jargon to better communicate across disciplines and developing a new vocabulary together

In a plenary discussion after all presentations and breakout sessions, various follow-up questions, concerns and steps were raised:

- Potential of co-supervision across disciplines to forge more collaborative pathways, as it obliges you to have to think across disciplines. These can really contribute to the broadening. This is a start.
- Different perspectives on what the root causes are is an issue. Different researchers have a difference in the things they think are a priority to address. Maybe this is something to explore in Session IV (perspectives on root causes)?
- There are problems we suffer in not seeing local people as specialists, just because they are not using the same terms as us. A plea to take more notice of indigenous and local knowledges.

The session closed with a check-out reflection over the following question: *How would you like your approach to human wildlife interactions to be after today's dialogue?*



There was some clear movement towards the center in the first and last polls questions - implying that people really want to push themselves to find ways to better span these differences. **Yet many questions still remain over how to do so - and this will therefore be the focus of the fourth and final session: Mapping a way forward for human-wildlife interactions. Join us next week!**