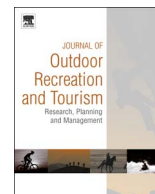




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Wildlife and flora and the perceived attractiveness of green places: A comparison between local and national green places

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ABSTRACT

Recent decades have seen a growing interest in experiencing wildlife and flora in nature-based tourism destinations, while at the same time it is far less clear whether wildlife and flora also matter in green places near home. This paper examines whether wildlife and flora affect the perceived attractiveness of green places, among the general public in the Netherlands. Differences between local green places, where relatively common wildlife and flora can be observed (e.g. ducks, hedgehogs, cow parsley), and national green places, where visitors can encounter more charismatic wildlife and flora (e.g. red deer, wild boars, orchids), are investigated as well. Data from a large online survey (the Hotspotmonitor) were used. The results show that wildlife and flora are relatively unimportant reasons for attractiveness, although slightly more important in national than in local green places. Interestingly, wildlife and flora do add significantly to the valuation of attractiveness of local green places, whereas nationally, they do not. Our results also demonstrate that wildlife and flora in green places near home are important for broad segments of the population, while they matter more for relatively old and highly educated people in green places further from home.

Management implications: Our findings suggest that more attention for geographical scale is needed in improving the roles which wildlife and flora can play in increasing the perceived attractiveness of green places. We recommend improving the valuation of attractiveness of local green places by:

- increasing awareness of the presence of wildlife and flora;
 - creating more opportunities to enjoy wildlife and flora;
 - promoting the enrichment of biodiversity.
- For national green places, we recommend:
- offering facilities which improve the visibility of charismatic wildlife and flora for the general public;
 - focusing on the special wishes and demands of nature lovers.

1. Introduction

Recent decades have seen a growing interest in experiencing wildlife and flora in green places visited for daytrips and holidays. A clear example is the rise of wildlife tourism, which can be defined as tourism in which visitors encounter wild animals (Ballantyne, Packer, & Sutherland, 2011; Higginbottom, 2004). The central idea behind the development of wildlife tourism is that multisensory wildlife experiences will lead to more intense emotional tourism experiences, to emotional affinity with nature areas, to environmental learning, and finally to stronger nature protective behavior (Ballantyne et al., 2011).

Consequently, in the marketing of international nature-based tourism destinations, attractive wildlife or mega-fauna, such as dolphins, elephants, gorillas, lions, orang-utan, rhinoceros, tigers and whales, are often used as ‘flagship species’ (Higginbottom, 2004). The use of such iconic wildlife is based on prevailing ideas of what composes an appealing ‘zoological gaze’: the appearance, charisma and behavior of animals (Curtin, 2010; Tremblay, 2008). Increasingly it has been acknowledged that not only charismatic mega-fauna, but also charismatic mega-flora such as trees and forests (Hall, James, & Bairda, 2011) or smaller flora species such as orchids (Pickering & Ballantyne, 2013) or wildflowers (Priskin, 2003) can play a significant role in

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nature-based tourism.

Thus far, most academic research into the roles of wildlife and flora in leisure and tourism has focused on large charismatic wildlife as a main attraction of nature-based tourism destinations (e.g. Cong, Wu, Morrison, Shu, & Wang, 2014; Curtin, 2009, 2010; Lemelin & Smale, 2006; Tremblay, 2008). However, it remains unclear how wildlife and flora play a role in the way people value green places closer to home. Moreover, only a few studies have paid attention to less charismatic or less exotic, more commonly present wildlife and flora (e.g. Bhatti, Church, Claremont, & Stenner, 2009). For spatial planners and leisure and tourism managers, insight into the extent to which wildlife and flora contribute to a higher valuation of green places by lay people may be useful in developing more attractive green places. This is an important aim for urbanized societies like the Netherlands, as highly valued green places are becoming more and more important for outdoor recreation (Kienast, Degenhardt, Weilenmann, Wäger, & Buchecker, 2012), having contact with nature (Mitchell & Popham, 2007), and for improving the health and well-being of the population (Coley, Kuo, & Sullivan, 1997; Groenewegen, Van den Berg, Maas, Verheij, & De Vries, 2012; Hartig & Staats, 2005; Van den Berg, Maas, Verheij, & Groenewegen, 2010).

In this study, we examine the extent to which wildlife and flora play a role in the perceived attractiveness of green places in the Netherlands. We compare the importance of wildlife and flora in the valuation of attractiveness of local and national green places. Local green places (< 2 km from home) are important for everyday leisure, whereas national green places correspond highly with the main holiday destinations (De Vries et al., 2013). In our study, wildlife and flora are defined as all species that can be encountered in the Netherlands. In general, in local places, such as urban parks, small woods, meadows, riversides, and ponds, it is likely to encounter relatively common wildlife (e.g. hedgehogs, ducks, great tits, robins, frogs, dragonflies, rabbits, roe deer, pheasants) and flora (e.g. cow parsley, bird cherry, silverweed, flowering agricultural plants). In national green places, such as National Parks, forests, lakes, the North Sea, and the Wadden Sea, visitors can also find more charismatic wildlife (e.g. red deer, wild boars, foxes, seals, sea eagles, otters, badgers, and Highland cattle) (Folmer et al., 2013; Logemann, 2011), larger numbers and a wider variety of birds (e.g. bearded tits, stilt walkers, different types of migrating birds) (Logemann, 2011), and/or rarer flora (e.g. different types of orchids) (Stichting Flora van Nederland, 2016).

Our paper starts with a literature review of what is known about wildlife and flora as main attractions of green places, followed by an examination of wildlife and flora as part of the overall nature experience of a place. Subsequently, an explanation of the data and methods is given. The results present the relative importance of wildlife and flora as a reason for attractiveness in local and national green places, as well as the extent to which people participate in recreation related to wildlife and flora. This is followed by an analysis of the importance of wildlife and flora in the valuation of local and national green places. The conclusion offers a reflection and discussion on the results. Recommendations for further research conclude the paper.

2. Wildlife and flora and the attractiveness of green places

2.1. Wildlife and flora as main attractions of green places

Wildlife and flora may affect the valuation of local green places, and green places further from home. Research has mainly focused on charismatic wildlife as the main attraction of green places further from home, such as nature-based tourism destinations and protected areas (e.g. Ballantyne et al., 2011; Curtin, 2009, 2010). Tremblay (2008) states that particular wildlife species can be true icons of nature areas, motivating people to visit green places. In the Netherlands, the presence of large charismatic animals such as wild boar and red deer draws many people to large nature areas (*source will be added after*

acceptance). Experiencing iconic wildlife species is strongly related to visitor satisfaction with a nature-based tourism destination (Curtin, 2006; Lemelin & Smale, 2006; Tremblay, 2008). However, no studies have specifically examined how wildlife contributes to the valuation of green places.

Only a few studies have addressed flora as the main attraction for nature-based tourism destinations and protected areas (e.g. Ballantyne & Pickering, 2012; Priskin, 2003; Lindemann-Matthies, Junge, & Matthies, 2010). However, there are indications that for nature-based tourism destinations, charismatic flora are as important as charismatic wildlife (Pickering & Ballantyne, 2013). Priskin (2003) discovered that wildflowers are the most important attraction for spring visitors, while Lindemann-Matthies et al. (2010) pointed out that visitors perceive plant diversity as an enhancement of grassland attractiveness. More specifically, orchids have been found to attract visitors to various protected areas, for instance in Chili (Vidal, San Martín, Mardones, Bauk, & Vidal, 2012), India (Jalal, Rawat, & Kumar, 2008), Italy and the UK (Pickering & Ballantyne, 2013). Flora also enhance local green places such as domestic gardens and urban parks (Bhatti et al., 2009; Christie, 2004; Head & Muir, 2006; Power, 2005). Bhatti et al. (2009) found that private gardens are experienced as ‘extraordinary’ places full of enchanting encounters with flora. Despite their proven ability to enhance green places, it remains unclear whether flora play a role in the valuation of green places near home or further afield.

2.2. Wildlife and flora as part of the overall experience of green places

In addition to being main attractions of green places, wildlife and flora may also form an embedded and self-evident part of overall nature experience. In many studies, the importance of wildlife and flora in the attractiveness of green places has been analysed by incorporating wildlife and flora in more general aspects of nature, such as ‘naturalness’, ‘variety’, ‘ephemera’ or ‘biodiversity’. Tremblay (2008) states that spotting wildlife and flora is perceived as a confirmation of the naturalness of a place. This corresponds with the finding of Coeterier (1996) that Dutch people experience wildlife and flora as part of the naturalness of a landscape. Also Van den Berg, Vlek, and Coeterier (1998) proved that biodiversity is a powerful predictor of beauty ratings for specific natural landscapes in the Netherlands, among both residents and visitors.

Several studies on green places further from home, such as nature-based tourism destinations and wilderness areas, show that an overall nature experience, including experiencing wildlife and flora, influences the perceived attractiveness of a green place. For instance, Schroeder (2002) found that in the overall nature experience, vegetation (e.g. trees, wild flowers, wild plants, and grass) as well as wildlife (e.g. birds, fish and other wildlife) add to the appeal of a wilderness place. Moreover, multisensory experiences of nature (e.g. hearing, seeing, sensing and smelling flowing water, birds, and other animals) play an important role in making tourism destinations attractive (Kirillova, Fu, Lehto, & Cai, 2014). How wildlife and flora blend in with an overall nature experience at nature-based tourism destinations is illustrated by Breiby (2014), who found that tourists regard ‘seeing and hearing animals in nature’ and ‘experiencing plants in nature’ as part of a feeling of harmony with nature.

In local green places, wildlife and flora may also have a role to play in raising appreciation, while being integrated within an overall nature experience. Some studies suggest that experiencing local wildlife and flora actually augment people's emotional attachment and appreciation of green places near home. For instance, Ogunseitan (2005) found that the appreciation of ecologic diversity (flowers, animals, and landscape ratings) is strongly related to the love for a nearby green place, while Ryan (2005) discovered that many people are attached to nearby nature and “enjoy being familiar with the plants and animals there” (p. 23). However, familiarity with local wildlife and flora may give rise to

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