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Media Culture Society 2008; 30; 551

DOI: 10.1177/01634437080300040701

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Powerful environmentalisms: conservation, celebrity and capitalism

Dan Brockington

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He watched the news. Same as yesterday's. The General Crisis coming along nicely. Nothing new except the commercials full of sly art and eco-porn. Scenes of the Louisiana bayous, strange birds in slow-motion flight, cypress trees bearded with Spanish moss. Above the primeval scene the voice of Power spoke, reeking with sincerity, in praise of itself, the Exxon Oil Company – its tidiness, its fastidious care for all things wild, its concern for human needs. (Edward Abbey, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*)

Edward Abbey's eco-warriors were an eclectic bunch: a disturbed Vietnam veteran, an aged and wealthy doctor, his beautiful nurse partner and a polygamist Mormon adventure-tourism guide (Abbey, 1975). They defended the lands they loved from the incessant construction plans of the US government with explosives and all-terrain vehicles, fighting the military industrial society with its own tools, and littering the country with beer cans and broken bulldozers, and pissing in the rivers en route. The story hangs on two literary devices. First, the characters are fighting a battle between good and evil. The eco-warriors are all flawed but lovable, and they are pitted against a relentless, destructive, faceless state whose agents only acquire character when their resolve to prosecute the fight against the eco-warriors weakens. Second, they are cast in a highly unequal contest. Four individuals against the might of the world's greatest security apparatus, overwhelming manpower and technological force. The Vietnam veteran is apparently shot to pieces in a horrendous fusillade of revenge in the climax of the book. But he, and the cause, prevail.

The Monkey Wrench Gang comes from a time when environmental protest demanded radical change of modern capitalism. The Club of Rome had published dire predictions about the limits of natural resources in 1972. Britain's

Media, Culture & Society © 2008 SAGE Publications (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi and Singapore), Vol. 30(4): 551–568
[ISSN: 0163-4437 DOI: 10.1177/0163443708091182]

energy shortage had forced the introduction of a three-day working week in 1974. But the image and idea of environmentalism produced in those times still dominates today. In particular, portrayals of environmentalism often dwell on the rootedness of environmentalist action in love of place, and the marginality of environmental concerns to mainstream social and economic power.

In a recent exposition on the relationship between environmentalism and the media Hutchins and Lester (2006) examined the famous blockade to prevent the construction of the Franklin Dam in Tasmania in the early 1980s (a defining moment of the green movement nationally and internationally). They argued that there was a contest between the media on the one hand, and the Wilderness Society which was choreographing the protest on the other. They showed that the media were not content to let the protesters define the news agenda and became increasingly resistant, even hostile, to the inauthenticities media events ('pseudo events' – Boorstin, 1961) can entail. The Wilderness Society had continually to find new ways to maintain media coverage in the face of increasingly cynical coverage.

Hutchins and Lester argued that environmentalists are usually up against a news-making machine which is 'in closer alignment with the dominant powers [of society] than with those individuals and groups dedicated to advocacy for, and protection of place' (2006: 447). Environmentalists face 'different rules of engagement' (2006: 446). Whereas stage-managed pseudo-events and publicity stunts are an accepted part of the publicity machines of industries and politicians, they are less acceptable on behalf of the environment and render their cause less authentic.

Central to Hutchins and Lester's arguments is the idea that environmentalism is politically and economically marginal. This is grounded in Castells' (1997) writings on environmentalism as a 'principal site of resistance to global capital and the domination of social life by economic interests' (Hutchins and Lester, 2006: 435). Castells recognizes that the environmental movement is a broad church (1997: 112–13) but nonetheless he distils from its varieties a common cause: a fight against the reorganizing logics of dominant society, and in particular a championing of places which give meaning to people's lives. In Hutchins and Lester's words, environmentalism values 'the physical environment for its symbolic and physical qualities' (2006: 436) not its dismal economic worth. It protects the special places from which people derive meaning, pleasure and identity, and which are continually threatened and reshaped by dominant economic and elite social interests. Environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have their 'feet, hands, minds and hearts firmly in and on the ground' (2006: 437). Burgess and colleagues adopted a similar position when they note that 'the depth of anger and grief many people feel when they see *their* part of the natural world destroyed for new development is part of the force driving the environmental movement' (Burgess et al., 1991: 501, italics in the original).

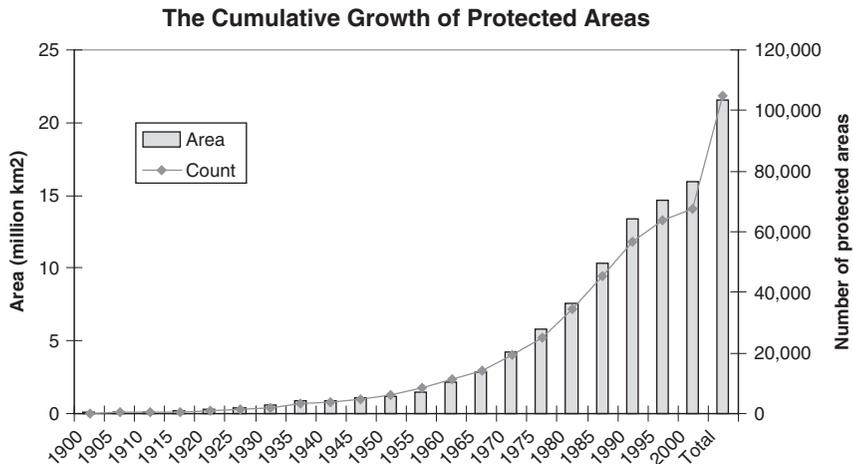
I suggest two modifications to this argument. First, Hutchins and Lester quite rightly observe that '[t]hose advocating or acceding to the interests of capital are more likely to be located within the privileged formation of the space of flows' (2006: 446), but I would argue that those powerful advocates increasingly include proponents of some varieties of environmentalism. For some varieties have strong attachments to the dominant social and economic forces in society (Anderson, 2000). Castells too recognizes this, as in more recent years some forms of conservation are becoming increasingly important to producing profit, winning votes and improving company images (Castells, 1997: 131). Aspects of it have much better access to the news and political agenda (Anderson, 1991, 1997).

Second, and more importantly, there is much more conflict between different environmentalisms, and particularly between its weak and powerful variants, than the generalizations above suggest. And one of the causes of conflict is precisely the fact that they are grounded in utterly different experiences of, and visions for, the world. Many environmentalists' goals are not necessarily grounded in specific places or rooted in people's everyday realities as Hutchins, Lester or Burgess and others have described. International conservation organizations, for example, spend much of their energy protecting environments far from the everyday experience of their supporters (cf. Anderson, 2000). Moreover they use concepts and principles which can be alien to the lived experience and identity to the people living in the places designated for conservation (Doherty and Doyle, 2006).

Indeed I suggest that in industrial capitalist societies many people's lives and encounters with environmental causes tend to be characterized by a *lack* of contact and interaction with the environments they value, or else they are characterized by infrequent, highly staged and carefully framed encounters provided by wildlife safaris or ecotourism trips. To understand the popularity and power of ungrounded environmentalisms we have to understand how people come to love particular *representations* of nature. This is a slightly different question from asking why they love nature (cf. Milton, 2002), and one which is less well addressed.

There are many possible ways of examining this question. For example, by examining how environmental consciousness born in some places is transferred to remoter, global issues; or by considering how far notions of hyper-reality, or virtualism, might explain environmental consciousness, or by exploring how representations of nature have varied over time, and across different societies, and in different media. This article examines just one aspect of nature's representation: celebrity endorsement of environmentalist causes. Celebrity environmentalism well illustrates the power of some forms of environmentalism. But more importantly it demonstrates the power of representations of nature and the authority of representation over experience. I will argue that the interaction between celebrity and environmentalism is not some convenient alliance between separate social phenomena. Rather the prominence of

Figure 1



Source: The World Database of Protected Areas (2005). The 'Total' column includes protected areas without establishment dates.

celebrity in environmentalism's affairs is a necessary consequence of the alienations of capitalism.

I will focus on one set of environmentalisms, those of the international wildlife conservation movement, and particularly of the international NGOs which tend to be based in the global North but which work extensively in the global South. I will develop the argument in two parts. First, I outline the importance of international wildlife conservation for dominant social and economic interests, I show how this form of conservation is not always well grounded in local places, and I show how this leads to conflict with other environmentalisms. Second, I will examine different types of celebrity endorsements of conservation and particularly the role of celebrity conservationists, people who win fame from their conservation work. I will conclude with thoughts on how to test these ideas.

Conservation and economic power

The mainstreaming of environmental issues in the media is well recognized by scholars of environmentalism and media studies (Adams, 2001; Anderson, 1997) and the contemporary power of conservation is visible in several general trends in the organization of nature and economy. There has been a dramatic increase in protected areas globally in recent years to cover more than 10 percent of the land surface of the planet (see Figure 1; see also Chape et al., 2005). Forty-one countries protect more than 20 percent of their land surface in protected areas,

many of which have been established during the last 20 years. In other countries there has been a dramatic rise in private protected areas. South Africa for example, which protects 6 percent of its land in public protected areas, has a further 13 percent set aside in private game reserves (Cook, 2002).

Often the growth of protected areas is associated with new strategies of accumulation based on ecotourism. It is an important business, particularly in poorer countries, worth between \$30 billion and \$1.2 trillion a year (West and Carrier, 2004). The growth of ecotourism proceeds hand in hand with protected areas (Duffy, 2002; West and Carrier, 2004; West et al., 2006), which provide clients with the authentic unspoilt nature they wish to consume on their holidays.

Protected areas also derive some impetus from the environmental mitigation measures of industrial projects. Organizations invest in the protection of natural land in order that their work be seen as environmentally 'neutral'. Thus the construction of the Chad–Cameroon oil pipeline has also been accompanied by the investment of millions of dollars in the creation of two new national parks in Cameroon, Campo Ma'an and Mbam et Djerem National Parks, in an 'offsite environmental enhancement plan' to mitigate the damage caused by the pipeline. The construction of a large series of dams on the Mekong River in the People's Democratic Republic of Laos, funded by the World Bank, is being supported by the World Conservation Union because it is accompanied by the establishment of a series of protected areas in the highlands near the river valley (Goldman, 2001a, 2001b).

No discussion of the growth in power of conservation is complete without an appreciation of the power and changing nature of the major conservation NGOs. The largest are the Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and Conservation International (CI). They are some of the biggest NGOs in the world, employing tens of thousands of people and controlling billions of dollars, and with projects and influence all over the world. They are highly visible, particularly in the West – the WWF's panda logo is one of the most successful of all time. All but the WWF are US-based, and even within the WWF, WWF-US is a powerful branch in its own right.

There is concern that these NGOs (sometimes called BINGOs – Big International NGOs) have become too closely allied to corporate interests and fail to oppose some initiatives because they rely on the companies involved for funds. Chapin (2004) and Dowie (2005, 2006) have alleged that conservation organizations were combining with corporate interests to the detriment of local land holders. Romero and Andrade (2004) have criticized conservation NGOs' deals with timber companies, in which logging concessions are gazetted into the conservation estate after timber extraction because of the harm both land uses can do. Dorsey (2005) has noted that the boards of directors of major conservation NGOs in the US are now dominated by the chief executive officers of major corporations.

The forces producing this alliance are simple and powerful. Conservation organizations are brands, wilderness and protected areas are powerful symbols. All are vital for companies in pursuit of the green dollar. The combination of protected area growth, ecotourism and the importance of NGOs for government budgets can make some environmentalisms, and particularly nature conservation, a powerful force. I have argued that in Tanzania it is appropriate to speak of an environmental-conservation complex shaping government affairs (Brockington, 2006). Duffy (2006) has argued that Madagascan aid and government policies are heavily influenced by conservation NGOs.

The coincidence of these trends makes certain types of environmental consciousness influential, particularly, I suggest, wildlife and nature conservation interests of wealthy countries' populations. For it is these countries who fund the BINGOs, and these countries' tourists who provide the effective demand for the environments protected areas provide. But in the process they can run up against a whole series of other varieties of environmentalism, as Guha and Martinez-Alier (1997) have described. The environmentalisms of the rural poor of the global South value environments for, among other things, their contributions to livelihoods in the form of firewood, grazing, house building materials and wild foods, both vegetable and meat (Doherty and Doyle, 2006). The Western wilderness ethic, which values pristine lands untouched and uninfluenced by people, is not compatible with many local environmentalisms (Guha, 1997). It is predicated upon a separation of nature and culture which is not recognized locally (Roberts et al., 1995).

The local, grounded, environmentalisms of the global South are often marginal to the powerfully supported environmentalisms of the North (Brockington, 2004). The conflict is visible in the earliest conservation efforts in the US surrounding the establishment of the Yosemite State Park and the Yellowstone National Park, which depended on the eviction of hundreds of indigenous Indian bands (Jacoby, 2001). In 1877, 300 people were killed in battles with the US Army intent on establishing the park. Surveys of eviction literature indicate that, in many countries, a high proportion of protected areas in Africa and Asia have depended on such moves (Brockington and Igoe, 2006). Imposing wilderness (to borrow Neumann's [1998] title) still persists in present-day conservation practice. There are ongoing attempts to move people from protected areas in Thailand (Buergin, 2003; Buergin and Kessler, 2000; Sato, 2002), Botswana (Hitchcock, 2002; Ikeya, 2001), Ethiopia (Pearce, 2005a, 2005b), Tanzania (Anon., 2006; Nyenyembe, 2006), South Africa (Goenewald and Macleod, 2004) and India (Shahabuddin and Shah, 2003). They can involve the forced removal of people from their homes or their economic displacement, through their being prevented from using protected resources (Cernea, 2005). More pervasively, this process involves the obliteration of local histories and associations with the land by circulating pictures, stories and images of protected places from which people have been removed. Supporters of the Mkomazi Game Reserve in Tanzania, which was

cleared of people in the late 1980s, proclaim it 'a restored wilderness', and its former residents 'not indigenous', despite the fact that people had been living there for generations before its establishment in 1951 (Brockington, 2002).

The local politics of wilderness creation can often be highly complex. There are many cases where local interests are highly diverse, where the battle to save wildlands is as much a local one as an international one, or was a local cause long before it found support internationally. But in many other situations the accord with local sentiment is much weaker. These are not battles driven by organizations with 'their feet, hands, minds and hearts firmly on the ground' (Hutchins and Lester, 2006: 437). They are not protest movements to save local places which are special to the people who 'live, work and construct their meaning' (Castells, 1999: 296) in them. Rather, these are more abstract (or global – cf. Szerszynski and Toogood, 2000) causes (wilderness, biodiversity), in which money is raised for all sorts of diverse projects, on terrains (remote parts of the global South) far from the homes of most of the people who fund them (cities in the global North), and using the same powers of representation and violence (advertising campaigns, favourable media representation, state security apparatus) which Hutchins and Lester described at work against the forest and for dams in Tasmania.

Celebrity conservation

The interaction between celebrity and conservation demonstrates the power and ungrounded nature of some environmentalisms. But before I proceed it is important to note that not all studies of celebrity endorsing environmental causes are testimonies to strength. There is very little on the topic – and one of the earliest pieces, written to incite interest (Meyer and Gamson, 1995), has hardly ever been cited. But in the smattering of writings there are two studies which point to the vulnerabilities of celebrities who join forces with environmental causes. Protesting environmental causes left celebrities open to criticism when working to save Walden Pond in the US (Meyer and Gamson, 1995), or opposing logging in Tasmania (Lester, 2006). Meyer and Gamson also noted that celebrity involvement tended to change the nature of the causes; they tended to shy away from confrontation and promote more consensual politics.

While these arguments may well characterize marginal environmentalisms, the relationship between celebrity and powerful environmentalisms is different. Vivanco (2004) has examined a more robust and swaggering form of environmentalism with his analysis of the adventures of the late Steve Irwin. He notes several of the characteristics of strong celebrity conservation – the 'self-conscious piety' of their self-portrayal (2004: 7), the depoliticized versions of nature and animals which they perpetrate (2004: 9), their simplifications of social context (2004: 10) and the encouragements his work offered to armchair conservation – all of which, as we shall see below, are general to the

industry, not to Irwin alone. Vivanco also notes that the conservation message was often lost because Irwin's fans were more interested in the entertainment he offered. Beinart (2001) has examined the history of African wildlife films, noting that these often encouraged film stars to set up their own wildlife charities (such as the Born Free Foundation) and raise public awareness of African conservation causes.

Vivanco and Beinart's work suggests that there is a strong current of patronage of good environmental causes by the rich and famous which pose few threats to celebrity status. Further, a brief overview of the more prominent interactions between celebrity and conservation suggests that the patronage helps to construct celebrity, and is probably adopted, at least in part, for that reason. Indeed my interpretation of the material puts the argument more strongly. Celebrity support for conservation fulfils a modern social need. The alienation from nature that characterizes capitalist urban living drives the demand for celebrity involvement in conservation. It also fuels the demand for, and construction of, celebrity conservationists – those who win their fame through their work for conservation.

The obvious form of mainstream celebrity endorsement of conservation is the work of royalty. Queen Noor of Jordan plays a prominent role in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). In the UK, Prince William, is patron of Tusk Trust and Friends of Conservation (as his father was before him); both are large UK-based charities which promote conservation in Africa. The Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Philip, is patron of the WWF, although his former willingness to shoot tigers and espouse conservation was controversial (Mackenzie, 1988). Another prominent European royal, the late Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, set up the prestigious 'Order of the Gold Ark' medal, which has been awarded to many of the world's leading conservationists. He also donated money to the WWF, which was ring-fenced for use in hiring paramilitary support against rhino and elephant poachers (Bonner, 1993). With the passing of Prince Bernhard, and with Prince Philip ageing, conservationists are seeking a new royal champion, with Prince Albert of Monaco in pole position.

Support for environmental causes is prominent, too, among some of the world's better-known entertainment celebrities, often closely linked to particular NGOs. Their involvement is a development predicted by Alison Anderson in 1991, who foretold a more 'show-business type' approach, with 'actors and actresses presenting documentaries on environmental issues and show business personalities being used to back newspaper campaigns' (1991: 473). Fulfilling Anderson's prophecy is a recent series of documentaries by the 'Saving Planet Earth Team' of BBC1: each programme is about one particular endangered animal, and each is fronted by a different celebrity. There are also Hollywood actors, such as Leonardo DiCaprio, who support groups including the Natural Resources Defence Council (NRDC), International Fund for Animal Welfare and the Diane Fossey Foundation, and Robert Redford, who also supports the

work of the NRDC as does Pierce Brosnan (also on the advisory board of the Sea Shepherds). Harrison Ford is Vice-President of Conservation International and has received numerous awards for his conservation work. Actress Stefanie Powers supports the William Holden Foundation. Angelina Jolie sponsors her own wildlife project in Cambodia and initiatives in Namibia. The musician Sting set up the Rainforest Foundation for which musicians including James Taylor, Sheryl Crow and Billy Joel perform in annual concerts. Other charities, including TNC, Wild Aid, the Murry Foundation and many more, devote special space on their website to list the celebrities who support them or to display special messages from them.

Conservation is also instrumental in the celebrification of politics. For example, in the US, the International Conservation Caucus Foundation (ICCF) was established in February 2006 (with support from the four main US conservation organizations CI, WWF, WCS and TNC) to incorporate sound conservation principles into US foreign and assistance policy. It comprises 123 members of Congress. Its inaugural gala, in September 2006, enjoyed extensive corporate and diplomatic sponsorship and honoured Harrison Ford with a newly created ICCF award. Ticket prices started at \$1,000, with different levels of sponsorship package and associated benefits available for donations of between \$10,000 and \$50,000. The Wildlife Conservation Foundation of Tanzania was set up in the name of former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa and is co-chaired by former US President George Bush Snr and former President of France Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. It has recently supported anti-poaching operations in the country. Nelson Mandela has embraced conservation's cause with his endorsement of the 'My Acre of Africa' campaign, which is raising money to expand and strengthen protected areas in South Africa.

This form of celebrity endorsement is distinguished from celebrity protest action by the safety of the cause. Celebrities who spoke out against logging or dam building in Tasmania found themselves criticized in the press (Lester, 2006). But celebrities who stand up for wildlife conservation are rarely criticized. Indeed, it is difficult for them to go wrong. Although anti-poaching operations can be a violent business (Peluso, 1993), the horrific images of dead and mutilated elephants, and the careful way they are staged (Neumann, 2004) swings public support powerfully behind the animals. Significant sectors of Western society cannot countenance any hunting of elephants, even if it benefits both their conservation and impoverished Africans (Fortmann, 2005).

This safe form of celebrity endorsement also tends to be characterized by its support for remote, more exotic places, or its more general abstract causes, such as wilderness, biodiversity or charismatic species. If it is made personal or real, it is through encounters with the charismatic individuals who champion these causes (on which see the Wildlife Conservation Network below) or by the presence of individual specimens of the species supported at fundraising galas. The result is that, unlike Tasmania, public knowledge and the quality of public debate is rarely sufficient properly to interrogate the images

being marketed. It also makes these forms of conservation decidedly less grounded than other causes.

Consider, for example, the charity Save China's Tigers, with celebrity patrons including actors Jackie Chan and Michelle Yeoh, musician Nick Rhodes of Duran Duran and the eccentric explorer Colonel John Blashford-Snell. The charity is rehabilitating the rare South China tiger back into the wild. But they are doing so in South Africa, on private game ranches, where three are now running free.¹ Tigers in Africa tend to ring alarm bells, as *Monty Python* has shown, but this is a pragmatic strategy. There are 10–30 of these tigers in the wild, and about 60 in zoos. The space available in South Africa, and the tigers' well-known breeding ability, will build up a group of animals able to fend for themselves, so that they will be ready to thrive on their home territory when the reserves in China have been created to which the animals can return.

The example is admittedly unusual, but it is still indicative of a much more common thread in conservation practice – namely that millions of dollars are raised each year from the wealthy of the world in support of conservation objectives far from these people's homes. It is much easier for money to be raised for these causes if they appeal to generic ideals such as wilderness or charismatic species. Conservation projects like this – or such as the recent international appeal to save Amboseli, or Mike Fay's mega-transects with the *National Geographic*, or the campaign to save the Ethiopian wolf, or the last great 'wild' reindeer herd in Russia – can be successful without having to be grounded in locally driven allegiance to place.²

All the cases above were about famous people who lent their fame to conservation's cause. There is, in addition, a group of celebrities who have won fame because of their stance towards and representations of nature. I call these people celebrity conservationists. Powerful public figures were prominent in the earliest days of the conservation movement (Adams, 2004; Prendergast and Adams, 2003). But perhaps one of the earliest celebrity conservationists was 'Grey Owl', a Canadian First Nation elder, who wrote several popular books about the North American landscape and its conservation. He toured England in 1935 and 1937, giving many public lectures and meeting the Royal Family. Grey Owl's real name was Archibald Belaney. He was actually born in England in 1888 and his Indian identity was adopted. Although his transformation was sincere, revelations of his 'true' identity detracted from his message, and he has only recently been rehabilitated as conservation's first celebrity. He was the subject of a not very successful 1999 film starring the actor Pierce Brosnan.

More recent celebrity conservationists include George Schaller and the late Gerald Durrell, both naturalists, E.O. Wilson, an ecologist and Wangari Maathai of Kenya, who was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize as a result of her environmental campaigns. A significant number of celebrity conservationists come to public attention as presenters of nature documentaries, among them

David Suzuki, the late Jacques Cousteau, David Bellamy, Jonathan Scott, Saba Douglas-Hamilton, Simon King, Charlotte Uhlenbroek and many others, but perhaps most famously Sir David Attenborough and the late Steve Irwin (Vivanco, 2004). Another group have won fame because of the extraordinary close relationships they enjoy with large charismatic animals in exotic parts of the world; prominent names include Jane Goodall (who works with chimpanzees), the late Diane Fossey (gorillas), Iain Douglas-Hamilton (elephants) and Cynthia Moss (also elephants), and the late Joy and George Adamson (lions).

There is a powerful economic logic behind the growth of celebrity conservationists. Being a celebrity of any sort, conservation or otherwise, is a business. It will require self-promotion: appearing in public often and preferably being paid to do so. It requires selling commodities, either other people's (such as newspapers, films and books) or one's own. One of the main commodities which celebrity conservationists can offer is closeness to nature, and experience of the same. The presenter Jonathan Scott and his wife Angie, who are both award-winning wildlife photographers, arrange exclusive safaris on which clients can enjoy the Scott's company and insights in many wonderful parts of the world.³ On their website the Scotts demonstrate the other commodity that celebrity conservationists can market: themselves as interesting and charismatic people and as one of the means by which their supporters can hear about, learn and know nature. This can be both for celebrities' personal profit or for their cause. Part of the power of celebrity conservation is the money that famous conservationists can raise for the conservation of exotic wildlife in remote parts of the world. The Wildlife Conservation Network, a California-based organization, raises funds for conservation at annual 'Wildlife Conservation Expo' events, including a Gala Reception and Dinner, with tickets costing up to \$1,500 each, which are branded as 'a celebration of wildlife heroes' and offer the fortunate diners a chance to mingle and eat with conservationists such as Goodall, Douglas-Hamilton and Moss.⁴

Why do celebrity conservationists exist? What needs do they meet? What do they suggest about the power of some forms of contemporary conservation? To say that they provide good entertainment, live enviable lives full of travel and dwell in wonderful places enlivened by close relationships with wildlife is inadequate. For this still begs the question: why are such lives considered good entertainment? Whence the market for them?

To understand the appeal of celebrity conservationists, and the profound power of the environmental causes they espouse, one has to return to the theories explaining the rise of celebrity more generally. Rojek (2001) and Turner (2004) argue that celebrity is a consequence of new social environments. Rojek has argued that the long-term roots of celebrity lie in the predominance of new urban industrial living, 'partly a product of the world of the stranger, wherein the individual is uprooted from family and community and relocated in the anonymous city, in which social relations are often glancing, episodic

and unstable' (Rojek, 2001: 74). Celebrity compensates for this isolation, filling the void with 'para-social relations', intimacy constructed by the media, with people we do not know.

The need for celebrity is also found in the contradictions of capitalism. The 'culture industry thesis' (Rojek, 2001: 33) holds that celebrity perpetrates false consciousness, expressing 'an ideology of heroic individualism, upward mobility and choice in social conditions where standardization, monotony and routine prevail' (2001: 33), an imaginative means of escaping the drudgery of day-to-day life, even the hope of realizing celebrities' incredible lives oneself. Alternatively, some analysts see the alienations of capitalism as fuelling a profound need for celebrities through whom we can vicariously live better lives. From this viewpoint, celebrities are less the prescription decreed from above to oil the workings of capitalism, and more a tonic demanded by estranged masses. Both views hold that celebrities exist to facilitate, increase and encourage consumption. Foucauldian perspectives emphasize the role of celebrity in maintaining and privileging particular discourses and semiotic regimes the better to control populations. Sporting celebrities encourage hard work and competitiveness. Rojek (2001: 37–8) reports Marshall's argument that celebrities emerged as part of an attempt to control the new urban masses by providing highly visible symbols, with whom people could identify, who demonstrated that talent was rewarded.

These arguments can, I suggest, be applied to celebrity conservationists. For just as sports, film and pop stars enable people to cope with diverse forms of social alienation, celebrity conservationists allow people to cope with the profound alienation from nature they experience in their day-to-day lives. Celebrity conservationists' audiences, like the audiences for other celebrities, participate in their celebrities' lives vicariously. Celebrity conservationists in action give their audiences the satisfaction of watching them actually being there in real wild places and interacting with real wildlife. As Cubitt (n.d.) observed of David Attenborough:

A sense of daring has always surrounded him with a glamorous aura.... Attenborough's presence seemed to prove not only the reality and size of his specimens, but a kind of guarantee that we too were part of this far-flung scientific endeavour.

The authority and appeal of celebrity conservationists derives from their apparent authenticity.⁵ In 2006, Attenborough was the most trusted celebrity in Britain.⁶ Cubitt (n.d.) noted that Attenborough was 'so preoccupied by his fascination with the subject at hand and unconcerned for his own dignity in front of the camera that he seemed to sweat integrity'. Irwin's encounters with wildlife relied on the drama of his really being there, of swimming with crocodiles and being licked by poisonous snakes. He paid the ultimate penalty for this, being killed by a sting ray while filming. Grey Owl's writings ceased to be marketable after his true roots became known.

African celebrity conservationists have a dual claim to authenticity. First, they represent 'the real Africa', the people-less Eden that is popularly believed to have existed before it was spoiled by discovery, exploration and development (Anderson and Grove, 1987). Second, their common motif is closeness to and communion with nature. Consider Jane Goodall, the late George and Joy Adamson, Iain Douglas-Hamilton, Cynthia Moss and the late Diane Fossey. All are famous for their special closeness to large charismatic wildlife. Africa is also the home of Tarzan, a conservation celeactor, perhaps paralleled in India by Mowgli (a celeactor is a fictional character with celebrity status; the term is Rojek's, 2001: 22). While Tarzan originally killed off large fierce animals with small knives and bear hugs, he now represents closeness to nature and wildlife. As Gordon puts it, he was:

... the consummate colonial-era adventurer: a white man whose noble civility enabled him to communicate with and control savage peoples and animals.... [He is] now the consummate eco-tourist: a cosmopolitan striving to live in harmony with nature, using appropriate technology and helping the natives who are too dumb to solve their own problems. (2006: 9)

Tarzan is frequently emulated by, or his qualities are attributed to, conservationists (Vivanco, 2004). His image fits well the heroic pose adopted by many conservationists in their fight for nature. The Tarzan figure is a trope which flatters them, and which resonates with their audiences.

Many people yearn for the sort of intimacy with wildlife and nature which celebrity conservationists enjoy. But it is also apparent that they are content to let others achieve that sort of relationship, if they themselves cannot, provided that they can enjoy the spectacle of it – read the books about it, look at the pictures, watch the film and catch up with the follow-up work in *Hello!* magazine. There is an irony involved here. Conservationists insist that conservation can only succeed if it builds on people's close relationship with the wild (Adams, 2004; Milton, 2002). But it appears that these relationships need not be built on physical interaction. Indeed, in a world of para-social relations they cannot be. Rather, when people consume celebrities' support for conservation, when they watch Sting on television, buy an acre of Africa online, send an email that Robert Redford wrote to their senator, watch Leonardo DiCaprio's website video on global warming and enthuse about the patronage of wild Africa by diverse members of European royalty, they are restoring their relationship with the wild.

Saving the world?

If, as we have seen, non-local environmentalisms can be powerful, all sorts of questions remain. First, what sorts of nature and environment are produced by

powerful environmentalisms? In other words, what sorts of nature and environment are they protecting, and how do their adherents' expectations of nature transform the environments they turn their gaze upon? Removing people in the name of wilderness can have profound ecological impacts. Ecotourists' demands for beaches of silver sand, for example, require considerable alterations to the muddy mangrove swamps surrounding their hotels and resorts (Duffy, 2002). A focus on charismatic species can obscure the needs of other more endangered, but rarer, creatures which are not so photogenic. Just as environmentalisms are rich and diverse, so are the aspects of nature to which they can be applied.

Asking this question also allows us to be vigilant to the problem of greenwashing. For, as the epigraph to this article observes, there can be much that is insincere in corporate support for conservation initiatives. Many environmentalist causes may be but poorly served by the powerful interests that adopt them. Mainstream representation can bring the demise of grassroots activism (Pakulski et al., 1998). There are many conservationists who feel that their cause is poorly served by environmental mitigation measures which authorize the destruction of some environments in exchange for more land in official protected area estate. The nature of the protection afforded by protected areas, and the social justice of the measures, is far from clear.

Second, it would be useful to put some empirical flesh on the theoretical skeleton I have sketched above. My argument, that celebrities enable people to cope with the alienations from nature which they experience in their everyday lives, is an extrapolation of other theories and needs testing. More empirical work, which refuses to be determined by the inevitable logic of political and economic dictat, might be able to show how celebrity conservationists and environmental causes are constructed and shaped by audiences and fans. Powerful forces shaping audiences' choices certainly exist, but the end products reflect multiple interactions between producers and consumers of celebrities' images.

In addition, it will be important to spend more time with some of the NGOs and their public relations departments (see e.g. Anderson, 1991). Protest movements may require one form of news management, but there are many other activities NGOs have to undertake, such as cultivating support for particular projects, maintaining the profile of the organization in the news and coping with crises day-to-day. The nature of these interactions with the media has not been well described in relation to conservation organizations. It would also be useful to know precisely how these organizations have interacted with celebrities and even more useful to know how they have interacted with the industry producing celebrity. Rules of engagement may well be different for environmental protest movements, but we do not know what the rules of the game are for other environmentalist projects. These questions are the subject of subsequent publications.

Notes

I thank Rosaleen Duffy, Jim Igoe and Bill Adams for talking over these ideas with me; two anonymous reviewers for their thoughts on the article; and Kay Milton for looking over a related MS. Thanks also to the Department of Geography at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, and the Resource Management in Asia-Pacific Program at the ANU for the opportunity to air these ideas in seminars. Work for this article was supported by an ESRC fellowship examining the social impacts of protected areas (RES-000-27-0174).

1. See: <http://www.savechinastigers.net/home.php> (consulted September 2006). Blashford-Snell is eccentric because, *inter alia*, he once mounted an expedition to Bolivia to find Atlantis after deciding that satellite photographs revealed a strong resemblance to Plato's description of the city's location.

2. The Amboseli National Park of Kenya was degazetted in a populist move designed to win support for a referendum on presidential powers, provoking an instant reaction from a suite of international conservation NGOs. The last wild reindeer herd is in fact boosted by many feral animals from Russian farms abandoned after structural adjustment. They are being promoted as a remnant of a pristine past by the WWF as part of its campaign to establish and fund a number of new protected areas in the region (Anderson, 2001). Elizabeth Garland's Phd thesis examines the work of Fay in a detailed prologue (2006).

3. See: <http://www.jonathanangelascott.com> (consulted September 2006).

4. See: http://www.wildnet.org/expo2006_weekend.htm (consulted August 2006).

5. Apparent authenticity because these people are the product of the same industry that produces other forms of celebrity, and in this industry authenticity is one of the more important aspects of many celebrities' images. Furthermore, wildlife and nature films in particular are the product of careful, calculated manipulations and editing (Bouse, 2000; Mitman, 1999; cf. Vivanco, 2004). Mitman puts it best:

'Wilderness,' Aldo Leopold wrote, 'is the raw material out of which man has hammered the artifact called civilization.' ... we are drawn to the spectacle of wildlife untainted.... [y]et, we cannot observe this world of nature without.... intervention. The history of nature film reverses Leopold's claim. Cultural values, technology, and nature itself have supplied the raw materials from which wilderness as artifact has been forged. (1999: 4)

6. He was voted most trusted celebrity by an opinion poll of *Reader's Digest* readers (see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Attenborough, consulted August 2006).

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