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### Volunteer tourism: its role in creating conservation awareness

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## **Volunteer tourism: its role in creating conservation awareness**

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This paper explores the perceptions of the impact that volunteer tourism has on the conservation awareness of non-volunteer tourists at the Elephant Nature Park (ENP) in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The ENP is a privately owned sanctuary that rehabilitates injured and abused elephants and relies on tourism and volunteer tourism for its upkeep. Data for this study were obtained through the use of self-administered questionnaires administered to 200 participants during both their pre-visit and post-visit at the ENP. Results showed that after spending time at the park, visitors' awareness about volunteer tourism increased. Participants felt that volunteer tourism increases awareness about conservation issues and volunteering, makes a considerable contribution to conservation, and brings necessary funding to conservation projects. Furthermore, non-volunteer tourists also expressed an interest in volunteering at the ENP, volunteering at home, and donating money to animal conservation organisations. The model of volunteer tourism utilised by the ENP was thus shown to be an effective tool for creating awareness about domestic elephant conservation issues in non-volunteer tourists.

**Keywords:** volunteer tourism; elephant conservation; awareness; environmental education; Thailand

### **Introduction**

Ecotourism, wildlife tourism, and volunteer tourism are all emerging forms of alternative tourism that have gained popularity within the last 20 years (Fennell, 2002; Honey, 1999; Newsome, Dowling, & Moore, 2005; Wearing, 2001; Wearing & Neil, 1999). The rise in these alternative tourism activities has been partly due to an increase in the numbers of environmentally and socially conscious travellers (Mowforth & Munt, 1998; Weaver, 1998). Ecotourism attractions often consist of tourist sites and activities centred on providing benefits for the local community and the environment (Peattie & Moutinho, 2000). Wildlife tourism leads to sustainable economic benefits for many countries while ensuring the conservation of many endangered species (Fennell & Weaver, 1997; Shackley, 1996). Volunteer tourism involves travellers contributing their time and income to a project that can fall under the umbrella of both wildlife tourism and ecotourism. Today, many individuals travel to a destination for relaxation as well as to volunteer their time and services to a local project (Campbell & Smith, 2006; Gray & Campbell, 2007; Harlow & Pomfret,

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2007; Wearing, 2001). An increase in the number of volunteer tourism organisations and activities worldwide suggests that this tourism sector is growing (Brown & Morrison, 2003).

This paper explores the role that volunteer tourism can play in the conservation of a species by presenting the results from a case study conducted on the Elephant Nature Park (ENP) in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Volunteer tourism plays a large part in the daily operations and economic survival of the ENP (Elephant Nature Foundation, 2008). It is important to clarify that within this paper, volunteer tourists are tourists who visit the ENP for 7 days or more and whose main purpose is to aid in the upkeep of the park by volunteering their time and money. Within the context of this paper, they will be referred to as volunteers. Tourists who visit and stay at the ENP from 1 to 3 days and do not volunteer at the park are referred to as non-volunteer tourists throughout this paper. The purpose of this study was to determine whether the ENP, as a volunteer tourism site, had an effect on non-volunteer tourists' awareness of conservation issues surrounding elephants. This study adds to the increasing body of work on volunteer tourism as there is currently no literature on using volunteer tourism as a tool for tourist attitude change and environmental education towards the conservation of elephants.

### **Volunteer tourism**

The term volunteer tourism applies to 'those tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society and environment' (Wearing, 2001, p. 1). Scheyvens (2002) identified volunteer tourism as a form of 'justice tourism' as it 'involves individuals from Western countries paying to come to the Third World to assist with development or conservation work, as they desire to achieve something more meaningful than a pleasure filled, self-indulgent holiday' (p. 202). In many cases, volunteer tourists pay more to volunteer at a specific destination than they would if they just visited the same destination on a non-volunteering holiday (Wearing, 2001).

Volunteer tourism is a relatively new concept within the tourism literature. Research on volunteer tourism is limited and that which exists focuses on the attitudes, values, and motives of the volunteer tourists (Brown, 2005; Campbell & Smith, 2005; Halpenny & Cassie, 2003; Stoddart & Rogerson, 2004; Wearing, 2001), impacts on local communities (McIntosh & Zahra, 2007), the nature of volunteering in developing countries (Broad, 2003; Simpson, 2004), and perceptions of various stakeholders towards volunteer tourism (Gray & Campbell, 2007). It is evident that most of the research on volunteer tourism focuses on the volunteer tourists and the impacts of volunteer tourism on local communities.

### **Environmental awareness, behaviour, and attitudes**

Several studies have shown the impact that education and interpretation programmes at nature-based tourism sights have on tourists' attitudes and perceptions of conservation (Finkler & Higham, 2004; Luck, 2003; Orams, 1997; Schänzel & McIntosh, 2000; Zeppel & Muloin, 2008). Orams' (1997) study on structured education programmes at a marine tourism site emphasised the importance of such programmes, as well as species interaction, to influence tourist behaviour. In studies on marine wildlife tourism, it has been demonstrated that educational programmes can create emotional affinity towards the species involved, thereby inciting changes in attitudes about environmental and

conservation issues (Andersen & Miller, 2006; Finkler & Higham, 2004; Heckel, 2001; Luck, 2003; Madin & Fenton, 2004; Mayes, Dyer, & Richins, 2004; Orams, 2002; Schänzel & McIntosh, 2000; Tisdell & Wilson, 2004). Free-choice environmental learning experiences are also identified as an important aspect of environmental education. This type of learning experience centres on the premise that learning about a topic is largely the choice and control of the participant (Falk, Heimlich, & Foutz, 2009). Such learning opportunities, which are found in ecotourism and nature-based tourism experiences, also play an important role in educating and influencing environmental behaviour, animal knowledge, and the conservation intentions of individuals within large groups (Ballantyne & Packer, 2011). Weaver (2005) discussed that 'effective interpretation can have a "transformative" effect by inducing among participants a deeper understanding of the attraction and consequent adherence to a more ethical and environmentalist ethos' (p. 441). The observations and experiences that visitors have at a site have an influence on their awareness, as well as on their understanding and knowledge about environmental issues (Ballantyne, Packer, Hughes, & Dierking, 2007). Ballantyne et al. (2007) further suggested that providing visitors with the opportunity of witnessing animal behaviour, within close proximity, in a natural environment further strengthens the onsite learning experience. This, in turn, has also been linked with visitor satisfaction and contributes to short-term pro-environmental learning outcomes (Ballantyne & Packer, 2011). Schänzel and McIntosh (2000) have also identified four themes that visitors acknowledged were important in their wildlife encounters: viewing (standing eye to eye with species); proximity (being in close range); authenticity (viewing in a natural environment); and wonder (ability to experience and witness the species in its natural behaviour). The knowledge and experiences that visitors gain from these wildlife encounters have been shown to further increase their support towards wildlife conservation, environmental awareness, and species protection (Orams, 1997; Wilson & Tisdell, 2003; Zeppel & Muloin, 2008).

The decision taken by a visitor to engage in a certain type of environmental or conservation behaviour has been shown to be dependent on several factors. The *theory of planned behaviour model* (TPBM) (Ajzen, 1991) is a model that is commonly used in studies of behavioural change and intention, beliefs, and attitudes (Ajzen & Driver, 1992). This model was adapted from Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) *theory of reasoned action model*. TPBM postulates three predictors of intention towards participating in a particular behaviour. The first is specific to individuals' 'attitude towards the behaviour'. This relates to their evaluation of a specific behaviour and whether they view it favourably or unfavourably. The second refers explicitly to the 'subjective norm' in which society and social pressures influence individuals' likelihood of performing the behaviour. Finally, the last determinant relates to the degree of 'perceived behavioural control'. This determinant refers to how difficult or easy it is to perform the behaviour. It is premised on any past behaviour, obstacles, and potential things that could have an effect on performing the behaviour (Ajzen & Driver, 1992). Ajzen and Driver (1992) argued that 'the more favourable the attitude and subjective norm with respect to a behaviour, and the greater the perceived control, the stronger should be an individual's intention to perform the behaviour under consideration' (p. 208).

The effect that learning has on the environmental and conservation behaviour of visitors in the long term has not been studied in depth. Kolb's (1984) *experiential learning theory* suggests that individuals need to progress through a four-stage cyclical model of learning which they experience, observe, think, and plan (or act). Ballantyne, Packer, and Sutherland (2011) applied this theory to their study on wildlife tourism sites to aid in explaining the process that visitors progress through from the beginning to the end of their experience.

They suggested that to increase the likelihood of visitors changing their long-term environmental and conservation behaviours, managers should (1) capitalise on the emotional affinity between visitors and the animals they are observing, (2) encourage a reflective response to the experience, and (3) provide suggestions for manageable but meaningful behavioural responses that visitors could make (Ballantyne & Packer, 2011). Furthermore, they argued that visitors progress through each stage of learning at various rates and cannot be expected to process all that they have learned during the time of their visit. Hence, post-visit follow-up and reinforcement regarding what was learned during their visit are essential in determining the effectiveness of the programme and whether there are any long-term behavioural changes (Ballantyne & Packer, 2011).

### **Creation of awareness in volunteer tourism**

Cohen and Kennedy (2000) discussed that tourism creates awareness globally by ‘improving individual well-being, fostering cross-cultural understanding, facilitating learning, contributing to cultural protection, supplementing development, fostering environmental protection, promoting peace and fomenting global consciousness’ (p. 212). The role volunteer tourism plays in creating awareness about conservation issues has not been studied in depth. Weaver (2001) argued that volunteer tourists are affected by their experiences at host sites and gain deeper appreciation and understanding of the social and cultural environments they visit. Each volunteer will come away with different interpretations of these experiences. This interpretation can manifest in various ways in their daily lifestyles. He suggested that this may also be due to their personal affinity and knowledge about the project before they travel to the site.

Use of tourism as a force for social change has not been studied extensively in the volunteer tourism literature (Hall, 1994; McGehee, 2002; McGehee & Santos, 2005; Tonkin, 1995). Studies on resource mobilisation and social psychology theories discuss how volunteer tourism can be used as a catalyst for social change (McGehee & Santos, 2005). Social networks and consciousness-raising are identified as important aspects for facilitating this social change or social movement (Klandermans, 1992; Knoke, 1988). Tourists participating in volunteering activities are affected by their experiences at host sites, thereby gaining deeper appreciation and understanding of the social and cultural environments they visit (Weaver, 2001). Volunteer tourism increases individuals’ awareness and participation in global issues, thereby initiating ideas for them to improve the world around them (McGehee & Santos, 2005). However, the influence that volunteer tourism has on tourists’ perceptions of animal conservation has not been studied. Hence, this study addresses this gap within the literature by discussing the influence volunteer tourism has on non-volunteer tourists’ perceptions of elephant conservation at the ENP in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

### **Current state of elephants in Thailand**

For centuries, Asian elephants were used for logging the forests of Thailand. In the late 1980s, this practice was banned due to environmental problems associated with excessive logging of forests (Lair, 1999). Subsequently, hundreds of elephants and their owners were put out of work. Due to the high costs in keeping and feeding an elephant, many were abandoned or killed as their handlers did not have the financial capital to care for them. Many of the survivors were forced to beg for money, and their owners would play on the sympathy of tourists and locals in the streets of the major cities such as Chiang Mai and Bangkok (Elephant Nature Foundation, 2008).

To alleviate some of this financial strain, several elephant owners opened tourist attractions, involving the elephants, which provide some form of entertainment. Trekking camps are popular among tourists, and they afford opportunities for travellers to ride the animals for a couple of hours or participate in 3–5-day packages trekking through the forests and camping in various locations. Other tourist attractions involve the elephants performing some sort of trick, for example, painting or drawing a picture. On a grander scale, there are Broadway-like productions in which the animals are expected to play a role and perform based on a script. Tipprasert (2001) found that there were 39 elephant-based tourist attractions in Thailand consisting of trekking camps, zoos, circuses, and entertainment attractions. Some experts argue that elephants used in tourism are treated better than elephants used in logging (R. Lair, personal communication, April 10, 2009). Others agree with this point; however, they note that many of the elephants used in tourism tend to be malnourished, abused, and over-worked and that some are on the verge of death due to the non-existent animal welfare laws (L. Chailert & J. Smith, personal communication, April 20, 2009).

The number of elephants in Thailand, both domestic and wild, has decreased at a rapid rate. In 1965, the Department of Livestock Development estimated that there were 11,192 captive elephants in Thailand (Elephant Research and Education Center, 2011). As of 2006, the Department of Livestock Development reported that there were only 1473 captive elephants in Thailand, while the Department of Local Administration, Ministry of Interior, reported that there were 2054 total registered captive elephants (Elephant Reintroduction Foundation, 2008). Although the numbers differ, they show that there has been a major reduction in the elephant population in Thailand over the past 50 years. The Elephant Reintroduction Foundation (2008) estimates the number of wild elephants in the country to be less than 1000. The shrinking population size can be attributed to loss of habitat, poaching, and domestication. In the 1960s, Thailand's total forested area encompassed 50% of the country; however, today, this number has been considerably reduced to only 15% of its total land area (Sato, 2002). Thailand has the largest population of domestic Asian elephants in Southeast Asia (Lair, 1999), yet there are no conservation laws in place for their protection. Lair argued that in the absence of any domestic elephant conservation law, their numbers will continue to decrease.

### **Purpose of the research**

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the ENP, as a volunteer tourism site, had an effect on non-volunteer tourists' awareness of conservation issues concerning elephants in Thailand. Its objectives were to determine whether the ENP had any effect on their preferences for elephant activities and whether the time that they spent at the park influenced their perceptions of volunteering and elephant conservation issues.

### **Background on research site**

The province of Chiang Mai is 700 km north of Bangkok and encompasses an area of 20,107 km<sup>2</sup> in the Mae Ping Basin Chiang Mai Provincial Administrative Organization, 2010. The ENP is located 60 km north of the city of Chiang Mai in the Mae Taeng Valley and spans 0.30 km<sup>2</sup> of low land surrounded by forest and hills. The park was created in 1995 with one elephant, and today, it is a shelter for 35 domestic elephants, 40 dogs, 13 cats, 20 cows, and 20 buffalo.

Under Orams' (2002) *Wildlife Tourism Spectrum*, the ENP can be classified as a semi-captive, wildlife tourist site. The majority of elephants at the park had been previously

abused, injured, or neglected. They range in age from less than 1 year to 85 years. The purpose of the park is to allow them to ‘live out the rest of their lives in peace and dignity’ (Elephant Nature Foundation, 2008). The ENP is a place where elephants no longer work for humans as there are no rides, tricks, or shows at the park. At the time of the study, it was the only park in Thailand which did not require elephants to perform for visitors.

Visitors to the ENP witness the elephants in a semi-natural environment performing natural behaviours of eating and playing. The elephants are allowed to roam freely throughout the park and nearby government-owned lands, with the ultimate goal of being released back into the wild. Due to the limited size of the park’s boundaries, and to limit destructive activities off property, each elephant is assigned a mahout. A mahout is an individual whose job is to care for and train an elephant. The mahout’s role at the ENP is to feed and groom a specific elephant and to watch out for it in an unobtrusive way. Twice a week, different elephant family groups are taken to a piece of land in the mountains, Elephant Haven, where they can forage naturally and are left to roam freely, without being under the watchful eye of their mahouts.

The ENP is a privately, locally owned operation. It does not receive any government funding or assistance and does not have corporate sponsorship. The park’s income is 100% generated through tourism fees and donations of money (L. Chailert & J. Smith, personal communication, April 20, 2009). Much of the work done at the park is by overseas volunteers. Non-volunteer tourists and volunteers who plan on visiting the park have several options for their length of stay and type of accommodation. Any visitor to the park must pay a fee and this amount varies with the length of the visit, as shown in Table 1, with the cost per day being highest for non-volunteer tourists.

Table 1. Costs of visiting the park.

Number of days/nights	Thai baht	American dollars	Pound sterling
Day visit	2500	74.39	38.07
2 days/1 night	5800	172.59	88.32
3 days/2 nights	7100	211.28	108.12
7 days/6 nights (volunteer)	12,000	357.09	182.73

Source: Elephant Nature Foundation (2008).

The volunteer and visitor programmes are instrumental in providing labour and financial support for the park. This, in turn, has led to the expansion and success of the park over the past 13 years (Elephant Nature Foundation, 2008). The numbers of non-volunteer tourists and volunteers who come to the park have increased considerably since 2005. In 2005, the total number of non-volunteer tourists was 1804 and the total number of volunteers was 340. In 2008, these numbers increased to 9985 non-volunteer tourists and 1594 volunteers (Elephant Nature Foundation, 2008). This reveals that the ENP has increased in its popularity among both non-volunteer tourists and volunteers.

Non-volunteer tourists and volunteers are brought in the morning by vans to the ENP from the Elephant Nature Foundation office in Chiang Mai. Volunteers arrive once a week and undergo the same experiences as non-volunteer tourists during their first day at the park. On the way to the park, a documentary that introduces the ENP and issues surrounding Asian elephants in Thailand is shown in the bus. Each van has a guide who takes care of and educates guests during their trip. The guide’s main responsibility is to ensure the safety of the park’s visitors while allowing them to enjoy their visit. Upon

arrival, both groups are instructed about how to interact with the elephants in a safe manner. Later on, they are taken around the various areas of the park. Throughout the day, the guide will talk about various facts on the Asian elephant, the plight of the Asian elephant in Thailand, and more specifically provide a biography about the elephants at the park (which includes past history and family groups). Both groups have several opportunities to interact closely with the elephants at the ENP. Feeding and bathing the elephants are the main activities that facilitate this direct interaction and occur twice during the day. A graphic documentary that exposes some of the cruel training methods used, called the Pajan, to domesticate the Thai elephant is also shown in the afternoon. It further discusses the current status of elephants within Thailand. At the end of the day, the non-volunteer tourists are taken back to Chiang Mai and the volunteers stay on at the park for the week or more. Volunteers take part in many different jobs throughout their stay at the ENP. These jobs consist of washing and preparing fruits and vegetables for the elephants as well as feeding them during their noon feeding time; digging and irrigating the elephant mud pit; cutting down old banana trees at various locations to feed the elephants; bathing elephants at the river; clearing out elephant shelters; scooping elephant faeces; feeding the cows and clearing out their pens; feeding the cats and clearing out the cat house; feeding the dogs and giving them the occasional tick bath; repairing or building fences; helping out in the kitchen; spending time with all animals; helping out the vet in his daily rounds; and other projects that may need to be carried out. There are also volunteer internship positions available, which include documentary filmmaker, night bazaar intern, volunteer coordinator, and park host. Throughout the time that they spend at the park, non-volunteer tourists bear witness to the various ways that volunteers assist in daily park operations during their stay. They also have the opportunity to interact with volunteers during the elephant feeding and bathing times as well as during lunch time.

### **Methods**

Data were collected through the use of two identical self-administered questionnaires, constructed by the researchers, to determine visitors' pre-visit and post-visit awareness of conservation issues. Convenience sampling was utilised to obtain participants. This method was chosen due to the limited time frame within which the researchers had to conduct this study. These surveys consisted of questions pertaining to demographics, general activity preferences, elephant activity preferences and trip duration and questions pertaining to volunteer tourism. A question was also posed within the survey to distinguish between participants who visited for a day or multi-days (staying from 2 to 3 days). This was to help ensure that the results obtained were only from non-volunteer tourists and not from volunteers. Participants were asked 36 demographic questions and closed-ended statements. Six of the questions asked pertained to whether the non-volunteer tourists' preference for elephant activities changed after spending time at the ENP. These questions utilised a yes/no dichotomy variable. The 22 questions on conservation awareness utilised a five-point Likert scale, which ranged from 1, strongly disagree, to 5, strongly agree. Of these 22 questions, the results of six questions were utilised in constructing this paper as they specifically related to statements that reflected pro-conservation and awareness.

Over a 4-week period in 2009, 313 surveys were distributed to English-speaking non-volunteer tourists at the ENP. Only English-speaking non-volunteer tourists were asked to participate in filling out the surveys due to the time constraints that the researchers had during the study period. Of the 313 surveys collected, 200 were completed in their entirety,

allowing for a response rate of 64%. Furthermore, the completed surveys consisted of only day visitor responses due to the lack of responses received from multi-day non-volunteer tourists.

The pre-visit and post-visit surveys were administered 6 days a week by the ENP guides early on the bus ride that non-volunteer tourists took to the park in the morning, prior to viewing the documentary, and before the guides provided information about the park and its activities. The post-visit survey was administered at the end of the day either at the park, just before boarding the bus, or during the bus ride taking the non-volunteer tourists away from the park and back to Chiang Mai. The pre-visit and post-visit surveys were identical. The identity of the participants was marked on both surveys, with their initials and year of birth, so that responses to specific statements regarding volunteer tourism and elephant conservation could be matched and assessed using paired *t*-tests.

A chi-square test was conducted on the data to determine whether the non-volunteer tourists' preference for elephant activities changed after spending time at the ENP. These included activities such as elephant trekking, elephant shows, zoos, feeding street elephants, and national park/sanctuary. A paired *t*-test was used to compare the pre-visit and post-visit survey responses. These responses stemmed from a series of questions which were related to how important non-volunteer tourists deemed certain factors regarding elephant conservation and to determine whether there was any change in their perceptions after visiting the park. Data were considered significant at an alpha level of 0.05 or below.

There were several limitations within this study. The first is specific to using survey methodology and the limited range of questions that can be asked as well as the inability to gain deep insights about the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2002; Nykiel, 2007). These limitations are evident within this study as respondents were not given opportunity to further expand on their responses. The use of convenience sampling within this study can also be considered a limitation. This can be attributed to the potentially limited scope and variation within the population sample, such as the lack of Southeast Asian non-volunteer tourists surveyed, which were brought about by the sampling techniques used (Jennings, 2001).

Other limitations that can be considered when conducting studies of this nature are social desirability bias and response shift bias. Social desirability bias involves participants responding to survey questions in a way that gains approval from their peers and is socially accepted (King & Bruner, 2000). Response shift bias can occur within studies that utilise self-report measures, such as pre-survey and post-survey instruments, where the purpose is to determine how effective a programme is on its constituents. In such studies, the participants' internal standard of measurement may change based on the newly acquired knowledge (Howard, 1980). For example, within this survey, respondents may become more aware of conservation issues due to the pre-survey questionnaire irrespective of their actual experience. Response shift bias refers to this potential change, and some scholars argue to accurately compare both pre-results and post-results, a common metric should exist between scores (Cronbach & Furby, 1970). While these biases were not specifically accounted for within this study, it is important to mention them in this paper as they may pertain to future research that may utilise such methods.

## Results

In this sample of visitor participants, females comprised 60% of the sample. The largest age group was from 20 to 29 years (44.5%) and second largest was from 30 to 39 years (29.5%). They were mainly from Europe (42%), the Americas (29%), and Oceania (19%). Therefore,

97% of survey participants fell within the age group of 20–59 years and 71% were from Europe and the Americas. Other studies on ecotourists have also shown that the majority of visitors from the UK (Diamantis, 1998) and North America tend to be between 25 and 54 years (HLA Consultants and the ARA Consulting Group, 1994).

Similar to other ecotourist profiles, the majority of respondents were highly educated (Backman & Potts, 1993; Boo, 1992; Eagles & Cascagnette, 1995; Wight, 1996). Of all respondents, 82% had completed some form of post-secondary education; of which, the majority had completed an undergraduate degree (45.5%), college/diploma certificate (18%), or master's degree (15.5%). This is also reflective of the majority age group as most respondents were aged from 20 to 29 years and would have likely completed their undergraduate degree during this period of their life.

The visitors' preference for elephant activities changed after spending time at the ENP, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Pre-survey and post-survey results of non-volunteer tourists' elephant activity profile of chi-square test ( $n = 200$ ).

Elephant activity					
Category	Yes	N/A	Total	$\chi^2$	$p$ -Value
Elephant trekking					
Pre-survey	40	160	200	72	<0.001*
Post-survey	20	180	200	128	<0.001*
Elephant shows					
Pre-survey	9	191	200	165.62	<0.001*
Post-survey	1	199	200	196.02	<0.001*
Zoos					
Pre-survey	11	189	200	1.58	<0.001*
Post-survey	9	191	200	165.62	<0.001*
Feeding street elephants					
Pre-survey	17	183	200	137.78	<0.001*
Post-survey	1	199	200	196.02	<0.001*
National park/sanctuary					
Pre-survey	146	54	200	42.32	<0.001*
Post-survey	177	23	200	118.58	<0.001*
I would not participate in other elephant activities					
Pre-survey	55	145	200	40.50	<0.001*
Post-survey	44	156	200	62.72	<0.001*

\*Significant at the 0.05 level (two tailed).

Respondents were allowed to check more than one category in this section. The non-volunteer tourists stated that after the ENP experience, they were less likely to engage in elephant trekking, elephant shows, zoos, and feeding street elephants. Furthermore, the number that would visit a national park/sanctuary increased. This finding suggests that their awareness of what is involved within these elephant activities changed due to the visit to the ENP.

Characteristics of non-volunteer tourists' pre-visit and post-visit survey responses to specific statements regarding volunteer tourism, elephant conservation, and policies that govern elephants in Thailand are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Non-volunteer tourists' pre-survey and post-survey responses regarding volunteer tourism paired *t*-test ( $n = 200$ ).

Statement	Pre-survey		Post-survey		Paired <i>t</i> -test	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	<i>T</i> -Value	<i>p</i> -Value
Volunteer tourism is an important aspect of conservation	3.93	1.09	4.35	0.88	-5.17	≤0.001*
I would like to volunteer at the ENP	3.41	1.23	3.80	1.25	-4.97	≤0.001*
I would like to donate money to animal conservation organisations	3.40	0.99	3.70	1.09	-4.44	≤0.001*
I would like to volunteer with organisations back home that advocate and protect animal rights	3.34	1.12	3.51	1.19	-2.25	0.03*
Volunteer tourism can raise awareness about conservation issues	4.46	0.80	4.60	0.86	-2.27	0.03*
Volunteer tourism brings necessary funding to projects	4.18	0.98	4.45	0.84	-3.71	0.003*
Volunteer tourism should play a greater role in conservation	4.01	1.00	4.23	0.97	-2.98	≤0.001*
Volunteer tourism does not have any effect on policy	2.26	1.15	1.99	1.14	2.67	0.008*

\*Significant at the 0.05 level (two tailed).

Note: Based on five-point scale where higher scores reflect more agreement.

The mean scores reveal that beliefs and attitudes were more in favour of conservation as negative values for the paired *t*-test suggest that agreement may be stronger in the post-visit survey than in the pre-visit survey. The data in Table 3 show that visitors believe that volunteer tourism can raise awareness about conservation issues ( $t = -2.27, p < 0.05$ ) and that it brings necessary funding to projects ( $t = -3.71, p < 0.05$ ). Non-volunteer tourists further felt that volunteer tourism should play a greater role in conservation ( $t = -2.98, p < 0.001$ ), was an important aspect of conservation ( $t = -5.17, p < 0.001$ ), and does have an effect on policy ( $t = 2.67, p < 0.05$ ). The results also show that non-volunteer tourists were more willing to donate money to animal conservation organisations ( $t = -4.44, p < 0.001$ ), volunteer with organisations back home that advocate and protect animal rights ( $t = -2.25, p < 0.05$ ), and volunteer at the ENP ( $t = -4.97, p < 0.001$ ) after their visit. These findings reveal that the experiences at the ENP changed the non-volunteer tourists' opinions on volunteer tourism.

## Discussion

The non-volunteer tourists surveyed in this study can be considered ecotourists and, by extension, wildlife tourists. They share some of the main characteristics that ecotourists have been known to possess, such as high education level. Also, 97.5% of participants for this survey visited the ENP only for 1 day. This is significant as the results show that the brief amount of time spent at the park had an impact on the non-volunteer tourists' values and attitudes towards elephant conservation and volunteering. Three-fifths of the non-volunteer tourists surveyed were female, which is comparable to some other studies that have found that more ecotourists tend to be female than male (Blamey & Hatch, 1998; Diamantis, 1998). The largest age group of non-volunteer tourists at the park during the period of this study was 20–29 years. This is also consistent with one other study in which participation in nature-based tourism activities was greatest within this age group (Blamey & Hatch, 1998).

This group of non-volunteer tourists comprised only a few domestic tourists and few tourists from countries neighbouring Thailand. The Office of Tourism Development (2008) statistics on international tourism arrivals shows Southeast Asians as the largest population of visitors to Thailand; however, this research shows that the vast majority of non-volunteer tourists at the ENP were from the Americas and Europe, not from Southeast Asia. South Asian countries do not meet the World Tourism Organization's 2007 ranking of top 10 tourism countries generating outbound tourists worldwide and, therefore, are not identified as a large tourism revenue-generating market (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2009). This low level of domestic use may be related to the costs associated with visiting the park, which are higher than those associated with visiting other elephant attractions in Thailand. Furthermore, it may be a result of the ENP targeting more individuals from Europe, North America, and Oceania than from Southeast Asia. It may also be due to regional differences in attitudes towards elephant conservation and elephant tourism. The majority of respondents possessed some post-secondary education, which is consistent with the literature that most ecotourists tend to be highly educated (Backman & Potts, 1993; Boo, 1992; Eagles & Cascagnette, 1995; Wight, 1996).

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the ENP, as a volunteer tourism site, had an effect on non-volunteer tourists' attitudes and awareness of conservation issues surrounding elephants in Chiang Mai. Non-volunteer tourists' preferences for elephant activities changed due to the visit to the park. The number of participants who would still participate in activities involving elephant trekking, feeding street elephants, and elephant shows declined significantly, while the number of people who would visit a national park/sanctuary increased. This suggests that participants became more aware of the realities involved with these types of activities for elephants and chose to not participate in them after gaining knowledge during the time spent at the ENP.

The data showed that the non-volunteer tourists became more aware of the issues surrounding elephant conservation as well as policies governing elephant rights in Thailand after visiting the park. Non-volunteer tourists' perspectives on volunteer tourism also changed. Post-survey results revealed an increase in their belief that volunteer tourism is an important aspect of conservation. The data revealed that non-volunteer tourists felt more inclined to volunteer at the ENP and to volunteer with animal rights organisations at home and would more likely donate money to animal conservation organisations after spending the day at the ENP. The results also showed that after their visit to the park, the non-volunteer tourists believed more strongly that volunteer tourism can raise awareness about conservation issues, should play a greater role in conservation, brings necessary funding to projects, and has an effect on policy. This can be attributed to the ENP's incorporation of the four themes (viewing, proximity, authenticity, and wonder), identified by Schänzel and McIntosh (2000) as important to visitors in their wildlife encounters, within the day schedule that has been created for non-volunteer tourists. Furthermore, these results are consistent with those of other studies in which the knowledge and experiences that visitors gain from these wildlife encounters have been shown to further increase their support towards wildlife conservation, environmental awareness, and species protection (Orams, 1997; Wilson & Tisdell, 2003; Zeppel & Muloin, 2008).

## **Conclusion**

This paper has demonstrated that volunteer tourism can be an effective vehicle for the creation of awareness about elephant conservation issues. For the non-volunteer tourists, the short period of time they spent at the park had a profound effect on their perceptions

towards elephant conservation issues and the role of volunteers. Also, witnessing and being made aware of the work that volunteers participate in at the park had an effect on their beliefs about volunteers and volunteer tourism. Apparently, educating non-volunteer tourists about conservation issues in an environment where they can have a hands-on experience with the species can ensure success when imparting the message of conservation. On a regional level, targeting more individuals from South Asian countries would allow for more creation of awareness about elephant conservation issues within that region of the world.

The awareness created for non-volunteer tourists about elephant conservation issues and volunteer tourism could be studied in more detail. While this study showed that many non-volunteer tourists would like to come back to volunteer at the park, research could be conducted to determine how many actually do come back. Applying Ajzen's (1991) TPBM would aid as a framework for predicting visitors' intentions towards returning to the ENP. Also, further research could be carried out to determine how many volunteers leave the park and actively try to promote elephant conservation issues elsewhere in Thailand. This could be achieved by determining how many people visit the park because of what they had learned from previous volunteers. Finally, the study could be expanded by conducting a longitudinal study, through the re-administration of the post-visit survey, over various periods of time such as 1 month, 6 months, 1 year, or 5 years. This would provide insights into what the long-term effects would be on non-volunteer tourists' environmental and conservation awareness and behaviour. Studies on environmental behaviour and learning have shown the importance of post-visit reinforcement and consolidation in learning to aid in ensuring long-term behavioural change and awareness (Adelman, Falk, & James, 2000; Ballantyne & Packer, 2011; Hwang, Kim, & Jeng, 2000; Rickinson, 2001). Although this study did not specifically deal with long-term effects, it may be beneficial for future studies to address them. This would aid in determining whether post-visit follow-up is an effective method in ensuring the implementation of environmental and conservation intentions and behavioural changes that may be associated with this.

The implications that this study has for other volunteer tourism sites are that the creation of awareness in non-volunteer tourists can be used as a tool to aid in environmental education as well as to promote and create support for conservation initiatives. Further research could be conducted to determine whether the findings from this study are also applicable to other volunteer tourism sites. The results from this study are consistent with McGehee and Santos' (2005) findings that volunteer tourism increases an individual's awareness and participation in issues and can be used as a catalyst for social change. The model of volunteer tourism utilised by the ENP was shown to be effective in creating awareness about domestic elephant conservation issues. It is hoped that this increased awareness will have long-term effects on individuals, communities, and the Thai government and will continue to change the face of domestic elephant tourism not only in Thailand, but also in adjacent countries.

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