

Session:
Bears and society

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF BROWN BEAR ECO-TOURISM IN THE SOUTH EASTERN ALPS

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Abstract

The conflicts between humans and bears are an issue for conservation projects, especially in highly anthropic landscapes such as those in Europe. A sustainable and long term management of bear populations is possible only when both scientific and socio-economic evaluations are taken into account. Despite the occasional damages to the agriculture and farming, the bears can provide benefit for the tourism sector, attracting nature lovers and wildlife watchers. However, the effect of activities like bear-watching on local economies and on the acceptance of large carnivore is still poorly investigated and it is a recognized knowledge gap in the literature. This work focuses on estimating the potential increase in eco-tourism demand for visiting the area of Trento (South Eastern Alps, Italy) that hosts a population of about 60 reintroduced brown bears (*Ursus arctos arctos*). As a first assessment we measured the monetary value of the bears' appearances in documentaries broadcast on Italian TV from 2011 to 2017. The marketing value of the bear image was on average 12.5 times the amount of money reimbursed for damages in the same period (range 2.6-34). The application of a more sophisticated econometric technique based on questionnaire is ongoing. The experimental design allows to estimate the so called "flag species" effect, i.e the impact on the image of an iconic mammal such as the bear, on a tourism destination. We expect to estimate the willingness to pay by tourists under different management and bear population size scenarios. The first prototype of the questionnaire will be administered to about 100 potential domestic tourists through an on-line survey that will take place in June/July 2018. The conference will be an occasion to share the preliminary results and to improve the questionnaire structure to develop the final international survey.