

Humans and Nonhumans: Coexistence Continuum and Approaches for Working Toward Shared Sentience

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Abstract

In this paper, I explain a continuum that focuses on coexistence between human and nonhuman animals, with different examples as outlined below. Starting at Tolerance and following the continuum to the right leads toward Extreme Coexistence (Schauer, Walsh and Patterson 2021), or Shared Sentience (Schauer 2020a; 2020b; 2021). Within the continuum, I identify approaches that can be classified as solutions for coexistence, they differ based on effectiveness. Recognition of Sentience is the most effective solution for coexistence, within the continuum, for example. However, within each approach along the continuum, variations of stronger and weaker elements exist. Along the continuum, I move from Behavioral Shifts to Economies of Life (Schauer 2020c; Schauer and Healey 2021; Schauer et al. 2021), to Recognition of Sentience, and in doing so, I explain a stronger and weaker example for each. My hope, herein, is to provide tangible solutions for the goal of what Schauer (2020; 2021) calls, "shared sentience" between humans and nonhuman animals.

Keywords: coexistence; empathy; interaction; shared sentience; tolerance

1. INTRODUCTION

The realms of humanity and that of non-human animals are continuously divided by the prevalent social constructs that exist today and have existed for centuries. As humans removed themselves from “pristine” and “untouched” wilderness (Cronon 1995) and began to manipulate nature, and her resources, in order to set boundaries on an exclusive empire-like human domain, the notion that humans are, indeed, animals faded. Because they could write and articulate their thoughts in a way that made sense to their own species – and only their own species – parts of society felt as though they were superior, that animals could be exploited for the sake of humans’ happiness, indulgences, and the expansion of humanity’s realm. I believe wholeheartedly that humans and nonhuman animals can coexist – and while stepping into the forest and marveling at all of the homes wildlife have constructed for themselves – nests, dams, cocoons, holes in tree trunks, hollows in soft clay ground – I wonder why humans did not develop their lives in such a way that was not environmentally degrading, with homes that blended into the landscape and remained holistic and organic in design and function, as all other species have. Speciesism¹ and human supremacism have convinced some humans that they are mightier than the beast, and yet they continue to harm their own species with pollution, emissions, racism, sexism, and other terrible parts of society. Nonhuman animals have never negatively impacted society nor other animals in the extensive, environmentally-altering way that humans have. We are scared of non-human predators, and yet the biggest predator of humanity is itself; countless tragedies have stemmed from the actions of human beings, and in many cases, animals are in the cross-fire. Because human-wildlife conflicts are easily identifiable, I aim to use this paper to instead focus on coexistence, and options for the solution to peaceful, empathetic interactions. Shared sentience (Schauer 2020a; 2020b; 2021) is the ultimate, crucial goal of human-animal interactions; a bond that unites the two in reverence, respect, and recognition of the other’s very spirit. However, society is currently supported by an anthropocentric, exploitative economy, much of which is driven by animal suffering. By diving deeper into Frank’s (2016) conflict-to-coexistence continuum, we can begin to move toward Schauer’s (2020; 2021) notion of shared sentience. In this paper, I examine the ways in which we can move toward coexistence by examining several methods to approach human and nonhuman interactions. In doing so, I place such experiences on a continuum – yet focusing on the coexistence end of the spectrum, where potential solutions have the ability to shift from conflict to coexistence.

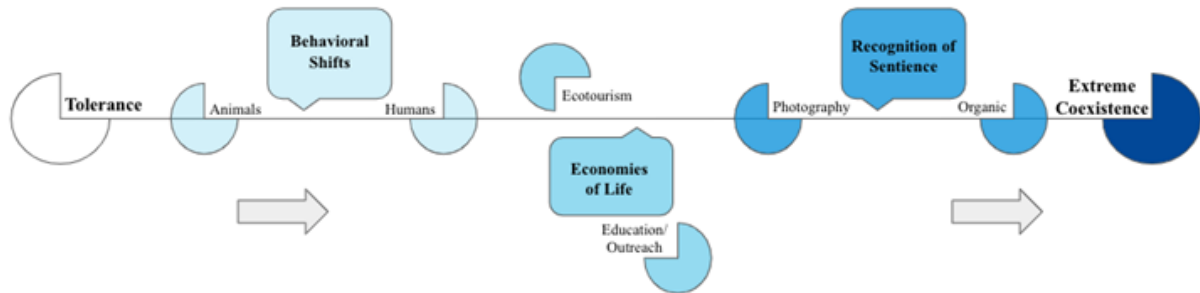


Figure 1. Human and Nonhuman Coexistence Continuum with Approaches and Variations

Figure 1 above depicts the coexistence end of the continuum, with different examples as outlined below. Starting at Tolerance and following the continuum to the right leads toward Extreme Coexistence (Schauer et al. 2021), or Shared Sentience (Schauer 2020a; 2020b; 2021). Although each of these approaches can be classified as solutions for coexistence, they differ based on effectiveness, where Recognition of Sentience is the most effective solution for coexistence. Below, within each approach, I explain variations of a stronger and weaker example.

2. BEHAVIORAL SHIFTS

Weaker: Shifting the Behaviors of Animals

Oftentimes, animals are killed in retaliation due to depredation on livestock or because humans feel threatened by an animal in another way. However, this also connects to “perceived risk versus real risk” (Conforti and Azevedo 2003 cited in Kelly 2019:360), and where animals are constructed as “man-eaters” (Kelly 2019:357). Yet, we know such attacks are rare (Kelly et al. 2019), often extremely rare. or are caused by provocation on the human’s part because the animal is defending his or herself from hunting, fishing or invading the territory of the animal (Kelly et al. 2019). Dichotomization seems to be a common human tendency, that everything must be categorized and divided between what is considered “good” and what is constituted as “bad”. The rigidity of this is so far from what life, and especially nature, entails. In other words, if humans refuse to understand animals, then how can they label them as such, with divisions that are based around the values, ethics, and norms that humans have deemed correct? Kelly (2019) examined this duality in Costa Rica and found that jaguars and pumas were “perceived” risks for Ticos, or non-Indigenous people, and “real” risks for Cabécar, or Indigenous people. This examination of

social constructs is helpful in understanding fear. Significantly less Ticos had encountered, directly or indirectly, a puma or jaguar. However, they were more likely to think of these animals as attackers, with the only solution being to kill them. Within her sample, one could extrapolate the closer one lives to jaguars and pumas, the less fear they have (Kelly 2019). While a large portion of the Tico sample who did not have recent experiences with jaguars or pumas, thought of them as “bad”, in humanity’s terms, though again, such a belief was not based on any relevant or recent events (Schauer 2021). This is something I have encountered in Colorado, where many bears cross the invisible and imagined borders of civilization, into where their habitat once was, and people become frightened and panicked. This hysteria can lead to law enforcement killing the bear, that is if he or she is considered too big of a problem.

While solutions to coexistence with bears in Colorado have been to provide bear-proof trash cans, which are stationed at every campsite, it is not a panacea, as bears travel outside of what is termed, ‘nature’ and ‘wilderness’ (Cronon 1995). Just last June, a bear was killed by Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) after he entered a home, his second time entering the town after he had been relocated—no humans were injured. It is also legal to hunt bears in Colorado for sport. Such hunts are even encouraged by CPW because there is the fear that bears are threats to livestock—yet there is so much misinformation around this. For example, life with large carnivores is complicated. Mostly, we know large carnivores, such as, bears, wolves, pumas, and jaguars, prefer to prey on sick and vulnerable animals.

Nyhus (2016) offers some approaches to managing conflict through controlling the behaviors of animals, which offers a potential avenue toward coexistence, though not as strong as shifting the behaviors and outlooks of humans, which I discuss next. However, anything is better than lethal control, which is an extreme form of conflict, as well as torturous and violent (Schauer et al. 2021). For nonlethal approaches, Nyhus offers: translocation, though its success rate is “typically low and frequently expensive” (Nyhus 2016:155); barriers and exclusionary devices, such as fences or vegetation; modified habitats that discourage certain animals (Nyhus 2016:156). Additionally guarding, restraints, deterrents, or repellants, as well as emerging technologies, such as sterilization programs are also used (Nyhus 2016). I argue here, of course, for the methods that stray the farthest from hurting the animal. Although these can be used to keep animals at bay and allow for ‘business as usual’ to continue on the human end, there is no doubt that these are less effective, and simply unethical. Therefore, next, I argue, for an approach that prioritizes humans changing their own personal behaviors, above forcing animals to do so. I argue here, humans are a large part of the problem, and micro, individual changes are extremely important, and will significantly support coexistence.

Stronger: Shifting the Behaviors of Humans

As Kelly and colleagues (2019:27) contend, “in part, coexistence with wild animals means humans must take responsibility to avoid attacks.” Although we can attempt to control animals through management efforts, the behaviors of individual humans matter just as

much, and arguably, even more. This goes along with systematic record keeping of human nonhuman animal encounters, investigating the health of a nonhuman animal to see if the attack was induced due to disease (Kelly et al 2019), as well as simply, understanding how to live alongside nonhuman animals; something as simple as storing camp food in bear-proof storage can prevent conflict and save a bear's life. As Nyhus (2016:147) writes, "entire species have been vilified because of conflicts with humans [. . .] real and perceived conflict with wolves led to their eradication from large areas of Europe and the continental US." As a global "superpredator," humans, (Nyhus 2016:148), are harming nonhuman animals more than nonhuman animals have ever harmed us. We, as humans, must recognize, that we are pushing into their habitats—not only this, but causing rising emissions and therefore climate change, which is damaging ecosystems—their home...herein, there is bound to be conflict. While such a conflict discourse may be useful in some circles, I move into the spaces where the focus is on solutions that will lead us to coexistence with nonhuman animals. This includes evaluating the language we use to discuss the interactions between humans and nonhuman animals. One example of the lexicon around nonhuman animals, is the media. The media, "plays a powerful, intermediary role in communicating facts, ideas and concepts between policy makers, scientists and the public" (McCagh, Sneddon, and Blache 2015:272) and can influence the public's "ability to relate" to environmental discourses" (McCagh et al. 2015:272). While this may at first glance seem useful, I want to bring attention to the fact that many of the people consuming the media have not had firsthand experiences with wildlife, and therefore are swayed by external, even non-credible, sources on what these interactions might look like. Therefore, we can also apply a continuum to language, with positive, coexistence-based language on one side. Such a discourse is often lacking in the media and discussions around human-wildlife interactions, especially large carnivores. Such as this, language, I argue here, also has significant implications on how we approach conflict and coexistence with nonhumans.

Perceived risk (Conforti and Azevedo 2003 cited in Kelly 2019:360; Nyhus 2016) is an important aspect of interactions with wildlife. In order to understand how we can shift our own actions and behaviors toward one centered around sentience, we must understand the difference between "perceptions of risk, actual degree of risk, and proportional response to risk" (Nyhus 2016:153). Wolves, for instance, are often seen as vicious killers of healthy livestock and elk by farmers and elk hunters, but in actuality they prey more often on weak and vulnerable animals, such as elk who have chronic wasting disease (CWD). Perceived risk here is very different from the real one, and therefore scientific conversations that engage these varying civilians are incredibly important. Specifically, the ways in which wildlife are perceived is based on cultural and historical contexts (Kelly 2019), and these are also important to keep in mind, as much as it is important to recognize that animals are also actors in these interactions—toward this end—we must continually keep them at the forefront of our minds, when making decisions. In other words, we should observe and understand their behavior before drawing conclusions on how to change it. As Nyhus explains, "in addition to managing wildlife or building barriers, there is growing recognition

that efforts to change human behavior can be as or more important than simply reducing damage caused by wildlife" (2016:157). In sum, we must recognize our own responsibility in managing conflict, which then can build coexistence. For example, in their application of the human wildlife continuum to human-shark interactions, Schauer, Walsh and Patterson (2021) acknowledge that "all activities along the continuum can be subject to an invasion of a sharks' agency" (n.d.), and therefore we must acknowledge the shark's territory, behavior, and comfort levels and adjust our own behaviors accordingly. In that, Schauer and colleagues, focus on the ways in which divers can train for safe interactions with sharks, which also cultivates shared sentience by taking the time to understand the comfort level of sharks and how they define their space. However, there are many options beyond sharks and at a scale larger than divers, by which human behaviors can change for the better; governance and education are arguably the most important in order to allow for stakeholder participation. Additionally, certain laws and policies that foster coexistence and reverence, such as endangered species protection. Economic incentives may also fit into shifting human behaviors toward increasing tolerance and therefore moving toward coexistence, as Nyhus notes (2016:159): "photographic tourism and other forms of ecotourism in which tourists pay local communities to see wildlife may reduce incentives to eliminate wildlife that cause conflict".

3. ECONOMIES OF LIFE AND DEATH

Weaker: Ecotourism

While economic incentives are useful, it should not be the case that nonhuman lives are valued by their economic worth, that is, the difference between whether a nonhuman animal lives or dies is dictated by money. This is the erasure of an animal's spirit, soul, and sentience—the idea that the meaning of their existence can be boiled down to how they fit into our narrative and the extent to which they enhance the lives of humans. However, this is the world in which we are now operating—nonhuman animal lives are dependent on how we assign them value, which is most often through the lens of economic profit. That said, it is crucial to the wellbeing of animals and the development of coexistence that we integrate the acknowledgement of their worth into our social framework—and doing so through an economic lens is the easiest way to initiate this. Therefore, it is imperative that economies reliant on death (shark finning in Schauer et al. 2021 or lion hunting in Schauer and Healey 2021, for example) can begin to transition to life (Schauer 2020c)—and most often, this is incredibly beneficial to the nations, local communities, and residents. An economy of life, such as through ecotourism, can bring long-term benefits where nonhuman animals are allowed to live, rather than the one-off economic profits of killing a nonhuman animal, or an economy of death (Schauer and Healey 2021; Schauer et al. 2021). Economies of death completely overlook the individuality of animals through desensitization; by denying the sentience of these beings, it is easier for people to kill them, and furthermore for consumers to be entirely removed from the killing. This has been referenced in the theory entitled "politics of sight", coined by Timothy Pachirat in his novel *Every Twelve Seconds*, an account

of industrialized killing. "Politics of sight" refers to the assumption that making visible these practices—the inhumane treatment and slaughter of animals—is enough to transform political and social discourse (Pachirat 2011). This is because economies of death, such as industrialized killing of nonhumans, conceal the horrific slaughter that goes on to supply nonhuman animal products to our population. By distancing the public physically from the slaughterhouses, any kind of possible emotional connection is severed. For example, pigs raised for slaughter are seen collectively as a means to an end, a product that can be defined by economic value. We even use the language to dismember them, referring to pig as pork when served for food. Rather, we should be looking at these brilliant and beautiful animals more closely, at the individual level—especially on an individual-to-individual bond through intimate interactions—to acknowledge the meaning that each of their lives hold and the fact that just like us, the time they spend on this planet is significant and should be considered and treated as such.

Cultural perspectives that have been formed throughout history pull our mind and opinions, and therefore sway our feelings, toward one way of thinking. This also connects to social constructionism, or how society places worth and meaning on certain objects and ideas. Today, the economy, money, especially is the primary example of a social construct that now controls our view of not only society, but also of nonhuman animals, as well as what we have deemed outside of society—"nature" or to frame it according to Cronon (1995), "wilderness". This is a very Western, non-indigenous, abstract and privileged way of viewing the world, as many people struggle throughout their lives to have enough money to even survive on a day-to-day basis. However, it is for this very reason that ecotourism can be so effective; it is enormously profitable, and when done with community participation, can ensure the basic and social needs are met of peoples in impoverished regions. Ecotourism is on the rise, and works to keep animals alive. According to Tortato and colleagues, in relation to tourism around jaguars in Brazil, it "will accelerate even faster in years to come" (2017:134). This is then one tool we have to promote the lives of nonhuman animals in our global world. Furthermore, and important to sharing sentience, ecotourism can lead to human-wildlife interactions that evoke emotion, shared sentience, and foster a powerful connection that leads to reverence and importantly, conservation-oriented behavior. Additionally, such a tourism allows for wild nature, reserves, preserves, sanctuaries, and so on, rather than using that land for industry that focuses on killing nonhuman animals, such as the case with lion hunting in Africa (Schauer and Healey 2021). In other words, the use of a natural environment, through ecotourism, fosters more authentic, and therefore more powerful, human-wildlife interactions. As Tortato and colleagues (2017) made evident through their study of jaguar tourism, "the monetary argument is no more powerful than an ecological or the moral argument, but it can reach a wider societal audience and can easily sway even the most hostile stakeholders to facilitate benign policy decisions that can achieve unanimous consensus" (Brauer 2003 cited in Tortato et al. 2017:134). Although in the end, we must move toward viewing animals as

sentient beings, ecotourism, at least, offers an alternative to the much more horrific act of injuring or hurting them through hunting or fishing.

Stronger: Education and Outreach

Ecotourism and any other form of an economy of life, becomes a much stronger path toward complete coexistence when it is combined with education, outreach, and community development. Because many impoverished communities rely on certain economies of death in order to survive (for example, fishers in Schauer et al. 2021), economies of life must do the same, and they do so to an even greater extent. In other words, economies of death are not a necessary path to economic gain; economies of life in the form of ecotourism, can be immensely more profitable, as well as beneficial to the local communities, nations, and most importantly, they keep nonhuman animals alive in a natural state (Schauer et al. 2021; Schauer and Healey 2021). We can look at what this means through ecotourism of sharks. As shown on the continuum put forth by Schauer and colleagues (2021), the strongest form of coexistence is the immersion of humans with nonhuman animals in their natural environment, without the need for attractants. However, because economic value is so important, it may be that we have to hover on the weaker end of coexistence until we can finally reach the ability to freely dive with sharks or create space in the sea for massive marine reserves. This is still better, however, for both the sharks as well as humans. Fishers can join the shifting economy by becoming dive operators, as their knowledge and skill set are invaluable to the sea. Communities, and tourism operators, can participate in citizen science programs and shark monitoring, and importantly, leading the educational outreach that is so vital to wildlife conservation.

Ecotourism and economies of life (Schauer and Healey 2021; Schauer et al. 2021) have proven to be the most beneficial route for all stakeholders, including, and importantly, nonhuman animals. Socioeconomic status, cultural elements, and traditional knowledge can all be addressed as well, involving local residents with historical traditions surrounding these animals and knowledge of living amongst them. Ecotourism is a highly profitable economy of life (Schauer and Healey 2021; Schauer et al. 2021) and a durable, growing alternative to economies of death (Schauer and Healey 2021; Schauer et al. 2021). Not only does its revenue consist of direct payments from the cost of a dive, but also "auxiliary expenses, including travel costs, wages and tips for guides, and other elements of the service industry such as purchases in restaurants and craft markets" (Tortato et al. 2017:134). Compensations can also be made, such as land-use revenue as indicated by Tortato and colleagues (2017), or levies used in diving, in which the tourist pays a fee to the operator, who then pays the fishers in return for blocking off the site temporarily to dive, or the operator can put this levy into a village bank account, and later these are divided up between local communities (Schauer et al. 2021).

Engagement and emotionally salient, positive interactions must occur along with education in order for change in human behavior and perception to occur. Therefore, stakeholders could partake in activities like a citizen science program (Schauer 2021). This

strategy would not only include the conservation organizations and farmers, but even local residents who are also stakeholders. Such a program “moves beyond educational efforts toward something much more tangible and engaging. As with other management, outreach, and educational efforts, a citizen science program should be crafted with an understanding of cultural distinctions among people who live in the SBBD²” (Schauer et al. 2021:19). Due to the dimensionality of human-wildlife interactions, the approaches taken for coexistence must also reflect this. Nyhus also suggests that “a major challenge of modern conservation is how to balance the protection of endangered species with the needs of local communities” (Nyhus 2016:148). Factors that influence conflict often revolve around rural communities that rely on agriculture or livestock for their livelihoods. However, education may help with this – either through information and implementation of mitigation strategies, such as, changing husbandry practices, and especially through understanding the species in question, more fully. Like the wolf, another misunderstood carnivore is the coyote, considered invasive, a pest, fear-provoking and dangerous, the coyote suffers not only speciesism but also the perception of their species as unimportant and an “other” (Boesel and Alexander 2020). In many urban areas, we share space with them, because society has encroached on their native habitat and range. Much of society despises them, feeding into the social construct surrounding this species. With educational services that allow humans to understand coyotes, and other animals with whom we share our environment, coexistence will become easier to achieve.

The most important part of economies of life is the prioritization of shared sentience (Schauer and Healey 2021; Schauer et al. 2021) along with economic value. If this does not materialize, coexistence will not. Therefore, emotionally salient experiences through ecotourism must be coupled with education, which can have a profound impact on individuals, both tourists and locals. Economies of life have many branches of powerful, positive benefits: education, socioeconomic importance, long-term benefits for human and animal communities and ecosystems, and the inexplicable experience of shared sentience that will further conservation efforts and therefore continue the implementation of economies of life. Therefore, while they are based on economic rather than emotional, intrinsic value, economies of life can be strengthened and made into an empathetic path toward coexistence with the addition of other elements that stray from solely economic incentives.

4. RECOGNITION OF SENTIENCE

Weaker: Interactions Through Photography or Other Media

Using photography and other media, positive media—such as environmental and wildlife documentaries that spur interest in conservation—can be an extremely beneficial and an effective way to garner support for wildlife, especially for those who cannot physically have an interaction with nonhuman animals. Photographs can be a tool for education; there are success stories such as that of Shawn Heinrick, who through his documentary, helped reduce shark fin consumption in China: he notes that “imagery gives a voice, and combining

visual elements with education resulted in an incredibly impactful change in behavior, exemplifying how educating individuals about conservation crises and campaigns can result in positive changes in action” (Schauer et al. 2021). Here we imagine images as incredibly powerful. Images that capture animals in their natural habitat, showcasing their magnificence, can transform mindsets and have a powerfully emotional impact on the public. Of course, “charismatic megafauna” can more easily pull at the heartstrings of the public. However, if they are given the attention they deserve, so can smaller animals that people often deem insignificant or “pests”—such as a field mouse or pigeon—and even animals that humans fear, such as lions or sharks. Wildlife photography and documentaries that foster conservation and empathetic interactions with wildlife have had a niche within media for so long, and are becoming more accessible, popular, and relatable to current generations, that there is hope and evidence that this can be a stronger path toward coexistence than conflict.

Social constructionism through the media, gender norms, and voyeurism can all skew how we view animals; therefore, photography can be intensely impactful. Unfortunately, photography, such as the case with hunting, can also be used in ways that demean animals, solely for the interest of humans. For example, Kelly (2018) found that jaguar and puma hunting is frequently driven by Westerners that “took indigenous symbols but left behind meanings” (Kelly et al. 2018:4), and often “the display of feline parts indicates prestige for urban, non-indigenous, wealthy men” (Kelly 2018). The hunting of lions—and related photography—is in the same vein. Schauer and Healey (2021) found “symbolic significance . . . [of] defeating another powerful being” for the hunters in their study, who were majority White men (Schauer and Healey 2021). The desire by these men to display a sense of superiority and power by killing an animal deemed as an “aggressive beast” can be identified as what Schauer and colleagues (2021) frame as Extreme Conflict on Beatrice Frank’s (2016) conflict-to-coexistence continuum. Such acts are extraordinarily cruel, ending in intense suffering, pain, and a torturing mortality. It is further separating humans from nonhuman animals, perpetuating the idea of nonhuman animals as objects, to be feared or conquered. Trophy hunters, then, become what society fears in predatory animals: senseless and merciless aggressors. Here photography to the hunter does not focus on sentience, yet to someone who shares sentience with, and a love of, nonhuman animals, such images tug at the heart.

Stronger: Organic Interactions without Barriers

Placing animals within history and tradition gives them meaning within the narrative of humans. This way, animals are no longer an instrument to the success of humans; rather, the two are experiencing history alongside each other. As Sax writes, “to regard each sort of animal as a tradition also encourages respect [. . .] tradition links animals to the ideas, practices, and events that make up human culture” (Sax 2001:xi). He argues that appeals to pragmatic reasons relating to why we should care for nonhuman animals and our environment are more persuasive to humans, and that using tradition can include all the complexities of our relationship with animals. Sax acknowledges that the idea of every

animal as a tradition will not provide a simple answer to ethical questions but will “at least provide a way in which to think of them” (Sax 2001:xi). With tradition, we can preserve a way of thinking of the animal that has been woven through cultural practices, historical values, and personal experiences. Despite the constantly changing landscape, traditions are rooted in history and are thus able to be adjusted respectfully without losing the values. The coupling of economic growth and environmental degradation has led to the divergence of humans and nonhuman animals, and therefore has created a barrier to coexistence. Tradition then, opens a way in which humans can understand animals more comprehensibly, thus strengthening our relationship with them. Although it is unfortunate that we are driven to explicitly define ways of thinking so that human-wildlife interactions are salient enough to change behaviors, rather than just allow these experiences to play out naturally, such as in sharing sentience with nonhuman others (Schauer 2020a; 2020b; 2021), it is important to do so in our modern world.

Animals have long represented motifs and ideas in literature, art, beliefs, politics, and other parts of culture. An example of this is the gray wolf. The wolf is a symbol of the West and often a revered animal in Native American mythology. But just as much as they are a figure of wonder, wolves are also a figure of fear. This is often because we do not understand them. Last year, I interviewed Delwin Benson, a professor of wildlife studies at Colorado State University and a member of the Colorado Wolf Management Working Group. Through his research, Benson found that wolves were “symbols of the rural past when they were removed as problem predators and now are symbols of urbanites who want them back³”. In this paradox, we find flaws and misunderstanding in the human perception of these animals. People view the wolf as either a destructive predator or a “token” of the wild West. Instead, we must begin to see them as a living, autonomous species. I would add that we should view them not only for their symbolic and spiritual power, but also for their sentience. We must recognize that wildlife has meaning on its own terms, despite humans’ perception of them (Pierotti and Wildcat 2000). Whether that be spiritually, physically, or emotionally, they exist as individuals just like us (Schauer 2020a; 2020b; 2021). Tradition must be coupled with an acknowledgment of the latter in order for us to fully comprehend an animal’s experience. In Lévi-Strauss’s, *The Totemic Illusion*, it is clear that Totemism and spiritual guides are traditional beliefs that bring a human closer to an animal not only through a general sense of symbolism, but also through ordering animal species in a way that allows them to understand the human and nonhuman animal relationship more fully. This practice of reverence is more developed than the use of an animal for the purpose of understanding solely the human condition. It forms the bridge between experiences of nonhuman animals and those of humans.

Last summer, I had an experience that illuminated the value of appreciation and understanding when interacting with wildlife; coincidentally, it was connected to gray wolves. I was in Yellowstone and was on a mission to find a pack of these magnificent and mystical beings, who were reintroduced into Yellowstone twenty-five years ago and now roam the Lamar Valley. A deep, smokey blue dusk was settling in and I was giddy from

having encountered a couple of brown bears playing in a meadow filled with vibrant yellow flowers; the scene was nothing short of spectacular. We kept driving down the road in hopes of seeing some wolves, and we saw a group of people perched on top of a hill with telescopes and massive cameras, all looking toward the same point in the distance. Upon sprinting up to them and inquiring, I learned that they were in fact looking at a pack of wolves, and although they offered me a moment to look through the telescope, I couldn't quite make out the tiny dots in the distance that were these beautiful creatures. I was feeling slightly disheartened that the wolves were so far away when a little girl, hair almost as pale as a wolf's piercing eyes, tugged at my jacket earnestly. She began to tell me all she had learned about the wolves—the mother and her pups, what the animals had faced that winter, the routes they choose for roaming about the valley—and she concluded by exclaiming earnestly "wolves are my spirit guide." Her father, smiling all the while, told me that he and his family spend the summers camping in Yellowstone and as a professor, he teaches his children about the animals, their importance to the ecosystem, and how important peaceful coexistence in all its forms—recognition of sentience, respect, admiration—are for the species.

This struck me as a perfect example of an essential piece of coexistence, which is education paired with experience and interactions. As stated in the previous section, an interaction with a nonhuman animal often sparks an emotional response, but if an educational aspect follows the experience, that response sticks around much longer. Education not only allows humans to further understand animal behavior or to marvel at the abilities of wildlife, but also helps form a deeper connection through an interaction that goes beyond the senses and delves into the heart space. This summer, I had the opportunity to go to La Jolla Cove, in San Diego, where sea lions and seals are known to reside. Because this is such a well-known spot for wildlife watching, massive crowds may gather to watch the seals and sea lions. Unfortunately, often this means that people do not respect the nonhuman animals' space, and in order to get the best photo, will ignore warning signs placed by wildlife organizations. I remember one particular moment when to everyone's surprise, a mother sea lion had suddenly birthed a pup. I was in awe at the mother's strength, nudging her baby and shielding his newly-exposed body from the chaos of the world and the loud exclamations from the crowd. However, not everyone seemed to recognize how powerful this moment really was. Around me, tourists were murmuring at how disgusting it was to have seen a nonhuman animal give birth. I was taken aback: why do we find birth so miraculous for humans, and yet when it comes to this sea lion, this crowd's reaction was one of disgust and mockery? The only onlookers who seemed to acknowledge the beauty of this moment were a mother and her daughter, who were delighted to see another baby come into the world. I walked away from the beach and found a volunteer with the San Diego Seal Society, telling her what had just occurred. She knew immediately to get to the site and speak with the crowd; both to protect the sea lions, and to educate the public with the intention of transforming their reaction into one of reverence. This is why education is so important when it comes to human-wildlife interactions: these

may spark emotion, but it is the nature of this emotion, and how we choose to respond to it, that matters. Education may help shift these viewers' response from disgust or indifference toward respect, which can then turn into a willingness to practice conservation and efforts toward coexistence.

As Schauer emphasizes, "culture [...] is crucial to examine *prior* to management implementation" (Schauer 2019:111). There are social constructs, albeit many are rooted in culture and tradition, and we must examine them all in order to coexist. However, examining these with an anthropocentric mindset is not enough; *shared* sentience (Schauer 2020a; 2020b; 2021) must always be the goal. We must regard ourselves as part of nature, of a system in which we, too, will suffer if it does. We must also make room for many other cultures in the conversation surrounding nature, and most importantly, we must make room for the voice of nature and of wildlife for themselves. We cannot romanticize, love, or respect, without also acknowledging the rights of the non-human species that also hold sentience; without this, the perceptions we place upon nonhuman animals and nature are objectifying. Our social constructs of nature and the fact that we are bound by our own language and human perceptions, might have long existed as a barrier against coexistence, but we can instead use these as ways to reform our ways of knowing, to acknowledge that not only is nature what we want to preserve, but she is also a part of our own narrative and existence.

5. CONCLUSION: COMPLETE COEXISTENCE THROUGH SHARED SENTIENCE

Along the veins of social constructs is also the human tendency to dichotomize, to comprehend through viewing things in life as "night and day", and not recognizing the complexity of life for fear of its complications. However, it is damaging to view human-wildlife interactions through this lens; nonhuman animals and nature are rarely so straightforward, and that is part of what makes them so beautiful, and as sentient as we are. Therefore, we should strive to view interactions as on a continuum, which can be multidimensional, varying on a continuum "from positive to negative, in intensity from minor to severe, and in frequency from rare to common" (Nyhus 2016) with the added dimension of shared sentience (Schauer et al. 2021). By putting interactions on a continuum, we can see that there is an entire spectrum and range of characterizing interactions. More specifically, we can pinpoint which interactions will lead us toward coexistence. As was mentioned in the Nyhus (2016) article, humans cannot place blame solely on the nonhuman animal or force them to behave differently; so much of it has to do with humans' behaviors, taking responsibility for them, and striking a balance between the behaviors of nonhuman animals and humans in order to give way to connection. This brings to mind the "summational effect" in music, in which notes played together reverberate to form a chord, and can often begin to form an amplified third pitch just by resounding together. During an interaction, humans and wild animals may be coming together from very different experiences – but a third, almost spiritual and entirely holistic way of knowing is created, a "shared sentience" (Schauer 2020a; 2020b; 2021). This is something upon which we can

place no monetary value, for it is so rich in empathy, compassion, and a power of connection living beyond language (Schauer 2020a; 2020b; 2021). Throughout my life, I have seen various moments of these “summational effects” in human-wildlife interactions; I will end with this one...

My experience of finding a small, champagne-colored bird, a Brown Creeper, trapped in a roadside shop in Vermont. I could see his little chest heave with deep breaths of panic and overworking himself to get out, startled by all of the foot traffic in the shop. Although my travel companions and I did everything we could to get him out, he kept flitting from wall to wall with such incessant, frantic stress that we thought it best not to force the situation; we left a note, propped the doors open, and began heading back to the car. However, I hesitated, pivoted on my heels and desperately looked back once more, tempted to try once more to help the bird out. However, as the bird perched on the shelf of the shop, his soulful eyes meeting my gaze, I felt a sense of profound calm wash over me. It was a moment of connection that allowed me to understand he'd make it out of there eventually, his steadying breaths soothing my worries. This is Schauer's (2020; 2021) shared sentience: an interaction and instant of communication that goes beyond the physical and pushes into the psyche and spirit, striking a chord of empathy that leaves each being with the potent force of understanding one another.

NOTES

¹ *A form of oppression and marginalization, the "assignment of different moral worth based on species membership" (Caviola et al. 2018:1).*

² *The Barbilla-Destierro Biological Subcorridor (Subcorredor Biológico Barbilla-Destierro) of Costa Rica*

³ *Delwin Benson, email message to author, October 2, 2021.*

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