

Shattering Negative Stigmas, Creating Empathy and Willingness to Advocate for Unpopular Endangered Species: Evidence from Shark Watching in Israel

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Abstract : There are many endangered species that are not popular but whose conservation is, nonetheless, important. The present study deals with sharks who suffer from demonization and, accordingly, from public indifference to the deteriorating state of their conservation. We used the seasonal appearance of sharks in the Israeli coastal zone to study public perceptions and attitudes towards sharks prior to ("control group") and after ("visitors") shark watching during a visit in an information center. We found that shark's image was significantly more positive among the "visitors" compared to the control group. We found that visiting in the information center was strongly related to a more positive shark image, attitudes toward shark conservation, and willingness to act to preserve them.

Keywords : wildlife tourism, shark conservation, attitudes towards animals, human-animal relationships, Smith's salience index

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