**Animal Science 5400.02**

**Participation Response – Sable Antelope**

**Cathy Becker**

 I do not agree that hunting should be used as a management tool for conservation of endangered species. I do not understand how a threatened or endangered species can be conserved by killing some of them. Instead, I would suggest ecotourism as a replacement.

 Andy does not like ecotourism because of experiences he has had of the industry as it is currently practiced in South Africa. Parks are overcrowded, and animals are stressed by too many people trying to see them at once. But it doesn’t have to be this way. Just as the hunting industry can be managed in different ways, so can ecotourism. One example of how to manage it with the welfare of the animals in mind is gorilla trekking in Rwanda and Uganda.

 Mountain gorillas are highly endangered, with only 880 living in the mountains of eastern Congo, northwest Rwanda and southwest Uganda. Rather than allowing an unlimited number of people to enter the national parks to see them anytime they want, crowds are controlled by selling permits and limiting the time animals are exposed to people. [Gorilla trekking](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/25/travel/safari-gorillas-rwanda.html) permits are expensive compared to general admission to a national park. In Uganda, permits sell for $600 each. In Rwanda permits sold for $750 each until May 2017, when the country [raised the price](http://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/rwanda-gorilla-encounter-fees-doubled-uganda-a7727821.html) of a permit to $1500, with access to view an entire family of gorillas for $15,000. Tourist groups are limited to eight each with only 80 permits sold per day. Twenty gorilla families in the park are habituated to humans. Tourist groups hike for one to three hours to see the animals, then are allowed to spend one hour observing them. No food, drink, littering or spitting is allowed, and tourists must stay in tight groups at least 7 meters away from the animals. Some tours require tourists to wear face masks to reduce the risk of transmitting disease from human to gorilla. In 30 years no visitor has ever been harmed by a gorilla, and no gorilla has had to be shot.

 Gorilla tourism has helped to turn around the fate of the mountain gorilla. In the 1980s thanks to poaching, disease and habitat loss, only 250 mountain gorillas were left in the world. Gorilla tourism started in Rwanda in 1995 as a way to boost their economy after the genocide of 1994. Few permits were sold in the 1990s due to ongoing conflict, but the industry began to take off in the 2000s. By 2015 more than 20,000 people each year were buying tickets to see the gorillas. This has had a significant effect on the economy of Rwanda. Tourism has now surpassed coffee and tea to become the main source of foreign exchange. Tourism, including travel, lodging, food, and other purchases, contributed [$202 million](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/AFRICAEXT/Resources/258643-1271798012256/Tourism_Rwanda.pdf) to the economy in 2008.

 Besides creating jobs and boosting the overall economy, proceeds from gorilla permit sales go to fund conservation, anti-poaching patrols, and projects in communities surrounding the parks. Gorillas are now a financial lifeline for impoverished locals, with each gorilla family [worth $1 million](https://www.africanbudgetsafaris.com/blog/mountain-gorilla-trekking-is-it-ethical/) per year to surrounding communities. The park employs 180 community members directly, with 800 more benefiting from temporary employment and revenue sharing. About 400 former poachers have become rangers and volunteers who patrol the park, remove snares, plant trees, educate the population, and work to reduce human-wildlife conflict.

 Sales of gorilla permits also fund local projects in communities near the parks. Previously communities received $37.50 for each permit sold; with the price increase they will now get $150 per permit. Even before the increase, from 2005 to 2010, permit sales [yielded $428,248](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/AFRICAEXT/Resources/258643-1271798012256/Tourism_Rwanda.pdf) for environmental protection, education, basic infrastructure, and food security. Benefits included construction of 10 schools and 32 water tanks, support for 10 community associations, and development of a community lodge that benefits 3,000 households.

 Obviously Rwanda is a different country with different wildlife than South Africa. But gorilla trekking shows that ecotourism does not have to be a madhouse traffic jam of hundreds of people trying to take pictures of a few animals. It can be managed in a way that produces significant revenue for the country and benefit for the people, who come to value the animals rather than see them as a nuisance. I would urge South African officials to consider creating their own version of ecotourism before putting resources into an industry that kills the very animals they want to save.