

Estimation of Recreational value of Leopards at Yala National Park, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Although the wildlife tourism has now become a growing sub sector in tourism it is well accepted that the entrance fees do not reflect the true recreation value of recreational areas. Yala National Park (YNP), the most visited National Park in Sri Lanka is well known for its leopard density which is the highest in the world outside Africa. Due to the high probability of viewing a leopard, there is a great demand for viewing leopards in Block 1 of YNP.

This study was conducted to estimate the local recreational value of leopards at Block 1 of YNP using travel cost method. A sample of randomly selected 250 local visitors was interviewed at the park entrance and Palatupana Beach with a structured questionnaire. Travel related information, socio economic information and questions to assess the priority placed on viewing leopards during their trips were obtained from the visitors. Surveys were conducted during both week days and weekends representing long holidays, school vacations and working days. Zonal travel cost method was used to estimate the recreational value of leopards of YNP. Multi destinations trips were treated by taking a proportion of their total travel cost as the travel cost (TC) related to the YNP. Proportion of TC related to the leopard from the total TC for the YNP was estimated based on the priority placed by visitors in seeing a leopard compared to other major faunal species at the park.

Results revealed that 28% of visitors visit the Block 1 of YNP for the sole purpose of sighting a leopard while for 30% of visitors, their first priority of visiting the park is to view a leopard. The total local recreational value of the leopards at YNP is calculated as Rs. 115.75 million per year and the local consumer surplus at present entrance fee is Rs. 105.75 million per year.

Results of this study can be used in deciding the efficiency of resource allocating in park management among other alternatives. Further this finding justifies the importance of well planned scientifically based conservation and management actions in YNP.

Key words: Zonal travel cost, Sri lankan leopard, recreational value