

Title: Can Ordinary Wildlife in Everyday Green Places Be Extraordinary?

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Abstract:

In wildlife tourism studies, it has been found that tourists who had meaningful wildlife experiences during their holidays also highly appreciate encountering wildlife near home. However, the importance of experiencing wildlife in everyday green places has not received much attention. Local green places are important to our health and wellbeing, and thus it is worth gaining insight into how people are connected with them. In my study, I investigated how multi-sensory wildlife experiences shape a person's bond with his or her favorite local green place in a highly urbanised society, the Netherlands. I conducted walk-along interviews with thirteen participants with varying socio-demographics and places of residence in their favorite local green place. These ranged from urban parks, agricultural land, and forested estates to large protected areas. The interviews took place over a whole year, covering all seasons. The results show that familiarity plays a central role in how wildlife shapes a bond with a favorite local green place. Through repeated visits, individuals build a relationship with the place and its wildlife, accommodating three ways in which a bond can form: (1) the localized self, (2) the internalized place, and (3) embeddedness in *Panta Rhei*. First, experiencing familiar wildlife—for instance, hearing well-known birdsong or regularly seeing deer—can trigger (childhood) memories, often related to significant others. This adds to feelings of rootedness in a favorite local green place, called *the localized self*. Second, over time, the bond can be strengthened by increasing knowledge about both wildlife and the place. This leads to successful and intentional wildlife encounters with feelings of pride and accomplishment. Individuals can also feel rewarded by the place through 'receiving' unexpected wildlife encounters. These wildlife experiences can lead to *the internalized place*. Third, wildlife experiences can provide individuals with *embeddedness in Panta Rhei*: the flows and cycles of nature and life. The presence of wildlife can be very important in connecting individuals with their natural surroundings, and with the natural world of which they feel part. Birds in particular play a prominent, yet undervalued, role in place bonding. Birdsong and bird behavior (building nests, migrating) in a familiar place can provide a sense of time as well as timelessness; birds can signify natural rhythms, announcing sunrise, spring or winter, year after year; they can provide comfort and continuity in an ever-changing life. Thus, although local wildlife, such as ducks, blackbirds, swans, foxes, and deer, may not be large or iconic, ordinary wildlife can be extraordinary as it plays such an important role in place bonding and in connecting people with the world.