

## Sustainability of Wildlife Tourism: Tourist Perceptions on Threats to Wildlife Tourism in Two State Protected Areas in Zimbabwe

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### Abstract

The study sought to determine tourist perceptions on the threats to the sustainability of wildlife tourism using a case study of two state protected areas in Zimbabwe. Using close-ended questionnaires, we collected data from 128 tourists in December 2015. Results show respondents generally perceived all the seven tested threats as serious, i.e., illegal hunting, destruction of wildlife habitats, human-wildlife conflict, lack of involvement of local people in national park tourism, lack of benefits from the national park to local communities, negative attitudes towards tourism by local residents, and poor local community and national park relationships. Moreover, respondents generally had similar perceptions on the impacts of the threats on the sustainability of wildlife tourism regardless of their gender, age, level of education and income. We conclude tourists are more environmentally conscious and well informed of the threats to wildlife tourism in Zimbabwe, which may indicate willingness to support conservation. It is thus necessary for park management to promote local people participation in ecotourism, enhance innovative law enforcement measures as well as motivate tourists to participate in conservation. Results could help broaden policy decision-makers' knowledge base in response to sustainable wildlife tourism development challenges.

**Keywords:** Ecotourism, human-wildlife conflict, illegal hunting, local community, wildlife tourism

### Introduction

Nature-based tourism is one of the most rapidly expanding segments of the tourism industry (Suta, Hrnjic & Banda, 2017). Nature-based tourism include wildlife tourism, which is a niche for the tourism business that includes non-consumptive activities, for example, photographing and observing animals in their natural habitats (Newsome, Dowling & Moore, 2005) and consumptive activities which involve selective removal or capturing animals, particularly through sport hunting and fishing (Lovelock, 2008). The value of tourism can be direct, indirect

or induced through tourism expenditures, creation of employment, revenues generated from taxes and other government levies, foreign exchange gains, and multiplier effects that are associated with the tourism industry (Freyer, 2011). Many African countries have economically benefitted from strong tourism growth in recent years (Gumede & Nzama, 2020; Ilban & Yildirim, 2017; World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), 2018). Although tourism in Africa is poor in terms of its economic importance and the continent has a minor share of the global tourist market (5 percent of foreign arrivals and 3 percent of international receipts in 2019), international tourist arrivals have been increasing steadily over the past few years (UNWTO, 2020). During the period between 2005 and 2019, the number of foreign tourists visiting Africa grew from 35 million in 2005 to 70 million in 2019 (UNWTO, 2020). The international tourism receipts for Africa in 2019 totalled US\$38 billion (UNWTO, 2020). While tourist visits to Zimbabwe fell precipitously from 2000 onward, tourism receipts have increased from US\$634 million in 2010 to US\$1.2 billion in 2019 (Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA), 2020). However, since the beginning of the year 2020, there has been a sudden decrease in both arrivals and receipts globally due to international travel restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns (Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2020; Mudzengi, Gandiwa, Muboko, Mutanga & Chiutsi, 2021; Sucheran, 2021).

Regardless of the notable growth in tourism in African, there is dearth of national tourism statistics in most African countries (UNWTO, 2018). Where there are data at national level, they are usually for the whole of the tourism sector and not for the various segments of tourism such as nature tourism, cultural tourism or wildlife-related tourism (Higginbottom, 2004). Higginbottom (2004) points out that data on wildlife tourism expenditure at destination level are not collected systematically. Despite this setback, wildlife tourism unarguably has various ecological, social, economic, scientific, educational, cultural and recreational values and immensely contributes to sustainable development and human well-being (Lekgau & Tichaawa, 2020; UNWTO, 2018). In many African countries and in Zimbabwe in particular, tourism is dependent on wildlife resources and related activities among others (Manwa, 2007; Morupisi & Mokgalo, 2017).

Liu (2003) points out that sustainable tourism entails both the expansion of tourism's contribution to society and the economy, as well as the efficient use of resources and the environment. On the other hand, sustainable tourism development is the management of all resources in such a way that they meet economic, social, and aesthetic requirements while also preserving cultural integrity, critical ecological processes, biological diversity, and life-supporting systems (Fennell & Dowling, 2003). The sustainability of wildlife tourism is affected by a number of factors that include rapid ecological changes (Ariya, Sempele & Wishitemi, 2020), political and economic instability, natural disasters (Saha & Yap, 2015), capacity management in the protected areas and support for wildlife conservation and tourism from the local communities living adjacent to the protected areas (Ap & Crompton, 1998). Most worrying is the fact that the wildlife species that are important for wildlife tourism, for example, the 'Big Five' in Africa, i.e., the rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis* and *Ceratotherium simum*), lion (*Panthera leo*), leopard (*Panthera pardus*), Cape buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*), and African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*), usually are the same that are often threatened by illegal hunting and trade (UNWTO, 2015). Illegal wildlife hunting and trading has become Africa's greatest direct and immediate danger to animal species, making this expanding trend a reason for worry (Muboko, Gandiwa, Muposhi & Tarakini, 2016). Furthermore, the increasing loss of habitat and loss of range is also another threat to wildlife species, among other pressures (Milliken & Shaw, 2012). Consequently, this decline in wildlife is anticipated to have a severe influence on the development and sustainability of wildlife tourism in Africa, as well as the tourism industry worldwide (Newsome et al., 2005; UNWTO, 2015).

Wildlife conservation inflicts significant costs on local communities; human-wildlife conflict (crop damage, livestock depredation and human deaths, and access restriction to natural resources) (Gumede & Nzama, 2020; Makwindi & Ndlovu, 2021; Muruthi, 2005). This situation compromises local people's livelihoods and increases resistance and hostility resulting in lack of support of protected areas and associated wildlife conservation efforts. This is owed to the fact that most of these people are generally poor and they depend on natural resources for their livelihoods (Ireru, Kung'u & Muriithi, 2020; Mulholland & Eagles, 2002). The use of a community-based tourism approach has been suggested as a way to empower communities (Makwindi & Ndlovu, 2021; Timothy, 2002). Kiss (2004) notes that community based ecotourism is a way to benefit local communities. Community based ecotourism projects motivate communities to reduce their exploitation of wild plants and animal species, and to help reduce illegal hunting (Kiss, 2004). Ecotourism has thus been linked to sustainable development initiatives, community development strategies, and protected area conservation efforts which is critical for wildlife tourism in protected areas (Stronza & Gordillo, 2008; Treephan, Visuthismajarn & Isaramalai, 2019). Many conservationists are against the direct and consumptive use of wildlife in ecotourism, but generally accept the non-consumptive use where tourists learn about wildlife and appreciate them in their natural habitats (Sinha, 2001). While it is widely acknowledged that the development of ecotourism involves a number of stakeholders, local communities are seldom involved with regards to participation in the decision-making process of tourism development generally (Garrod, 2003). Gasteyer, Flora, Fernández-Baca, Banerji, Bastian, Aleman, Kroma and Meares (2016) stress on the importance of the role played by local communities in natural resource management and sustainability.

Harmonious conservation relationships between protected areas and the neighbouring communities are consequently important for the sustainability of wildlife tourism (Mutanga, Vengesayi, Muboko & Gandiwa, 2015) given that local communities interact with wildlife tourists and wildlife resources in varying ways (Muganda, Sirima & Ezra, 2013). This connection could have ramifications for wildlife tourism's long-term viability and sustainability. Hence, when local people do not support wildlife conservation and tourism, they may neither comply nor cooperate with protected area authorities or even refuse to participate in wildlife conservation related programmes (Holmes, 2013), thereby threatening the sustainability of wildlife tourism. Disgruntled communities tend to engage in unsustainable activities such as illegal hunting, habitat encroachment and destruction (for example, through encroachment into protected areas and uncontrolled fires), and violence (Romañach, Lindsey & Woodroffe, 2011) all of which negatively impact on wildlife conservation and tourism. As such, outside of protected areas, wildlife is constantly vulnerable to host dangers, for example, illegal hunting, snare for the bush meat trade or harassment (Okello, Buthman, Mapinu & Kahi, 2011).

Although tourism can bring with it a package of many positive factors ranging from employment to overall economic development (Zuniga, 2019), many destinations have experienced significant harm thereby raising the need to move towards more sustainable tourism in destinations (Dodds, 2012). However, innovation is required to address these ecological, social, and economic concerns and to transition toward sustainability (Carlsen, Liburd, Edwards & Forde, 2008). Schaper and Volery (2007) posit that true tourism destination innovation is undefined and frequently influenced by external forces such as government policy, changing customer tastes, environmental circumstances, demography, technology, or social imperatives. The inclusion of stakeholders is critical to the long-term growth of wildlife tourism in a community. As such, understanding the perceptions, attitudes and stakeholders' interests is an antecedent to planning and managing of sustainable wildlife tourism (Byrd, Bosley & Dronberger, 2009). According to Cater (1993), the main aims of sustainable wildlife

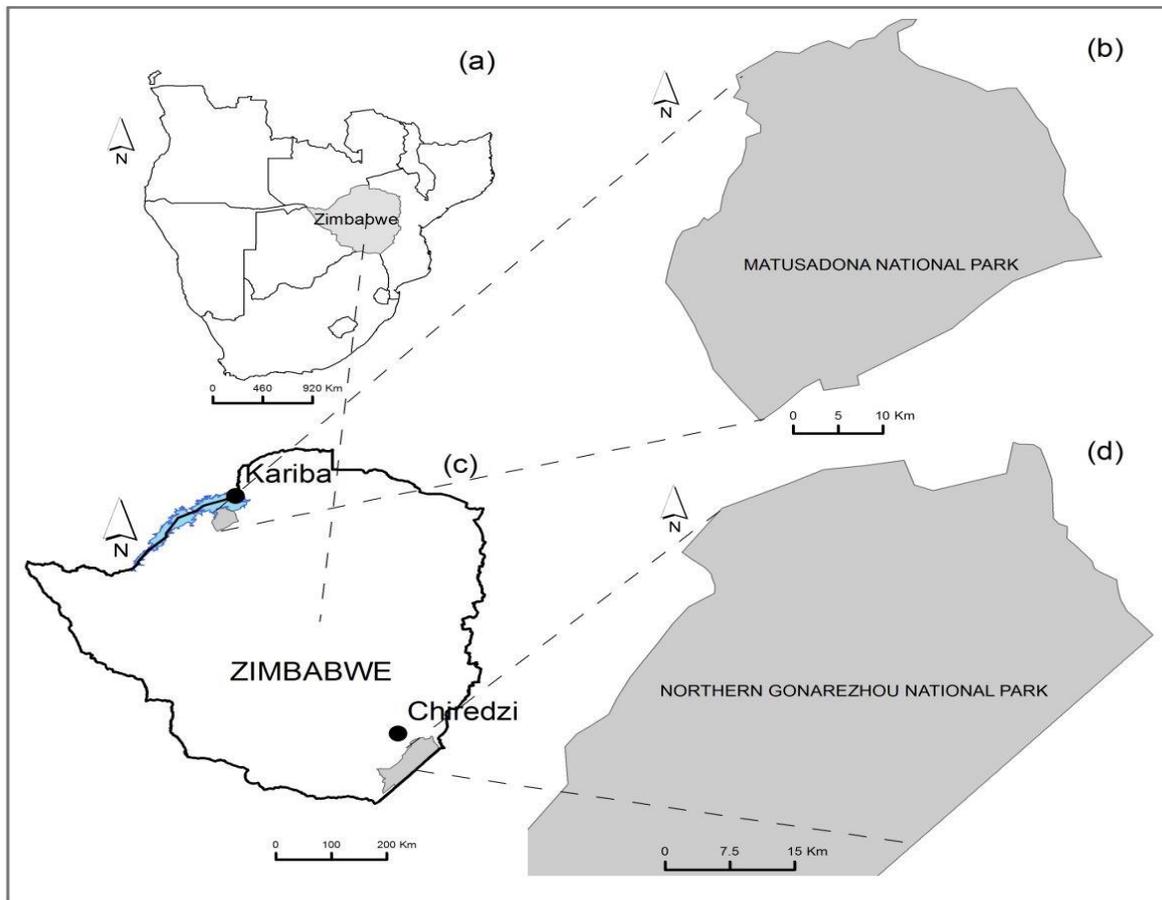
tourism include meeting the needs of the host people in terms of improving living standards, satisfying the desires of an increasing number of tourists, and protecting the natural environment.

Creating awareness about the threats to the sustainability of wildlife tourism thus may influence response actions that reduce the negative consequences that may accompany the exigent need to tackle various environmental or conservation pressures such as uncontrolled fires and illegal hunting (Ityavyar & Thomas, 2012). According to Ballantyne, Packer and Falk (2009), management practices that involve the tourist are likely to be successful in meeting both tourist and wildlife interests, hence it is important to investigate tourists' perceptions about the threats that are facing wildlife conservation. Limited research has been conducted on the factors that influence the sustainability of wildlife tourism and the perceptions of tourists on threats to wildlife tourism (e.g., Hillery, Nancarrow, Griffin & Syme, 2001; Muboko et al., 2016). The objective of this study was, therefore, to determine tourist perceptions on the threats to wildlife tourism and its sustainability. While the tourism industry is currently crippled by the COVID-19 pandemic (Rogerson, Lekgau, Mashapa & Rogerson, 2021), results from this study could be valuable in informing future decisions on planning, monitoring, marketing and evaluating programmes and activities related to wildlife conservation and tourism initiatives post COVID-19. Results could also help inform policy makers of the contemporary issues in the field of sustainable development, thereby expanding policymakers' knowledge base in reacting to problems thereof.

## **Methods**

### ***Study sites***

Gonarezhou and Matusadona National Parks (Figure 1; Table 1) were chosen due to their diverse wildlife species, abundant wild animals and unique wilderness characteristics. Moreover, we chose these large state protected areas as they give some long history of conservation and tourism and have some external support for conservation. The two parks are also part of the Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs) initiatives that seek to promote and facilitate regional peace, tourism, cooperation and socio-economic development of Southern Africa. Gonarezhou National Park is part of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area, while Matusadona National Park is part of the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area.



**Figure 1:** (a) Location of Zimbabwe in Southern Africa; (b) Geographical location of Matusadona National Park and Northern Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe; (c) Matusadona National Park; and (d) Northern Gonarezhou National Park.

Considering similarities in environmental factors such as wilderness and remoteness, and presence of local communities adjacent to park boundaries, the assumptions were that the two parks have similar threats and are visited by tourists with similar preferences. For Gonarezhou National Park, this study focused on the northern section known as Chipinda Pools.

**Table 1.** General characteristics of Gonarezhou and Matusadona National Parks, Zimbabwe

Attributes	Gonarezhou	Matusadona
Status	National Park	National Park
Location	Between 21° 00'–22° 15' S and 30° 15'–32° 30' E	Between 28° 23'–28° 51' E and 16° 41'–17° 13' S
Ownership	Government	Government
Management	Public-private partnership (since 2008)	Public
Year established	1930 as a Game reserve, upgraded to a National Park in 1975	1963 as a Game reserve, upgraded to a National Park in 1975
Size (km <sup>2</sup> )	3,000 (Chipinda Pools)	1,400
Animal species	Diverse species of large carnivores and herbivores	Diverse species of large carnivores and herbivores
Tourism facilities	Tented camps, camp sites	Lodges, camp sites
Bed capacity	268	136
Other infrastructure	Roads, view platforms, picnic sites	Roads, view platforms, picnic sites
Average visitor numbers per year (2008 – 2015)	6,749	1,982
Tourist attractions and activities	Waterfalls, cliffs and natural water pans, game viewing, sport fishing and bird watching	Hiking and escarpment climbing, game viewing, sport fishing, bird watching, boating and canoeing safaris
Accessibility	By air through Buffalo Range Airport or by road	By air through Kariba airport, by boat from Kariba or by road
Adjacent communities	Include: Chizvirizvi (ward 22), Mupinga (ward 4), Chitsa (ward 5), Mutandahwe (ward 29), and Mahenye (ward 30)	Include: Nebiri (wards 7 and 8), Musambakaruma (wards 9 and 10)
Estimated number of households	6,749	2,395
Local languages	Shangani	Tonga, Shona
Sources of community livelihoods	-Small-scale subsistence and cash crop farming -Small scale livestock production	-Small-scale subsistence and cash crop farming -Very little livestock production due to tsetse fly prevalence
Ecotourism projects	CAMPFIRE	CAMPFIRE
<b>Potential conflicts between PAs and communities</b>		
Community benefits from PAs	Mainly CAMPFIRE benefits	-Employment benefits -CAMPFIRE benefits
Human-wildlife conflict	Loss of crops and livestock	Minimal crop and livestock destruction
Compensation for losses from wildlife	No compensation	No compensation
Community involvement in decision-making	Limited involvement only in CAMPFIRE management	Limited involvement only in CAMPFIRE management

**Source:** Extracted from Mutanga, Muboko, Gandiwa & Vengesayi (2016b). Notes: CAMPFIRE is a form of Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) project implemented in Zimbabwe. Due to NGOs and the private sector pulling out of many of the CAMPFIRE projects, the economic benefits to communities have declined significantly, and the projects have degenerated as model examples of ecotourism projects. Six or seven villages make up a ward.

### Data collection

This research is part of a larger study on tourism and wildlife management in Zimbabwe, with the goal of generating relevant information that will aid in a better understanding of the interactions between PA-community ties and nature-based tourism in developing nations like Zimbabwe. A close-ended questionnaire was used to determine tourist perceptions of the threats to the sustainability of wildlife tourism following Muboko et al. (2016). Seven items derived from literature review were used, i.e., illegal hunting, destruction of wildlife habitats, human-wildlife conflict, lack of involvement of local people in national park tourism, lack of benefits from the national park to local communities, negative attitudes towards tourism by local residents, and poor local community and national park relationships. The items were

measured using a 5-point Likert scale where respondents were requested to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that each of the items was a threat to the sustainability of wildlife tourism on the scale (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = undecided; 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree). We used this scale to determine the seriousness of the threats where 'strongly disagree' represented the least serious threats while 'strongly agree' represented the most serious threats.

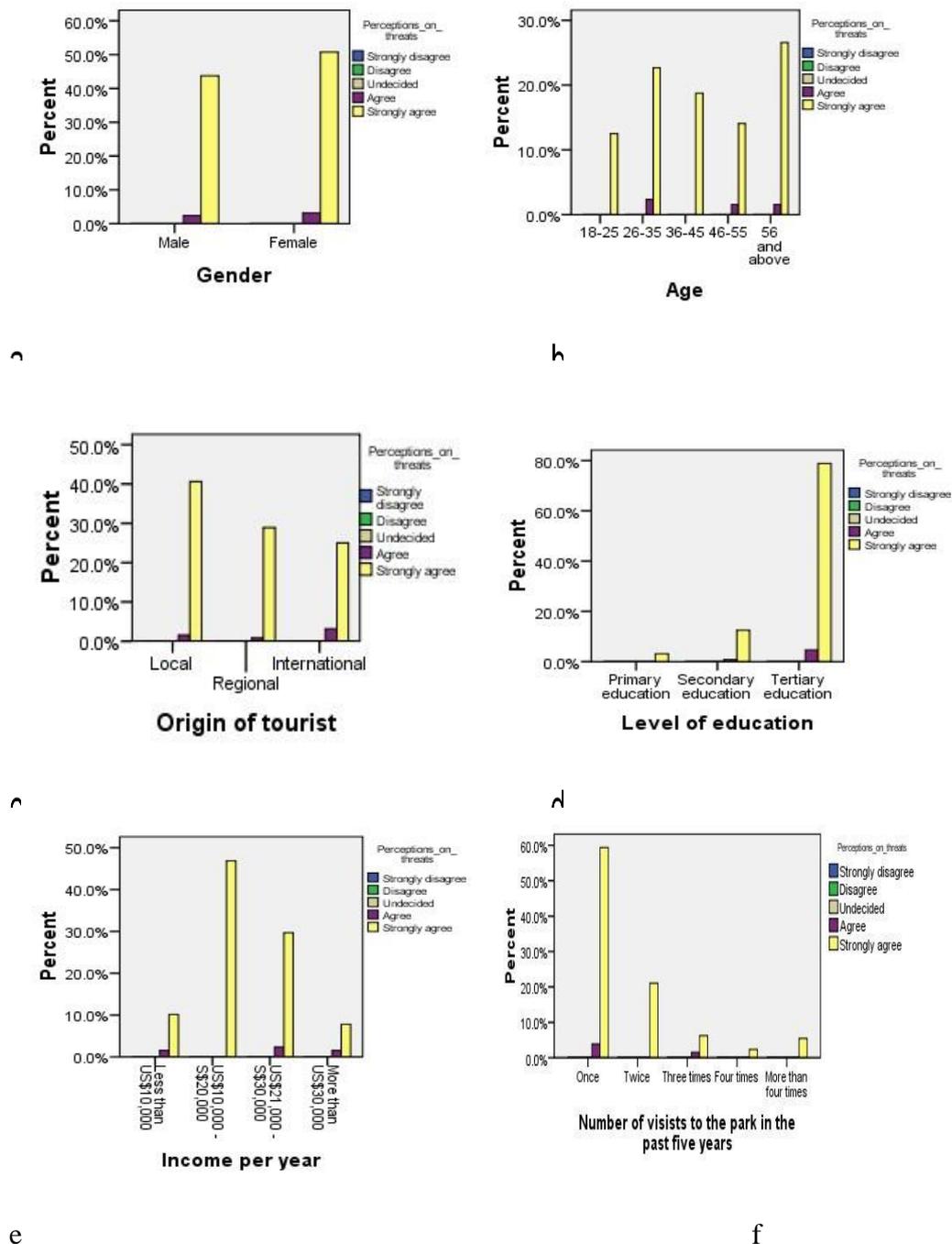
Data were collected in December 2015 with the target population for this study consisting of local and foreign tourists (day and overnight) who visited both Gonarezhou and Matusadona National Parks during this period. Convenience sampling was used to select respondents, where we targeted every tourist into the parks who was willing to take part in the study. Park staff at the park entrances who had been instructed beforehand about the study's goals and the specifics of the surveys administered the questionnaires to tourists above 18 years of age (commonly regarded the maturity age) as they entered the park. Where tourists were travelling in a group, all those who were above 18 years of age were invited to participate in the survey. Respondents completed the questionnaires at their own time and dropped them off at the reception as they checked out. Formal consent was obtained from every respondent that participated in the survey. Based on the tourist visitation statistics for the month of December between 2010 and 2014, about 279 tourists visited Gonarezhou National Park and about 117 tourists visited Matusadona National Park. Thus, a total of 119 questionnaires were distributed in Gonarezhou with 67 valid questionnaires returned (response rate = 56%; sampling intensity = 24%) whereas 72 questionnaires were distributed in Matusadona with 61 valid questionnaires returned (response rate = 85%; sampling intensity = 52%). According to Baruch (1999), acceptable response rate for surveys maybe about  $\pm 60\%$ . As such these response rates and sampling intensities were considered sufficient. A total of 46% ( $n = 59$ ) males and 54% ( $n = 69$ ) females responded to the questionnaires. About 28% ( $n = 36$ ) were above 55 years of age, and 25% ( $n = 32$ ) were aged between 26 and 35. Most of the respondents had university education ( $n = 67$ , 52%). There were 42% ( $n = 54$ ) local respondents, 30% ( $n = 38$ ) regional respondents, and 28% ( $n = 36$ ) international tourists. Local tourists travel from their normal and usual places of residence within the same country, regional tourists travel within a defined geographic region, such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and international tourists travel outside of their countries of residence, typically to another continent or any other defined geographical region (Tureac & Turtureanu, 2010).

### ***Data analysis***

We used descriptive statistics (frequencies) to determine tourists' perceptions of the threats. Pearson Product-Moment correlation coefficient was used to establish socio-demographic factors that influence tourists' perceptions of the threats to the sustainability of wildlife tourism. Kruskal-Wallis Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests were done to determine differences in tourist perceptions of the threats to the sustainability of wildlife tourism among local, regional and international tourists, and among different groups of tourists based on the number of times they had visited the parks in the past five years. Where there were variances, post-hoc examination was conducted on the mean ranks in order to determine the differences. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20.0 (SPSS, Inc, Chicago, IL, USA) was used.

### **Results**

All threats were generally indicated as serious by respondents regardless of their gender, age, level of education and income level (Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** Tourists responses by socio-demographic factors; (a) Gender, (b) Age, (c) Origin of tourists, (d) Level of education, (e) Income per year, and (f) Number of visits.

We recorded a few correlations between socio-demographic factors and tourists' perceptions on the threats to the sustainability of wildlife tourism. There were correlations between origin of tourists and tourists' perceptions on the effects two of the threats, lack of local people involvement in PA tourism ( $r=0.32, p<0.001$ ) and poor PA-community relationships ( $r=0.19, p<0.05$ ; Table 2). Correlations were also recorded between number of visits to the park in the past five years and tourists' perceptions on the effects three of the threats, illegal hunting ( $r=0.01, p<0.001$ ), destruction of wildlife habitats ( $r=0.11, p<0.001$ ) and lack of community benefits ( $r=0.33, p<0.001$ ; Table 2).



**Table 2:** Pearson product-moment correlation between socio-demographic factors and tourists’ perceptions of the threats to the sustainability of wildlife tourism. Values are Pearson correlation coefficient (r) and significant level.

Perception on the effects of.....	Socio-demographic variable						
	Gender	Age	Origin of tourists	Level of education	Income per year	Park visited	No. of visits to the park in the past 5 years
Illegal hunting	r=0.10 ns	r=-.13 ns	r=0.13 ns	r=0.14 ns	r=-0.15 ns	r=0.10 ns	r=0.21* <b>P=0.019</b>
Destruction of habitats	r=-0.22 ns	r=-0.06 ns	r=-0.14 ns	r=-0.10 ns	r=-0.14 ns	r=-0.05 ns	r=-0.31** <b>P=0.003</b>
HWC	r=0.02 ns	r=-0.09 ns	r=-0.10 ns	r=-0.08 ns	r=-0.08 ns	r=-0.02 ns	r=-0.17 ns
Lack of local people involvement	r=-0.05 ns	r=-0.11 ns	r=0.32** <b>P=0.006</b>	r=0.05 ns	r=0.27 ns	r=0.06 ns	r=0.06 ns
Lack of community benefits	r=-0.04 ns	r=-0.05 ns	r=0.02 ns	r=-0.08 ns	r=-0.01 ns	r=0.05 ns	r=-0.33** <b>P=0.007</b>
Local people’s negative attitude	r=-0.07 ns	r=-0.05 ns	r=-0.01 ns	r=-0.05 ns	r=0.06 ns	r=-0.10 ns	r=-0.03 ns
Poor-PA community relationships	r=-0.06 ns	r=-0.06 ns	r=-0.19* <b>P=0.028</b>	r=-0.02 ns	r=0.30 ns	r=-0.02 ns	r=-0.01 ns
Overall perception on threat	r=-0.02 ns	r=-0.04 ns	r=-0.12 ns	r=-0.03 ns	r=-0.10 ns	r=-0.09 ns	r=-0.02 ns

\*Correlation is significant at  $P < 0.05$  \*\*

Correlation is significant at  $P < 0.01$

ns = not significant

Our results from Kruskal-Wallis Test suggest that there was a significant difference in tourists’ perceptions on the effects of lack of local people involvement in PA tourism and poor PA-community relationships on the sustainability of wildlife tourism across different tourist origins. Findings further suggest that regional and international tourists had more conviction that lack of local people involvement in PA tourism and poor PA-community relationships negatively affected the sustainability of wildlife tourism (Table 3). Our results also suggest that there was a significant difference in tourists’ perceptions on the effects of illegal hunting, destruction of wildlife habitats and lack of community benefits on the sustainability of wildlife tourism across different groups of tourists based on the number of times they had visited the park in the past five years. Tourists who had visited the parks more times had more conviction that illegal hunting and destruction of habitats were threats to the sustainability of tourism. Table 3 shows the relationship between selected socio-demographic factors and tourists’ perceptions on the threats to the sustainability of wildlife tourism. Values are Kruskal-Wallis H test Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ ) and the mean ranks for the corresponding groups. Values with different superscript letters differ significantly (Kruskal-Wallis H test specific comparisons; \*\*\* $P < 0.001$ , \*\* $P < 0.01$ , \* $P < 0.05$ ).



**Table 3:** Relationship between selected socio-demographic factors and tourists’ perceptions on the threats to the sustainability of wildlife tourism

Socio-demographic variable	Perception on the effects of.....							
	Illegal hunting	Destruction of habitats	HWC	Lack of local people involvement	Lack of community benefits	Local people’s negative attitudes	Poor PA-community relationship	Overall perception
<i>Origin of tourists</i>	X <sup>2</sup> =2.31	X <sup>2</sup> =5.73	X <sup>2</sup> =3.38	X <sup>2</sup> =18.06***	X <sup>2</sup> =0.51	X <sup>2</sup> =0.51	X <sup>2</sup> =9.57*	X <sup>2</sup> =3.11
Local	61.52	68.00	67.15	55.43 <sup>a</sup>	63.57	63.33	57.38 <sup>a</sup>	65.63
Regional	63.95	62.95	64.68	70.29 <sup>b</sup>	66.13	66.34	68.69 <sup>b</sup>	66.32
International	64.44	60.89	63.33	72.00 <sup>b</sup>	64.17	64.31	65.30 <sup>b</sup>	60.89
<i>No. of visits to the park in the last 5 years</i>	X <sup>2</sup> =10.23*	X <sup>2</sup> =12.29*	X <sup>2</sup> =6.24	X <sup>2</sup> =2.93	X <sup>2</sup> =16.82**	X <sup>2</sup> =2.54	X <sup>2</sup> =8.14	X <sup>2</sup> =6.25
Once	54.68 <sup>a</sup>	46.84 <sup>a</sup>	61.60	63.35	48.92 <sup>a</sup>	65.19	66.25	64.05
Twice	61.52 <sup>b</sup>	58.63 <sup>b</sup>	69.50	67.41	58.76 <sup>b</sup>	61.91	62.22	68.00
Three times	71.00 <sup>c</sup>	55.00 <sup>b</sup>	69.50	58.50	66.30 <sup>c</sup>	58.90	57.50	65.20
Four times	71.00 <sup>c</sup>	66.67 <sup>c</sup>	69.50	72.00	75.17 <sup>d</sup>	71.50	71.50	68.00
More than for times	63.86 <sup>b</sup>	72.86 <sup>d</sup>	69.50	72.00	78.21 <sup>d</sup>	71.50	71.50	68.00

## Discussion

All threats were perceived as serious by respondents. Milliken and Shaw (2012) and Gandiwa, Heitkönig, Lokhorst, Prins and Leeuwis (2013b) suggested that the sustainability of wildlife conservation is mostly compromised by high prevalence of illegal hunting. Similarly, it has been reported that tourists are also concerned about illegal hunting and its impact on wildlife conservation and tourism (Muboko et al., 2016). Accordingly, UNWTO (2015) reported that illegal hunting has a detrimental impact on the tourism experience because of reduced wildlife species numbers and a low rate of tourist-wild animal encounters or sightings. Moreover, habitat loss and destruction due to human encroachment and wildfires has remained the leading threats to biodiversity and have probably become the most common causes for the annihilation of species (Mamo & Bekele, 2011).

Furthermore, a contemporary tag-of-war between people and wildlife today is by no doubt positioned among the top threats to conservation in Africa (Treves & Karanth, 2003). For instance, it is a typical occurrence to kill wild animals in retribution for concerns with human-wildlife conflict. As a result, a variety of large carnivore species such as spotted hyenas (*Crocuta crocuta*) or lions (*Panthera leo*) have been eradicated in some areas as a result of human-wildlife conflict (Chardonnet, 2002). Earlier studies have highlighted that in some areas human-wildlife conflict negatively affects relationships between protected area and local communities which in turn leads to unsustainable behaviours by locals such as illegal hunting and habitat destruction which threaten the continued existence of wild animal species (Mutanga et al., 2015; Mutanga, Gandiwa, Muboko & Vengesayi, 2016a). Given that wild animals feature as a significant part of the experience in wildlife tourism (Ballantyne, Packer & Falk, 2011), it is likely that the sustainability of wildlife tourism is greatly threatened by the depletion of wild animal species and populations.

Our results show that tourists’ origin was correlated to their perceptions of the effect of lack of local people involvement in PA tourism with regional and international tourists having more conviction that lack of local people involvement in PA tourism and poor PA-community relationships negatively affected the sustainability of wildlife tourism. Tourist views on threats, wildlife tourism and conservation are shaped by framing in the media and hence perceptions can vary between local, regional and international tourists due to variations in sources of media used to gather wildlife related information (Gandiwa, Sprangers, Van Bommel, Heitkönig, Leeuwis & Prins, 2014). In this case, regional and international tourists could be taking the global perspective that if locals are not involved in tourism, they may not have sufficient

sources of income and may therefore resort to illegal harvesting of wildlife (Allendorf, Swe, Oo, Htut, Aung, Aung, Allendorf, Hyek, Leimgruber & Wemmer, 2006; Tessema, Lilieholm, Ashenafi & Leader-Williams, 2010). This is also closely linked to PA-community relationships. It is globally reported that positive PA-community relationships enhance community support for wildlife conservation and tourism (Holmes, 2013). On the other hand, poor PA-community relationships may imply that local communities are not happy (Mutanga et al., 2015) and according to Ebua, Agwafo and Fonkwo (2011), unhappy communities tend to engage in activities that are harmful to conservation efforts, for example, illegal hunting or collaboration with external poachers.

Correlations were also recorded between number of visits to the park in the past five years and tourists' perceptions on the effects of the threats of illegal hunting and destruction of wildlife habitats on the sustainability of wildlife tourism with more visits associated with more conviction that illegal hunting and destruction of habitats were threats to the sustainability of tourism. When tourists are visiting a destination for the second or third time, they already have expectations of the destinations which are built from previous experiences (Rodríguez Del Bosque, San Martín, Collado & del Mar García de los Salmones, 2009). In this case, the encounters between tourists and wild animals which include viewing animals, photography and walking in the parks are part of important wildlife tourism experiences and tourist expectations from the parks visited. As such, seeing no or fewer animals than before, encountering carcasses of dead animals or snares set by poachers, livestock grazing in the parks or veld fires often lead to bad experiences (Mutanga et al., 2016a).

Our results illustrate that wildlife resources are threatened and point to the fact that sustainable tourism could be managed by locals. For example, CBNRM can empower local communities, improve rural communities' livelihoods, and change community attitudes toward wildlife resource conservation (Mudzenzi, Gandiwa, Muboko & Mutanga, 2020; Stone & Stone, 2020). Tourists in particular recognise that CBNRM / mitigation of HWC is important which again is encouraging. If tourists recognise that more needs to be done for community upliftment, then they will be happy to partake in cultural tours or may be prepared to pay a premium to visit Zimbabwean national parks so long as this revenue from tourists is ploughed back into the communities. However, a study by Mutanga et al. (2016b) indicated that there was no allocation or percentage of revenue from tourism for the communities. As such most of the studied communities were not directly benefiting from tourism in the PAs. On another note, Mutanga et al. (2016a) and Shereni and Saarinen (2020) also revealed that proceeds from CAMPFIRE did not seem to satisfy everyone, where local residents were only passive beneficiaries of income generated by wildlife that they considered to be the property of the Rural District Councils (RDCs) or the government.

Of importance to note is that this is a two-way deal; for CBNRM to work, communities need to stop engaging in unsustainable activities such as poaching or encroachment. This indicate to the need for innovative approaches to enhancing livelihoods through tourism especially through developing local economic activities considering that these communities currently have few opportunities for villagers to earn income. Lekgau and Tichaawa (2021) posit that community participation is crucial to attaining the benefits conceptualised by wildlife tourism. This could be done by coming up with innovative ways of establishing and stimulating community collaboration to produce local tourism products which could help conserve wildlife, educate communities, as well as maintain biodiversity. For example, improving or establishing eco-lodges within communities or community tourism products like village walks, provision of display places for selling handcrafts, and entertainment of tourists which can provide economical alternatives to destructive practices such illegal harvesting of wildlife. Community based tourism development can thus lead to the empowerment of local people that

ultimately results in sustainable livelihoods (Harilal & Tichaawa, 2020). Communities can earn much-needed tourism-generated incomes by working with community-based ecotourism programs, which replace revenue obtained through damaging practices like illicit game hunting, logging for fuel, and overfishing for food sources. Local people can be empowered through community-based ecotourism projects development, ultimately resulting in sustainable livelihoods. When employed in community-based ecotourism projects, tourism generated revenues can be earned thereby replacing unscrupulous income earning from destructive endeavours which include illegal game hunting, logging for fuel (deforestation) and overfishing for food supplies. These projects enable communities to come to the realisation of the importance of conservation of wildlife owed to the incomes associated with it. This is fundamental in promoting good local community and protected area relationships (Fischer, Muchapondwa & Sterner, 2011; Mutanga et al., 2015), which are important for wildlife conservation.

Strategic networks between Government authorities, conservation agencies, the private sector, Non-Governmental organisations, and the communities may play a significant role in supporting local community tourism and assisting local residents with the establishment and sustainability of their operations and activities, as well as informing continued community tourist development innovation. This could be through enhancing local capacity building in research, planning, and management of natural resources as this is important for sustainable tourism and profit realisation. Hitchner, Apu, Tarawe, Galih@ Sinah Nabun Aran and Yesaya (2009) point out that local organisations must direct the vision, pace, and trajectory of ecotourism development within communities. However, as Saurombe, Du Plessis and Swanepoel (2017) argue, for community projects to be successful, the community, supported by the relevant government ministries and the tourism industry, should provide strength and support for the projects like the tree does for the whole tree.

Overall, our findings indicate that tourists appear to be well-informed of the threats facing wildlife in Africa which implies that they are environmentally aware and are concerned about the sustainability of the wildlife resource. This is positive especially considering that about 100 years ago tourists shot every animal they saw in Africa (Lovelock, 2008). According to Zeitlin (2011), nature or wildlife tourists are often concerned about the quality of the environment and the sustainability of the resource itself hence their perceptions are important in inspiring innovation for sustainable tourism.

## **Conclusion**

The study aimed at evaluating threats to the sustainability of wildlife tourism and based on our findings, we conclude that all the evaluated threats are serious. We conclude that tourists' perceptions of the threats to the sustainability of wildlife tourism differ significantly across different areas of origin as well as number of visits to the parks in the past five years. However, no significant differences exist in tourists' perceptions of the threats to the sustainability of wildlife tourism based on gender, age, level of education and income. We also conclude that the fact that tourists are environmentally aware is positive as the tourists may be willing to support conservation. To enhance the conservation and management of the wildlife resource, park management can boost conservation and tourism benefits granted to local communities so as to promote positive relationships and peace between local communities and protected areas. It is also necessary for park management to increase law enforcement measures so as to minimise illegal resource harvesting. This can ensure that both wildlife conservation and tourism are sustainable. Wildlife conservation influences the future of travel and recreation considering that protected areas are increasingly becoming popular destinations for wildlife tourists, especially in developing countries.

The knowledge that tourists are environmentally conscious is encouraging as it may imply that they may be willing to pay large sums to visit wildlife areas and to support conservation of the wildlife resource. Elsewhere, in Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Rwanda, tourism has contributed to the conservation of mountain gorillas where tourists are estimated to pay about ±US\$600 for gorilla trekking (Higginbottom, Northrope & Green, 2001; IGCP, n.d). This indicates to the need for protected areas to continuously provide travelers with the seclusion and natural beauty that they seek in vacation spots to enhance good tourism experiences and positive perceptions about the destinations by the tourists. Thus protected area managers can engage tourists and encourage them to participate in or contribute towards conservation. Tourists can help in the monitoring of wildlife species by reporting valuable information such as species sightings and behaviours to conservation agencies. In addition, tourists can act as deterrents to the disturbance of wildlife, poaching or collecting firewood by local communities.

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