

Recent wildlife documentaries affect public understanding of wider conservation

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Research led by the University of Kent's Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE) has found that the personification of animals in recent wildlife documentaries leads to significant

misinformation and creates problems for public understanding of wider conservation.

In a [research paper](#) published by *People and Nature*, Professor Keith Somerville (DICE), Dr. Amy Dickman, Dr. Paul Johnson (both from the Wildlife Conservation Research Unit, University of Oxford), and Professor Adam Hart (University of Gloucestershire) argue that the portrayal of charismatic animals in nature films, while entertaining, risks the propagation of misconceptions about nature and [conservation](#).

A common theme recognized through analysis was the portrayal of animals and their behavior as though they have similar minds, motivations and personalities as people (anthropomorphism). Further to this, false jeopardy, where normal situations in animals' lives are presented as though they are unusual and far more dangerous than they really are, was commonly used to create suspense.

Nature documentaries are ever popular for informing people's knowledge of the [natural](#) world, and influencing their understanding of wildlife, species and habitats. Yet, with conservation increasingly relying on [public support](#), the researchers stress the importance of people being presented with factually correct information through nature documentaries.

Professor Somerville said: 'Natural history documentaries are the closest many will get to seeing featured animals and their behavior in the wild. They are a significant source of information to highlight wildlife, conservation, and environmental issues. Therefore, it is critical that rather than framing 'stories' as soap operas to gain emotive impact, more focus is given to showing the true problems that exist in the [natural world](#) today.'

More information: Keith Somerville et al, Soap operas will not wash

for wildlife, *People and Nature* (2021). DOI: [10.1002/pan3.10202](https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10202)

Provided by University of Kent

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