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Title

Flagship Species, Tourism, and Support for Rubondo Island National Park, Tanzania

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Date of Award

9-2011

Document Type

Open Access Dissertation

Degree Name

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Degree Program

Wildlife & Fisheries Conservation

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Abstract

Two major goals of managers of Rubondo Island National Park (Rubondo), Tanzania are to increase the number of international visitors to the Park (and thereby increase revenue generated) and to increase support for the Park among residents of nearby communities. I investigated species preferences among children living around Rubondo and the wildlife viewing preferences of international visitors to Tanzania in an attempt to identify flagship species that Park management could use in marketing and outreach campaigns designed to meet their goals. I also assessed local interest in visiting the Park. As local flagships for Rubondo, the Egyptian goose (*Alopochen aegyptiacus*) and silver cyprinid (*Rastrineobola argentea*) appear to have the most potential among the species that I assessed (i.e., fish eagle [*Haliaeetus vocifer*], Egyptian goose, silver cyprinid, little egret [*Egretta garzetta*], sitatunga [*Tragelaphus speki*], genet [*Genetta tigrina*], monitor lizard [*Varanus niloticus*], spotted-necked otter [*Lutra maculicollis*], vervet monkey [*Cercopithecus pygerythrus*], crocodile [*Crocodylus niloticus*], hippopotamus [*Hippopotamus amphibius*], giraffe [*Giraffa camelopardalis*], and elephant [*Loxodonta africana*]). However, based on either range or limited aesthetic/behavioral appeal, I considered neither species useful as an international flagship. Among species on Rubondo included in investigations of potential international flagships for the Island (including the chimpanzee [*Pan troglodytes*], crocodile, elephant, giraffe, hippopotamus, vervet monkey, bushbuck, fish eagle, large-spotted genet, goliath heron [*Ardea goliath*], monitor lizard, sitatunga, and spotted-necked otter), few were concluded to have potential, either because participating visitors had limited "awareness" of and "interest" in viewing the species, local people had strong negative opinions of the species, the animals are not native to the Island, and/or the animals are more easily viewed in more readily-accessible locations. Local people generally had not visited Rubondo but wanted to visit. Not having visited the Park appeared to influence perceptions of the Park, wildlife tourism, and conservation among some participants. Recommendations for local and international marketing and outreach strategies for Rubondo are made based on the outcomes of the aforementioned investigations of local and international species preferences and interest in visiting the Park.

Recommended Citation

Stevens, Sadie S., "Flagship Species, Tourism, and Support for Rubondo Island National Park, Tanzania" (2011). *Open Access Dissertations*. 487.
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