



Conservation, mirrors and milkweed

Description

How misdirection is used to keep people from interfering with unpopular wildlife management practices

By **Georges Dupras**

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Anyone having watched David Copperfield has been mesmerized by his sleight-of-hand skill and considerable agility in **the art of misdirection**. Few are as adept as Mr. Copperfield at keeping the audience's attention away from what is actually happening in order to project some other illusion. This technique is also used by some officials in an effort to keep people from interfering with unpopular wildlife management practices.

Whenever a concerned citizen is critical of a management program, officials are quick to argue that critics should focus their energy on endangered species and the priority they demand. This is clearly an attempt to re-direct the critics' anger away from the issue that motivated the complaint in the first place.

Where do endangered species come from?

When the issue of species at risk surfaces, two components of the subject are usually overlooked. Firstly, how did the once plentiful species become endangered, and secondly, the status of the plant life or other food sources, vital to the species' survival. The time to protect a species is when it has no apparent need for our help. You see, our help always comes at a cost.

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Should *Ursus americanus* be listed as protected?

For the record, and in a perfect world, I believe that all species should be protected. A first step in achieving this objective would be by reverse listing the appendices of **CITES**, the multilateral treaty to protect endangered plants and animals. A second step would be redefining their present designation from a “resource” to something more appropriate.

Acknowledging that we live in the real world and contrary to what others argue, I would include the **American black bear** on today’s protected list. The time to act is now, while it is still plentiful. This suggestion has at times, met with comments I dare not repeat. It is often followed up by someone suggesting that I re-direct my energy on more pressing issues (misdirection).

The division of values

The illegal wildlife trade is worth between 7 to 23 billion annually (legal product sales of about 160 million). The cost of implementing proactive programs to protect wildlife, such as relocations, is but a fraction of that required to maintain reactive programs. The question remains – which is the better approach, waiting for the species to be in palliative care (CITES)* or while it is plentiful and enjoying the benefits of a healthy diverse habitat?

Our priorities are clear – more funds are invested in protecting species at risk (palliative) than in keeping species off the list in the first place (pediatrics). This is a political issue and has nothing to do with science or overpopulation. This goes to misdirecting blame away.

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Changing times (turbulence ahead for black bears)

The face of America is changing, and there are cultural traditions, far from our shores, that are having an impact on our black bear populations. Added is that the human population is expanding, and with each person comes more energy requirements. Failure to act in a pre-emptive way will result in increased loss of habitat and corridors. The American black bear is abundant today only because of its adaptability, a trait that humans now exploit.

COP-15 (disregard for biodiversity and people)

The **Biodiversity conference in Montreal**, and more particularly the issue of the **Technoparc**, is a prime example of what happens when science, logic, and the will of people counter political and corporate interests. Despite little if any public consultation, bulldozers were sent in to remove the milkweed** essential in the diet of the **Monarch butterfly**, a species at risk. This was a mean-spirited move done well before a single shovel was required for building on the proposed site and while preservationists were still attempting to communicate with officials.

COP-15 (what is said, what is done)

The Government’s disregard for biodiversity can be seen in its support for projects such as the Technoparc development and its tacit support for the **Royalmount development**. The latter has the intent to include an **aquarium**



within the site, this despite expert advice to the contrary and the knowledge that aquariums pollute substantially more than zoos. So much for the PMO's commitment to the protection of biodiversity.

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Closer to the illusion

Whether in the private or public sectors, in a letter to a constituent, or claiming to protect biodiversity at COP-15, misdirection undermines all other sincere efforts and bring us closer to an illusion.

* Set up in 1975 to protect the trade in wild animals and flora

** Little to any thought is given to the plant life essential to the health of the species it nourishes

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Georges R. Dupras has advocated for animals for over fifty years. A member of the International Association for Bear Research and Management (IBA), a Director of the Animal Alliance of Canada (AAC), Quebec Representative of Zoocheck Canada and past Board member of the Canadian SPCA, he worked on the original Save the Seal campaign in 1966 that culminated in the founding of the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) in 1969. Georges Dupras has published two books, *Values in Conflict* and the eBook *Ethics, a Human Condition*, and currently lives in Montreal, Canada.



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1. Animal Welfare
2. Opinion

Tags

1. American black bear
2. conservation
3. COP15
4. Georges Dupras
5. misdirection
6. Monarch Fields
7. Technoparc Wetlands

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