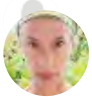


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Amanda JS Kaufmann

Nov 1, 2022

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Eight College Writing Students Ask about Sea Turtles, and Other Notes from Your Friendly Artist & Wildlife Conservationist

My last post was a bit of a bust, as I learned that the government doesn't want to share details about the work going on around endangered species. I do understand the wariness, as so much is misconstrued out there; on the other hand, as an educator, I'm sad, because **I love learning new things and feel it's important that people understand better what's going on to right the ship. Then again, when efforts fall flat, the darkness in me feels the ship can't be righted — not entirely (no duh) — so, fine, I won't say anything and to heck with it.**

No, I'm going to keep trying to move things in a positive direction, and on that note, I have a set of questions that eight college students submitted as part of their research for an essay assignment I've been collaborating on with a California State University East Bay colleague and friend. Aside from the prompt, the students watched this little video I made about **sharing beaches with sea turtles**

(https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zCrs4zI9plowknt99DMkwd4fAU3PxdMj/view?usp=share_link), and then they submitted questions for me to answer and to help guide them in their research.

I'm no know it all (far from it), but **these questions are the kind of thing I try to answer on an ongoing basis as a wildlife conservation volunteer. If anyone has better answers, I welcome them to join the conversation.**

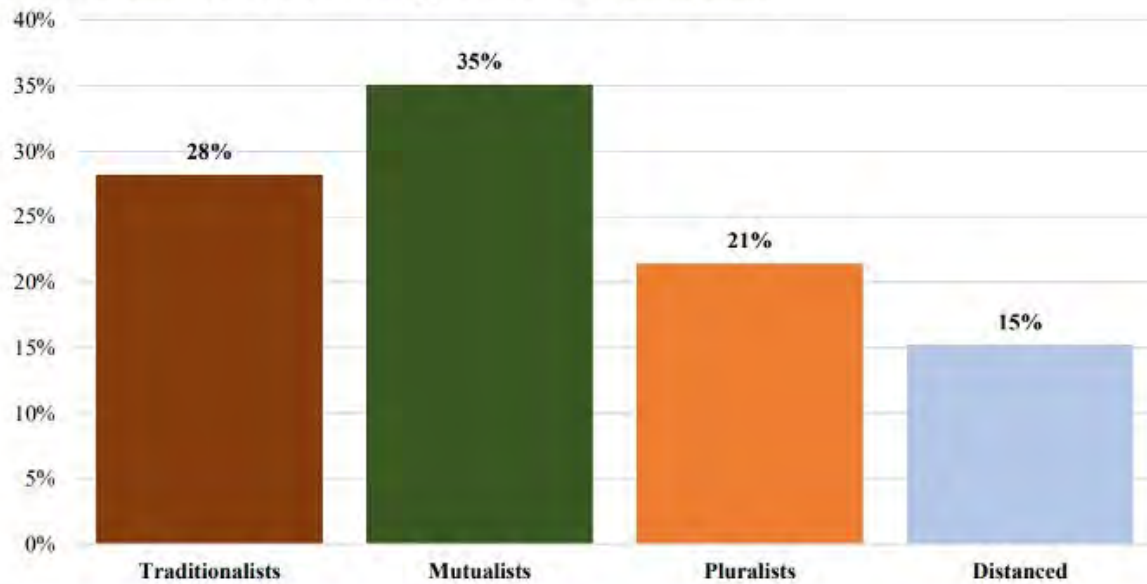
Notice how many times “the government” comes up in the students’ questions. Meaning that there is sentiment out there that the government should be involved in solutions. If only we weren’t so removed from what the government does ... But, don’t ask me, I can’t tell you anything ...

Here are two graphics (see the caption link for the source) to help you with your bearings before you read through the Q&A. **If you’d rather skip this Q&A, search for the subheading “Other Notes.”**

- **Traditionalists (or Utilitarians)** – Score high (above the midpoint) on the domination scale and low (at or below) the midpoint on the mutualism scale; i.e., they are the most extreme in beliefs that wildlife should be used and managed for the benefit of people.
- **Mutualists** – Score high on the mutualism scale and low on the domination scale; i.e., they are the most extreme in seeing wildlife as part of their extended social network.
- **Pluralists** – Score high on both mutualism and domination scales; i.e., different situations or contexts result in this group emphasizing one orientation over the other.
- **Distanced** – Score low on both mutualism and domination scales; i.e., they exhibit low levels of thought about and interest in wildlife.

What are your ethics around wildlife management? Can you guess mine?

Figure 2: Wildlife value orientation types across the United States



According to the study "America's Wildlife Values"

(https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Y0YUIwUTyB7Q4VcbaiDgyQGSAhVm2bk/view?usp=share_link), Mutualists have the most representation.

STUDENT 1

Why can't beaches where there are turtles be completely closed off to the public for the safety of the turtles?

>>>Hawaii's beaches are open to the public, except for any used by the Federal Government (military areas), so there is no precedent for creating wildlife sanctuaries. People, including tourists, would have to be willing to give up their access for the animals.

Are there any other factors that determine how we take care of wildlife on the beaches?

>>>Yes, for example, if you research sea turtle nesting in Florida, you will find information about how people have to adapt their behavior to not disturb nests and hatchlings. In this case (where it's more obvious to people what's going on with the animals), there is more shared knowledge about how to coexist with the turtles.

What effect does having a "Traditionalist" value orientation have when dealing with the care of wildlife on the beaches?

>>>Traditionalists put human needs ahead of wildlife's, so it would follow that a traditionalist would prioritize human utilization of the beach over the turtles' needs. That could result in shrinking perimeters around the turtles, animal displacement, or even harassment of the animals (sitting on them to take pictures).

STUDENT 2

What is the root cause for why turtles are resting on the shores of beaches? Are there alternatives? If not, what can be done to ensure their safety?

>>>Turtles bask (warm up under the sun) and rest onshore, not unlike a lizard on a rock. We're seeing more of these animals where people are because of habitat loss and the growth of the human population. Perhaps habitat restoration could be done, but that requires a lot of money and an emphasis on the turtles' survival, which people need to care about. Otherwise, people need to learn to share the same spaces, which requires valuing and understanding the animals.

What is the maximum capacity of people who can occupy a certain beach compared to the average number of turtles that occupy the beaches?

>>>NOAA guidelines are to give the turtles 10 feet of distance on land or in the water. Beyond that, it's just a matter of how many people want to pack into the remaining space, as there's no human capacity limit at this time.

If nothing is done to keep tourists away from sea turtles, what is the future for the turtles in Hawaii?

>>>If the turtles are harassed, they risk being stressed and injured and may leave altogether. Whether they find another suitable place to rest is then the problem, because their habitat is shrinking.

Are there specific solutions trying to be brought to fruition currently to solve this problem? Rather, is it from the local government or local residents?

>>>Residents are volunteering their time to set perimeters around the animals and

teach onlookers about the animals, all in the spirit of learning to coexist with the wildlife. To date, no government agencies have been willing to get involved in managing this issue.

STUDENT 3

What are some of the statistics that determine whether sea turtles in Hawaii are considered a part of the endangered species protection?

>>>It's a complicated process. See

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/endangered-species-conservation/listing-species-under-endangered-species-act>.

What has the government done to solve this issue of tourism affecting the habitat of sea turtles and is it working? What is the result of the government's actions?

>>>The Hawaii Tourism Authority has been working to do more messaging to tourists to "malama" (care for) Hawaii's natural environment. From my experience, though, there are many people who aren't clued into what's going on around them.

Are tourists truly the only factor to consider in this problem? What about the locals in the area? Although they may seem to take pride in their homeland and "know what's best" for the sea turtles and the "aina," are they also harming the wildlife in any way?

>>>Residents are more aware of the wildlife here, of course, but that doesn't mean they are doing all they can for it. If you consider fishing gear entanglements, that's a local industry problem. We also lack volunteers, which is something that needs to come from the local community.

Does tourism have a cause and effect toward the population of wildlife? For example, as tourism continues to increase and grow, has the appearance/population of these sea turtles continued to decline?

>>>Fortunately, the sea turtles here are still hanging on to their recovery numbers, but the beach resting activity is new and is a harbinger of habitat loss "things to

come,” so people need to start paying attention. Other wildlife in the area (myriad bird species, such as the shearwater) has been greatly harmed by development, and those species’ tales should not be ignored.

What actions have these conservation groups toward sea life or more specifically sea turtles done to support these wild animals and has it made an impact? Are these actions correlated to the in-field saving of the animals or the government aspects such as introduction of laws and rules?

>>>The small act of setting a perimeter around the turtles and having volunteers on hand to educate people has cut down on the amount of animal harassment — I’ve had many residents tell me how thankful they are that volunteers are there to help with this situation. These efforts fall under field efforts and only fall under the law when discussing the Endangered Species Act (where it is illegal to harm the animal).

STUDENT 4

How have tourists played a role in doing better? Do they ever come to realize what the damages are to the wild animals?

>>>As people come to Hawaii and experience the “right” way to behave around the wildlife, this is a message they can then share with others who will come here. So that is good. Whether they truly grasp the enormity of the situation is hard to say. These things take time to sink in for people, as many are swept away in the moment by the novelty and photo opportunity.

Do turtles have certain hours that they come to the beach? If so, can we have certain hours where tourists can come and visit?

>>>There are peak times when the turtles are on the beach (mostly when people are NOT on the beach), but the beach is open 24/7 for people to visit.

STUDENT 5

Why do beaches in Hawaii have the most sea turtles?

>>>Turtles “beach” in other places around the world, but the Hawaiian Green Sea Turtles reside only in Hawaii, so observing their behavior year-round is very easy to do. That may give the illusion that it’s more common here.

What should we do if we see a sea turtle on a beach?

>>>Stay 10 feet back and don’t shine white lights at (or use flashes around) them.

How is the government taking action in these cases?

>>>Aside from the protections around the turtles (Endangered Species Act), the government is not involved in the daily beach management issue shown in the video.

How does tourism majorly affect sea turtles, and how are they affected by the human activities?

>>>Unknowing tourists can unintentionally (or intentionally) harass the animals (as can anyone who’s unfamiliar with or uncaring about the animals). Otherwise, adverse human activities include pollution (see <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/great-pacific-garbage-patch>), which causes entanglements and plastics ingestion; toxic waste runoff, which also harms and/or kills marine life; and climate change, which is leading to sea-level rise/habitat loss and warmer temperatures that affect the gender of turtle hatchlings (see <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/aug/04/florida-sea-turtles-female-global-heatings>).

What are the threats to the sea turtles on the beach, and how many of them die because of this?

>>>The biggest threat is scaring them back into the water where their predators and entanglement hazards are — things they’re trying to get away from when they come ashore. Otherwise, there are mean-spirited people out there who have intentionally killed both sea turtles and monk seals in Hawaii. Read about L20 (Honey Girl) here: <https://malamanahonu.org/meet-the-honu/>.

STUDENT 6

How can tourists help improve/benefit the quality of living situation for the sea turtles?

>>>The biggest thing tourists can do is read about the wildlife where they're going and understand that wild animals need space and the least amount of disturbance as possible.

What should tourists do if they encounter wildlife?

>>>For the turtles, they should always seek to stay 10 feet away and not shine white lights or use flash photography around them. Tourists should also refrain from publicizing wildlife locations on the Internet to safeguard the animals from further human disturbance.

STUDENT 7

What has the government already done to help the sea turtles?

>>>The main thing the government has done is to protect the animals under the Endangered Species Act.

Are there specific beaches that these turtles like to go to rest?

>>>They do have favorite spots, which is the good and bad news. It's good in that they're allowing humans to figure out how to protect them in specific areas, but it's bad in that people learn about the areas and seek them out (meaning, more people go there).

STUDENT 8

When turtles want to lay their eggs, do they have a safe environment to do so? Can we figure out what beaches the turtles come to and be able to close them all off? In years to come, what are the beaches going to look like if we don't start now by cleaning up now and giving them habitat? They rely on beaches for nesting.

>>>The Hawaiian Green Sea Turtles nest mainly in the Northwest Hawaiian Islands (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northwestern_Hawaiian_Islands), and that area is a protected marine sanctuary that only scientists can visit. However, that land is slipping away to sea-level rise and is subject to marine debris washing ashore, which leads to barriers to and entanglements of the animals. No Hawaii beaches outside of military lands are off limits to the public, so it would require a lot of change for people to give up their spaces for the benefit of the animals, even though there are known areas where the turtles like to bask and rest. Should more nesting sites develop in the main Hawaiian Islands, that could lead to more higher-agency management, as trampling and bright lights would severely impact incubation and hatchlings trying to get to the water (where they look for the light of the horizon).

Other Notes

Speaking of **community support for wildlife conservation**, one of my very best besties was just visiting, and we splurged for pedicures. The spa employees were both very nice and chatty, and when they asked what I do and I told them I'm an artist and am involved in wildlife conservation efforts, they immediately got to talking about the turtles, which I told them I worked with. **They thanked me for my efforts (many passers-by thank me when I'm out there doing my volunteering)**, and they had ideas for how to manage the beach, such as using a bullhorn to make announcements, like lifeguards do. I noted during the discussion that we're not wildlife authorities, and that we could use more volunteers, in case they or anyone they know would be interested. And that's where we're at: **So many of these efforts are homegrown — they have nothing to do with wildlife authorities. So how can we all get on the same page about the right ways to coexist? Keep talking, as far as I can tell.** One of the employees mentioned she regularly sees the mayor out surfing, so maybe she'd try to get a word in about putting up some signage at least, as I had noted that would be a personal preference of mine: to have something permanent in place of a volunteer to supply information about the wildlife.

Seems so simple, but it isn't.



Thanks to my bestie Laura for coming to visit. Aside from getting pedicures, we laughed really, really hard.

*

For you art fans out there, I've been loading more images to my Society6 site (<https://society6.com/wordworthyphotos>), including this monk seal and these Hawaiian stilts. Like many species in Hawaii, both are endangered, but the stilts hang out right in the backyard along with the nene geese, so perhaps I'll prattle on a bit about them in future posts.



Please save the seals. Somebody.



The aptly named Hawaiian stilt.

In the meantime, I've starting making potholders and placemats like a 9-year-old girl. **Hit me up if you'd like to buy anything as a Christmas present**, because I do love working with my hands, something photography and graphic design doesn't fulfill. Though, please, buy prints too, because this artist would like to maybe cover some grocery bills too ... The Society6 site has wall art, tote bags, blank cards, shower curtains, and t-shirts/sweatshirts, and Society6 now actually pays the artists, unlike the pennies on the dollar in prior times. Progress!



Remember these weaving looms? Now that I have a crochet hook, I might become dangerous on that front too.

*

Before I sign off, I wanted to share some of the reading I've been doing (there's so much to read ...). I revisited *Koko's Kitten*, and I think everyone should reread this book, or read it for the first time. **I used to volunteer with the Gorilla Foundation, back in the 1990s, I think it was, and the abilities of Koko should not be forgotten.** Animals are smart, and they experience the world emotionally too. But I can't think too hard about that, or I get too upset about all the knocks and setbacks animals experience.

Willy Whitefeather was an author with the first publisher I worked with coming out of college. He's now dead, but his survival guide lives on, as it should, because he wrote it in the same spirit I approach my writings: to help.

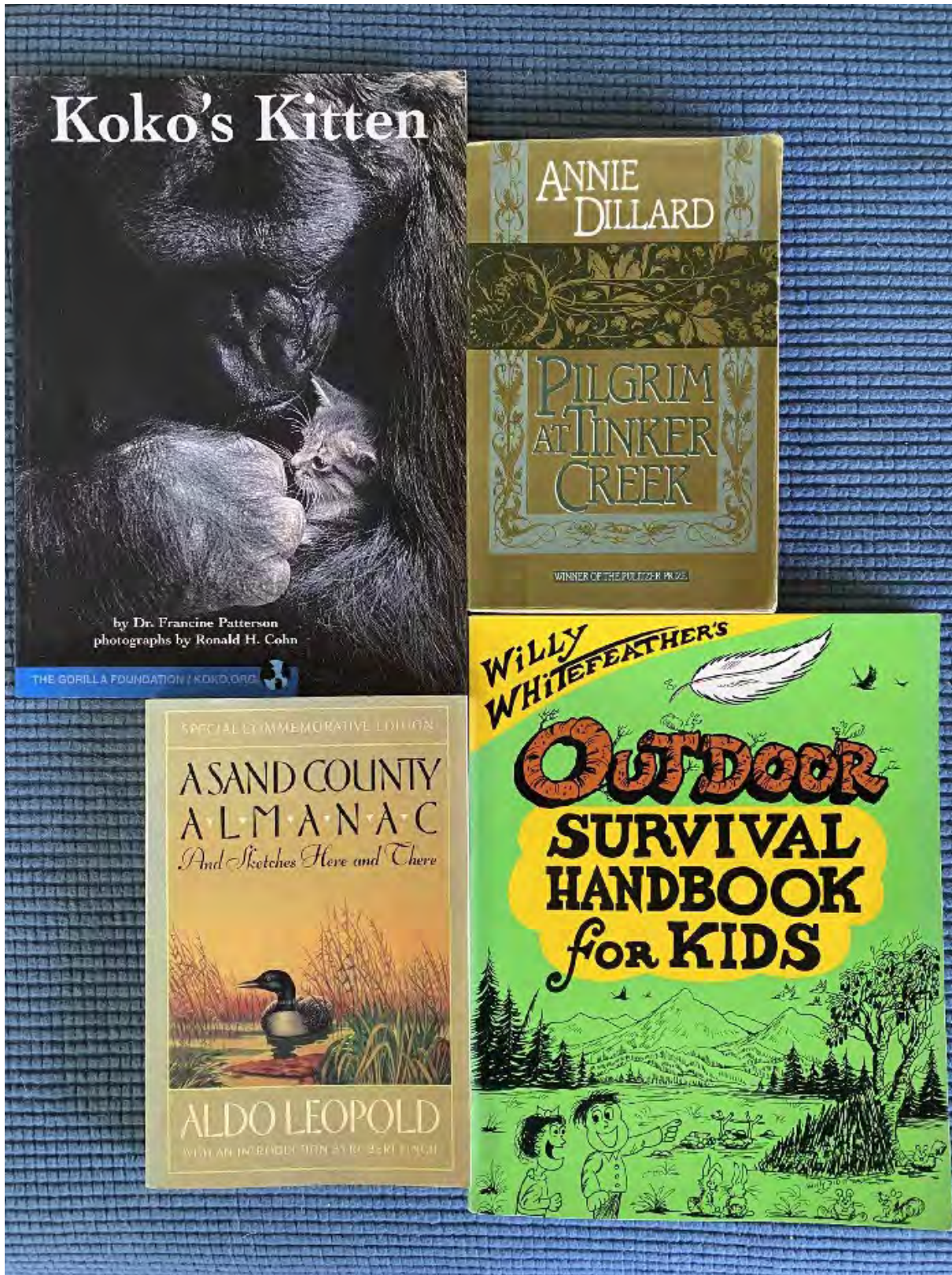
And I'd like to revisit *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, given to me by my high school bestie

in 1989, as well as *A Sand County Almanac*, which I annotated, so it must have been part of my college reading. I saved both books when we got rid of most of our stuff in the move to Hawaii, so I know they were quite meaningful to me.

What are you reading these days? I'd love to hear.

Take good care of yourself, and take good care of the animals,

Amanda



Revisiting some of my favorite books.

Endangered Species

Wildlife Conservation

Writing

Art

Hawaii

1

1

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More from Amanda JS Kaufmann

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Artist, educator, and Kauai resident Amanda JS Kaufmann talks story about her wildlife conservation efforts, all in the hope of inspiring positive action.

Jan 23

Art for Animals (Art with a Purpose) & Other Meanderings

Aloha from Kauai this fine January day, my mother-in-law's birthday, happy birthday, Pam! Even better, Pam is here visiting, a super special trip and my husband and I are so glad she made it out. I decided to write today in honor of Pam, because she has always supported art...

Art

5 min read



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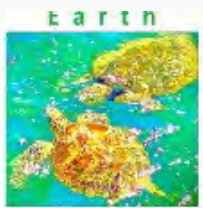
Feb 15

Special Edition #2: Free Kauai Wildlife (and trash) Information Flyer

When you're an educator at heart, you can't not disseminate information, and with that in mind, I am offering a free Kauai Wildlife (and trash) Information Flyer, specifically about the Hawaiian Green Sea Turtle and the Hawaiian Monk Seal. This will appear on the wall of our vacation rental soon...

Kauai

4 min read



Jan 26

Rest in Peace, RM28

One of Kauai's seals has died, a three-year-old female known as RM28. She was sister to RQ78, the little seal pup in my Baby Hawaiian Monk Seal artwork. I learned about this yesterday as I was gallery sitting, and I had to make a conscious effort not to cry. ...

Endangered Species

1 min read



Sep 4, 2022

On Becoming a Honu (Hawaiian Green Sea Turtle) Guardian

Prologue: "Species come and go," said the uninterested tourist. "Species come and go," said the overwhelmed person having a bad day. "Species come and go," said the wildlife conservationist, "but that doesn't mean we should accept being the reason they do or that we shouldn't try to help the ones..."

Sea Turtles

6 min read



Dec 16, 2022

And Now a Word from Monky, the Hawaiian Monk Seal

(This one's for the kids out there, and for the kid in all of us. ~Amanda) Aloha, my name is Monky, and Amanda asked me to write a post for you today so you could get to know me and my fellow Hawaiian Monk Seals better. Amanda seems like an...

Kids Stories

4 min read



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