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## **Don Quixote's windmills: technology, conservation and animal cognition**

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper will examine the paradox between increasing knowledge and fatal blind spots in our appreciation of the welfare of the planet and its flora and fauna. The presentation will be in 3 parts. In Part 1, views of nature will be discussed, especially current representations of animals in media, documentaries and film. It is well known that, when nature (with its animals) is described as dangerous and malevolent, an ideological position is espoused that is meant to legitimate destroying it. Part 2 will exemplify how knowledge expansion should help us deal effectively with environmental challenges. As an example, the paper will give detailed examples of the substantial scientific advances made in understanding animal perception and cognition. Indeed, we now know that there is very little in human behaviour that can be regarded as 'uniquely' human any longer. Examples from my own research will be included. Awareness of cognition and sentience in animals has provided a very important counter-argument against thoughtless harm to animals and in part, it will be argued, has led to welfare improvements and greater awareness of animals' needs also in the natural environment. Part 3 will attempt to uncover a Quixote-like modern paradox steering us in the direction of accelerated decline while continuing to proclaim and celebrate human progress in combating current environmental problems. Not even conservation philosophy or ecoethics has cut the umbilical cord of vested historical and economic interests of the Anthropocene, failing to critique the process of any 'progressive' technological innovation. The result is that decisive questions are not being asked anywhere in the world today. This silence contributes crucially to so-called defaunation. In particular, the paper will discuss designs of new energy saving or energy producing technologies, such as wind turbines, and indicate their flaws and their destructiveness of nature, i.e. sponsoring the assured carnage of even more animals than the world has now proclaimed to want to protect. The paper will conclude by saying that Western societies, even when allegedly subscribing to green ideas, have deeply repressed the thought that there might be questions about the costs of their own inventiveness. It is a taboo that is not acknowledged to even exist; yet it is in plain sight. In the present, we will need to find forms of communication that enable attribution of a specific kind of importance to flora and fauna in everyday life and in any innovative process.