

WILDLIFE RESEARCH NEEDS ETHICAL BOUNDARIES AND VETERINARY SUPERVISION

There are several documented, and many word-of mouth accounts of chemically immobilized and otherwise restrained endangered species like the Asian elephant and African wild dog being severely injured, killed or dying soon after capture and/or release. In some instances there was an association with the animals being injected with un-tested and un-approved modified live virus vaccines. In other instances the injured or killed animal was a pregnant or nursing mother.

Experienced veterinary supervision is called for especially when research biologists are loose in the field using drugs and vaccines on their animal subjects and applying various methods of capture and restraint which may cause serious injury, capture myopathy and even death.

Wildlife continue to be harassed, stressed, and subjected to these in-field risks so that tissue and blood samples can be taken (though DNA evidence can be obtained from feces and rubbing/marketing areas), radio collars and even cameras fitted, and microchips implanted. The generation of more scientific data from such field research may help advance careers and engender more funding, and give some substance to wildlife management schemes. But when the animals in question are put at risk, and there are no in-place regulations and effective law enforcement to protect and restore their existing habitats, and to extend same in order to help minimize accelerating loss of genetic biodiversity, then these wildlife researchers should cease and desist.

Such activities alone have nothing to do with wildlife conservation and at best give the false impression that something is being done, the foreign presence alone being a deterrent to poaching etc etc. Yet in reality from a bioethical perspective, the risks to the animals far exceed the immediate and foreseeable benefits. So I appeal to all appropriate institutions and organizations, governmental and non-governmental, for-profit and not-for profit, to encourage alternative, non-invasive wildlife research, and to cease funding and permitting any form of wildlife capture except for well justified emergency veterinary and conservation-translocation reasons.

Michael W. Fox BVetMed, PhD, DSc, MRCVS
www.drfoxvet.com