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Zoonotic transmission: Tourism at the animal-human-environmental interface

Explored in this paper is another facet of my nine-year research project, participant-observation in the small, but growing, niche ecotourism market —endangered non-human primates. My specific concerns are the possible tourism-related pathways of zoonotic disease transmission. Considered here, however, is a less exotic aspect of the animal-human-environmental interface, tourist contact with domesticated animals, i.e., livestock. Entering the United States, a Customs Declaration form is “signed.” Item 12 asks “Yes” or “No”: “I have (We have) been in close proximity of livestock: (such as touching or handling).” This paper delves the significance and possible consequences of Item 12 of the Customs Declaration form. Aspects of livestock as a “reservoir” of zoonotic transmission became apparent during recent travel in Peru. My research interest for this trip focused on animal-related tourist souvenirs. However, my attention was drawn to the activities of one traveler. A young person of high school age accompanied by relatives, petted every cat, dog, guinea pig, llama, or alpaca which crossed their path. Modes of disease transmission can be by direct contact, oral, reproductive, aerosol, fomate (contaminated inanimate objects), environmental (common source), or vector-borne: petting combines some of these. Over 200 zoonotic diseases are known—bacterial, viral, fungal, parasitic, or by unconventional agents. Disease transmission between animals and humans can be in either direction, animal-to-human, zoonoses, and human-to-animal, a reverse zoonoses, anthroponoses. As concurrent reservoirs, these diseases can be considered as anthroponozoonoses. According to the World Health Organization, “About 75% of the new diseases that have affected humans over the past ten years have been caused by pathogens originating from an animal or from products of animal origin. Many of these diseases have the potential to spread through various means over long distances and to become global problems.” In this complicated matrix, considered is the power of one.

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