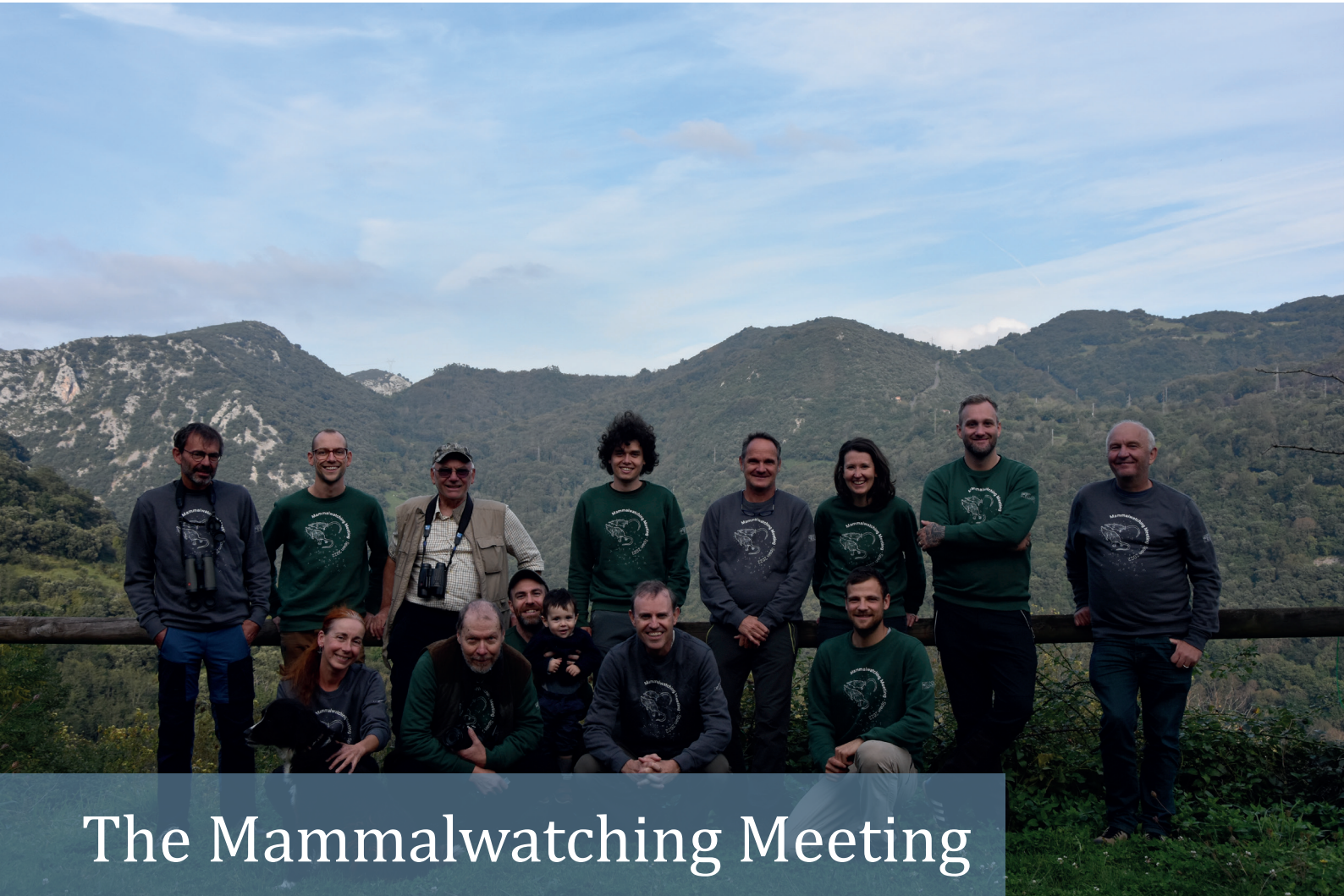




Wild Cat Conservation
projectfelis.org



The Mammalwatching Meeting

Participants: Jon Hall, Charles Foley, Quentin Phillips, Colin Slator, Martin Royle, Ruben Vernieuwe, Valentin Moser, Lorenz Achtnich, Manuel und Sophie Baumgartner

Online part: Andy Holman, Juri Miyamae, Janco van Gelderen, Jens Hauser, Alex Meyer, Mandy Jones, Trev Hughes, Lucy Hughes, Vladimir Dinets

Preface

This document is a summary of the 1st International Mammalwatching Meeting in Asturias, Spain from 30.09 to 02.10.2022. The mammalwatching meeting was a combination of discussions, presentations and mammalwatching. The latter is described in detail in the trip report on mammalwatching.com and thus we will not elaborate on the mammalwatching - although it surely helped to reflect on our ideas!

The purpose of the mammalwatching meeting was to bring together international mammalwatchers and discuss how we can make mammalwatching more sustainable and how mammalwatchers can better contribute to conservation. Beyond the discussions we aimed to also come up with some concrete actions for ways we can help the community contributing to conservation and practise their hobby in a more sustainable way.

We will start by summarising the presentations and then the topics discussed both in Spain and during the online meeting. In the end we summarise the actions we can implement as a community to make mammalwatching as beneficial as possible for our beloved mammals

The mammalwatching story

Jon Hall

Jon's legendary enthusiasm for mammalwatching made this oral recount of the beginning and the present of mammalwatching an excellent entry into the weekend. He described how he fell in love with mammalwatching and found a way to pursue his passion even when he thought he was alone. Jon outlined how he started the website as he did not find any resources to plan his trips or on where he could find certain species. Most information was scattered over numerous scientific articles. Progressively, he (and probably many others) began to realise that they were not the only mammalwatcher around the world. A community emerged and has continued to grow ever since. By now the website is a major source of information for mammalwatchers sharing information from all over the world

The website and the emergence of a community has made it possible to observe some species that were previously considered 'unobservable', such as the Snow Leopard or the Giant Armadillo. This is not only because people describe locations, but also because we have shared information on how to search for specific species, and the growing number of mammalwatchers means there are now cottage industries dedicated to showing people species such as Snow Leopards. Jon also talked a bit about conservation and how your visit to a certain area can start some mammalwatching tourism when writing a report and give the local people a sense of pride for the mammals and other wildlife in their local area. Mammalwatching can also directly support science when observations are recorded and shared properly. Jon also spoke about the future of mammalwatching and the website. He told us some exciting news that will shortly become visible on the website.



How mammalwatchers can contribute to conservation

Charles Foley

Charles Foley presented his views on how mammalwatchers can contribute to conservation. His presentation was built around 5 ways in which mammalwatchers can help conservation. During the presentation he gave examples how mammalwatchers could do good, but also what negative impact mammalwatching can have if done in an unsustainable way. Highlighting sites, like the village where the maned rat occurs, can increase local appreciation of wildlife and conserve such species in the long-term by establishing tourism. Researchers such as David Lehmann with Mandrill can finance their crucial work with visiting mammalwatchers. Places where there is no research project, there may be a small, efficient and meaningful conservation project that could be mentioned in trip reports and others and where a small donation from mammalwatchers can make a big difference. Charles also talked about carbon offsetting, mentioning projects such as

REDD+ (<https://redd.unfccc.int/>) which pays landowners to conserve their land and its biodiversity. This gives remote regions the possibility of a source of income as they may not be able to offer wildlife tourism. Income from mammalwatchers can exceed previous forms of more damaging practices, such as the examples of Jaguar ranches illustrate, where not shooting the Jaguars brings much more revenue from visitors than the additional loss of cattle due to the Jaguar. However, these activities can become unsustainable when animals are disturbed too much, such as in an example of Tarsiers, which modified their behaviour to avoid mammalwatchers. To avoid such negative consequences, choosing the right tour company is crucial. Besides conscious actions during the trip itself, compensating a trip by a donation and/or offsetting the carbon offset, as well as reporting your sightings should be further measures to make mammalwatching more sustainable overall.

Summary

1. Finding and highlighting new areas
2. Providing income at sites
3. Supporting conservation endeavours
4. Offsetting our impact
5. Providing data



Are mammalwatchers building big biodiversity benefits - why and how to report your sightings

Valentin Moser

Different ways to report lead to different data quality. Reporting your sightings on mammalwatching.com is a start, but to maximise the use of one's data is to upload where biodiversity data is collected in a standardised way, ideally with proof such as a picture or a sound recording. This is when the data can be used for things like a Red List assessments or conservation projects and therefore have the best impact. To choose an appropriate platform to record such sightings, Valentin introduced the TAPIR-Protocol.

Most platforms offer the option to report obscured and by at least reporting the most valuable observation, such as rare species or range extensions, reporting does not take much time. It is therefore often one of the best and easiest ways for mammalwatchers to contribute to conservation. Two popular platforms are 'iNaturalist' and 'observado'. Valentin uses iNaturalist, which is also a personal database and planning tool for trips.

How to choose a platform: TAPIR

- **Time:** How is the data collected
 - long-term?
- **Access:** Who?
 - other users?
 - relevant authorities?
- **Protection:** How?
 - protection of your privacy
 - protection of knowledge of guides
 - protection of "animal privacy"
- **Information:** Passed on to GBIF?
 - Global Biodiversity Information Facility
 - THE global database for biodiversity data
- **Recording:** Benefits to you?
 - Lifelist, stats
 - Pictures organized



The mammalwatching guidelines

Jon Hall

First, Jon explains why guidelines are needed: mainly because we want to encourage responsible mammalwatching. We can't enforce our guidelines, but we can try to be a role model and motivate people to pay attention to certain behaviours. The guidelines are based on expert knowledge from scientists who also mammalwatch.

Essentially, it is not possible to mammalwatch and have absolutely zero affect on the animals their environment. Instead, it's better to try to do „more good than harm“.

Last, but not least, please help locals appreciate the value of their wildlife and encourage them to protect the animals and their habitat. Try to be generous with your thanks and tips when you see animals being protected by a community with much less than you may have.

The basics:

- Avoid unnecessarily disturbing mammals and/or their habitat.
- Stay on roads, trails and paths where they exist to keep habitat disturbance to a minimum.
- Always respect local rules and customs about entering private land.
- Stay a sensible distance away from the animal both for their safety and yours.
- Using recordings should be done sparingly, if at all.

Spotlighting:

- Use the lowest wattage/lumen light necessary to spotlight in the relevant habitat.
- Thermal scopes and thermal scanners are less invasive than spotlights.

Trapping:

- Trapping should only be carried out in countries where it is legal to do so.
- Small mammal trapping should only be undertaken by those with sufficient experience to avoid unnecessary risk to wildlife. If you plan to trap it is important to first gain experience with experts, for instance by attending small mammal trapping training.
- Carefully consider the need for this activity before carrying out small mammal trapping.
- Traps should have suitable food for any species likely to be trapped.
- The biggest risk to captured animals comes from extreme temperatures. The traps must be prepared accordingly and checked regularly.
- Traps should be routinely cleaned, especially when moving them from one location to another.

Baiting:

- Baiting should only ever be undertaken sparingly.
- Live baiting is cruel and unacceptable.

Batting:

- Avoid disturbing bat roosts particularly at hibernation sites or when bats have young.
- Ensure that you wash clothes and boots thoroughly between visiting bat roosts.
- Catching bats, especially in mistnets, should only be undertaken by those with experience, permits and a wish to contribute to conservation.
- Do not use bright lights in bat roosts.

Reporting:

- We encourage sharing as much information as possible about interesting sightings, unless there are compelling reasons not to.
- Reports that are suitably circumspect about difficult identifications are of greater value to both science and the mammal watching community than cavalier identifications.

Guides:

- Encourage operators (and all others within the mammal watching community) to adopt these guidelines for the benefit of conservation.

Project Felis

Sophie Baumgartner

We kicked off the second day of presentations and discussions with Sophie Baumgartner, the president of 'Felis' giving a presentation about this NGO. She presented what 'Felis' stands for, what we are trying to achieve, how Felis was started and how the idea for the mammalwatching meeting started.

Manuel and Sophie had known for some time that they wanted to get involved with their beloved mammals. The idea of an own NGO crystallised more and more as the best way to do so. When they heard about a suitable project in Bhutan, it was suddenly crystal clear for them and it was the right moment to take the step and found 'Felis'. Their mammalwatching friends were all immediately on board, giving an extra boost of motivation.

The NGO advocates for wild cats and especially the smaller wild cats which receive less attention. By advocating for the top of the food chain, the entire habitat can be protected also because wild cats are great ambassadors.

Next to organising the mammalwatching meeting, Felis has very different projects which should fulfil this purpose. Felis supports research work by equipping researchers with camera traps, provides guidance on establishing sustainable eco-tourism, helps with awareness raising, for example in Brazil with a children's book or by constructing a hide to improve the appreciation about our local fauna in Switzerland. With our projects, Felis is involved in the protection of valuable habitats by giving more value to wild cats and all wild inhabitants.

Our Mission

- Supporting wild cat conservation with a focus on small wild cats.
- Raising awareness and creating value for key wild cat habitats.
- Protecting wild cats by collaborating with local communities and authorities.



The diversity of Bornean Fig trees and their importance for conservation and mammalwatching

Quentin Phillips

Next was the presentation of Quentin Philips showing the truly amazing diversity of Ficus trees in Borneo and how important they are for the ecosystem. He introduced his web-site <https://borneoficus.info> and showed us how they aid conservation with planting ficus trees in palm oil plantations or other places, significantly helping nature, as figs in Borneo are a keystone species, meaning they support a lot of species such as the Binturong. The binturong is one of many species that feeds almost exclusively on Ficus trees and thus suffer strongly from the destruction of forest for palm oil plantations. Planting ficus trees near these plantations significantly aids wild-life species that are dependent on Ficus trees both directly and indirectly.

There are 150 species of figs in Borneo. Some are tiny, others huge, some ripen all at once, others over a longer period of time. Quentin explains that figs can be used to promote eco-tourism: If you know the figs, you can predict which animal will eat them and when. He is currently working as a consultant and he reports on nurseries that grow various species. Quentin also revealed he is working on a book about Bornean Ficus trees. Considering his experience with writing other books on Mammals and birds of Borneo with beautiful illustrations made by his sister there is no doubt that this book will be an excellent guide to the wonderful world of Bornean Ficus trees.

THE FIGS OF BORNEO

A guide to Borneo's 150 species of wild fig trees, stranglers, lianas and shrubs



TABIN BORA

Sabah Ficus Germplasm Centre (SFGC): World's largest collection of living Figs



BENJAMINA, SECTION CONOSYCEA

Ficus benjamina: Stink Bug mimics fig

December 9, 2022

Some thoughts about the future of mammalwatching

Martin Royle

The last of our participants presenting was Martin Royle, the owner and founder of Royle Safaris (<https://www.royle-safaris.co.uk/>). Martin notices from his tour company that there are more and more mammalwatchers. But there are many more mammalwatchers not part of the community around the website. There are a lot of mammalwatchers who are for example focused on rare target species or have mainly the goal of a photograph rather than an observation. It would be good if these mammalwatchers were introduced to the guidelines of sustainable mammalwatching from the beginning. Especially also with regard to the ecology or conservation side of it. If mammalwatching is not done in a sustainable way, it could have a very big and negative impact.

When mammalwatchers do not support the local community by hiring local guides, local lodges etc. ecotourism could have a negative impact as local communities do not benefit from the tourism and have no incentive to protect the animals bringing in the tourists. This happens when the money goes to big companies instead of local communities and conservation projects. It is very important that customers of a travel company remain critical on these points. One should consciously choose a travel operator who wants to support local initiatives and addresses misconduct. Many tour operators of course do keep sustainability and local conservations into account, so it is important to do your research and look into the ethics of tour operators offering trips for big target species.

Identifying small mammals

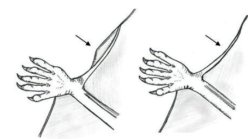
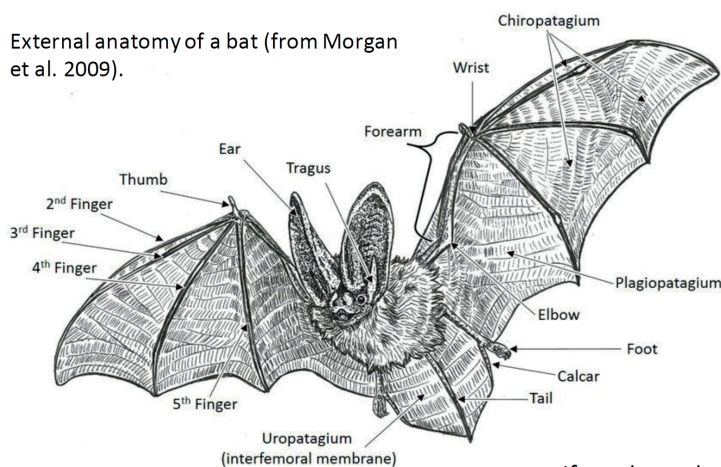
Vladimir Dinets

Last but not least we hosted Vladimir Dinets who gave an online presentation on identifying small mammals in the field. Of the roughly 6500 mammal species more than 3 quarters belong to Rodents, Bats and Shrews but are often disregarded as it is often believed they are impossible to ID in the field. As there are few good field guides, preparation can be hard but not impossible. But you have to do the work. With some key features you could get a long way. He was emphasising the importance of being able to estimate the size of the animals and the ratio of the head and tail for many mammals. Pictures are often a very handy tool as you can take your time looking at all the different features for which many observations are too brief. For instance, hair on the base or tip of the tail. Or the facial features of Horseshoe and leaf-nosed bats.

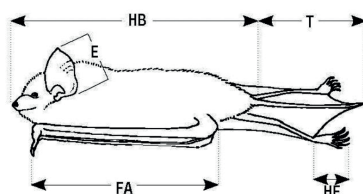
But also, some often hard to see characteristics like fur on the soles of animals with the good advice to check the tracks, especially in sand as animals with hair on the soles of their feet leave prints that are less clear than animals with naked soles. For many animals the teeth are also a very important feature which can be looked at if the animals have been trapped together with the plantar pads. Both difficult or impossible to assess if you don't have the animal in hand. For bats a very helpful feature is echolocation. Using bat detectors for recording and sonograms can often lead to a species identification if done properly. Calls are often species specific as they differ in frequency and components. Make sure to have multiple recordings of good quality as identifying small mammals can be hard. It is very important to prepare your trips very carefully.

With bats, everything is different.

External anatomy of a bat (from Morgan et al. 2009).



Keeled and unkeeled calcar.



Bat measurements (from Francis 2009).

If you have the bat in hand, look at the tragus shape, the ear shape, the calcar shape, the claws length, and check where the plagiopatagium attaches to the hind leg/foot and what the tail tip looks like (it can be free or fully attached to the uropatagium).

Beaver-Ecosystems

Valentin Moser

Valentin introduced his beaver-related beaver PhD. Beavers are ecosystem engineers, and as such, change their environment often in a drastic way, creating mosaic-like habitats. As biodiversity often profits from these activities, beavers could be an important tool to restore biodiversity. In his PhD, Valentin wants to assess the effect of beavers on biodiversity and ecosystem functioning across the land-water interface and ultimately assess the potential of beavers as ecosystem restoration agents.

He sampled 16 sites in Switzerland, both aquatic and terrestrial and in a beaver and an adjacent control area. He sampled different communities, such as bats, dragonflies and plankton, as well as environmental properties such as soil chemistry and ecosystem services such as decomposition rate. With this extensive data set, he now tries to find out how biodiversity and ecosystem services are influenced by each other and the beaver. Finally, he presented some preliminary results, showing that bat activity is higher above the beaver pool compared to control.

Research goals and expectations

- Assess the effect of beavers on biodiversity and ecosystem functioning across the land-water interface (blue-green)



- Assess the potential of beavers as ecosystem restoration agents



Topics discussed

We spent the afternoon discussing varying topics of mammalwatching and conservation. One idea that would help conservation is to encourage visits that support small-scale projects rather than big organisations: for many of the small conservation and research projects around the world, a little income can mean a great deal. Such projects are also likely to employ local people and so helping the community on a socio-economic level and oftentimes giving people a sense of pride that their region protects an important mammal.

We returned to the importance of the guidelines and felt that they could be communicated more simply and visually. We could encourage ecotour operators to share the guidelines with their clients. At the very least it might give wildlife guides something to point to if they felt they were being pressured by clients to act unethically.

The presentation of Charles and Valentin opened the discussion of providing data and when and how to do so. Providing data might put certain areas at risk of unsustainable tourism or certain species as they are vulnerable to disturbance or even poachers could use the data. This all led to the agreement that providing data is important but needs to be done responsibly. Platforms like iNaturalist and Observado take care in handling data in ways where the wellbeing of the animals is a priority.

Also, the trip reports hold a lot of data with sometimes very precise locations. We discussed the possibility of reporting not specific locations but general locations with habitat descriptions for vulnerable species. A document could be published on the website on how to report sightings, helping with writing trip reports and reporting observations on other platforms.

All in all, it was agreed that writing reports is still very important as this shares knowledge among mammal-watchers on interesting places and projects. We agreed that reports written about trips that had little success are equally as important and respected, as others can learn what might have gone wrong or so that we have a more realistic idea of the likelihood of a sighting. It was also stressed that people might be apprehensive about writing a report as they feel their English is not sufficiently fluid for writing a report. This is why we should encourage writing reports in languages other than English as there are some very good translating tools these days. Summarised, writing any report is better than writing none at all.

One way to stimulate the writing of trip reports is by bringing back the mammal awards. They were hosted in 2018 and had different categories, with the winner being selected for writing the most Notable, Unique, Tantalising, Tenacious and Enlightening Reports.

Since the community from 'mammalwatching.com' is only a small part of the active mammalwatching community, which is very international, information might not always be accessible for people as they speak no English. The idea was proposed to translate certain pages and guidelines to other common languages so it can be more easily read by mammal-watchers and shared with local guides and other interested people.

Travelling, which is a big part of mammalwatching, has an inevitable impact: Carbon emissions. But there are ways to limit the impact of this and one of the ways is to offset carbon emissions. There are many projects around which one can donate to that claim to offset carbon, but people often need advice on which ones are reputable. We could have regional coordinators looking into different projects and promoting the good ones on the website.

Online meeting

While the group was having lunch the online part got started with 10 participants from many different places around the world sharing their views and ideas on how mammalwatchers can contribute to conservation. It was very nice to see that the online participants overall had similar views and ideas with some very interesting additions. While having a very open discussion, we especially focused on reporting data, guidelines, the mammalwatching website and CO2 compensation. Some participants of the online part even volunteered to help implement our ideas by writing guidelines or a template for trip reports.

The ideas of the online participants were then presented to those in Spain showing that a lot of the participants had the same views on the challenges but more importantly the future of mammalwatching. We all agreed that guidelines are a delicate topic as nobody wants heavy-handed policing within the community, but with the growing interest, as well as a new generation of mammalwatchers, we all are aware of the impact we have and need to develop ways to watch mammals in a responsible way that does more good than harm. We came up with an animated version of the - something like an airline safety video - might be an effective way to promote them. Peer-pressure could also help to make sure people respect the animals, as well as mammalwatcher clubs or encouraging guides to follow best practice. Good practice could be highlighted on the website to promote guides that prioritise the well-being of the animals their clients want to see. New subscribers to the website could receive the guidelines, and there could be regular reminders on social media and the website to follow best practice.

We also discussed the 'mammalwatching.com' website, as this is the current heart of the community. The focus was especially on questions around how to make the website the best long-term contribution to mammal conservation. One idea was to have a permanent staff behind the website, working out new ideas. This could be financed by a (voluntary) membership fee, donations or advertising on the website. Contributions to the website could also be made by a group of motivated volunteers to take off some of Jon's shoulders. This group could also form special interest groups (e.g. primates) to support the website with information, organise online meetings for the community (e.g. to network and find trip buddies) and help moderate the website. Last but not least they could produce tutorials on how to use the website or help conservation with mammalwatching. Another potential function of the website could be to make species in trip reports searchable - this would benefit both conservation and trip planning. Local mammalwatching should be encouraged - we agreed that local mammalwatching can be excellent and is often underestimated and also of course more carbon friendly. When we travel, we should try to limit impacts by considering low-emission transportation and choosing lodges that work sustainably (such as using local food for example) where possible. Mammalwatchers could also support a carbon offset program. Last but not least: If mammalwatchers partner up, the slower low-emission transportation can be fun! Long drives and train rides shared with fellow mammal enthusiasts can be surely a good experience.

Concluding remarks

After the discussions both in Spain and online, we summarised our most promising ideas in a list of to do's with items we want to proceed with over the coming year. As Felis members are all volunteers, we are grateful to receive so much help from the community to implement the many ideas generated during the weekend. Felis will play a coordinating role to ensure the most promising ideas come into practice. Anyone can of course still volunteer if they want to help out with moving the community forward.

Felis would like to thank the participants and the guides Pierre and Fred for accompanying us in Spain and the online meeting participants for proposing great ideas.

Don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions: info@projectfelis.org



GUIDELINES

Revising the mammalwatching guidelines and make them better known.



AWARD

Revive the mammalwatching award with a focus on conservation.



SUSTAINABILITY

Encourage sustainable actions such as carbon offset, reporting sightings, supporting local projects and guides.