

A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF THE  
URBAN MINORITY ADOLESCENT EXPERIENCE WITH WILDLIFE

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ABSTRACT

An increase in urbanization has contributed to an increase in the general public's isolation from traditional uses of wildlife and led to changes in attitudes toward wildlife. Although the majority of people live in urban areas, urban wildlife has received relatively limited attention from public wildlife agencies. Additionally, the information that has been gathered is based on the attitudes of predominately White Americans in suburban environments. Ethnic minorities make up a significant percentage of the urban population in the United States, yet few studies have investigated the wildlife-related experience of these citizens. Understanding the urban realities and subjective meanings that shape people's lives is essential to effectively address the human dimensions of wildlife management programming in an urban environment.

Using a grounded theory research approach (dimensional analysis), I identified 5 conditions in the lives of the study participants (i.e., attitudes toward wildlife, demographic characteristics of the participants, socialization, place of residence, and wildlife encounters) which are important factors in shaping 5 general processes (i.e.,

connecting with wildlife, negotiating safety, selective engagement with wildlife, enduring wildlife, wildlife disconnect) that describe the differing experiences of urban African American and Latino adolescents with respect to wildlife.

The implications of these findings suggest that urban African American and Latino adolescents will demonstrate differing levels of engagement with wildlife management programming depending on their experience with wildlife, ranging from active engagement in wildlife management issues to complete disengagement with wildlife. These findings suggest that to foster an appreciation for the multiple values of wildlife and encourage supportive behavior for wildlife management programming, several conditions should be present in a developing child's life: 1) childhood access to and immersion in natural areas, 2) supportive mentoring from adults important in a child's life, 3) positive encounters with a variety of wildlife species, and 4) involvement in a variety of wildlife-related activities in a supportive environment.