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Does colour matter? The influence of animal warning coloration on human emotions and willingness to protect them

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Source: [Animal Conservation](#), Volume 16, Number 4, 1 August 2013 , pp. 458-466(9)

Publisher: [Wiley-Blackwell](#)

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Abstract:

The perceived popularity of animals plays a crucial role in their support by the general public and consequently in the success of conservation efforts. We experimentally investigated with Slovak schoolchildren the role of animal coloration and basic human emotions in the willingness to protect animals. Both unaltered and experimentally manipulated pictures of aposematic animals increased perceived danger. Spiders and snakes were perceived as more dangerous/disgusting than other taxa, particularly birds and mammals. Children showed significantly a stronger willingness to protect aposematic animals over inconspicuous, cryptic animals. Perceived disgust and danger of animals negatively correlated with a willingness to protect them with females showing greater fear of animals than males. Our results suggest that the use of aposematic animals in conservation programs may increase their popularity and public support.

Document Type: Research Article

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/acv.12014>

Publication date: 1 August 2013

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