

## Viral AI content – the new threat to Wildlife Conservation

Wildlife charities are fighting for survival - not just against poaching, habitat loss, and trafficking, but also against a flood of fake wildlife imagery that hijacks attention and buries the truth. AI-generated videos and pictures are going viral, engineered to tug at emotions and rack up shares. They show perfect, heart-warming, or dramatic scenarios that never happen in nature, while the gritty, real work of rehabilitation and conservation gets pushed out of the frame.

Social platforms thrive on engagement, and AI visuals are designed to deliver it. They're polished, emotional, and "shareable." A group of pangolins fighting a snake, a baboon riding a lion, a tiger cuddling a child - none of it is real, but all of it is irresistible to algorithms. Every viral fake pushes authentic conservation posts further down the feed, silencing the voices of those who are actually saving lives.

On an even more important note, true content by real organizations used to bring in revenue for the Non-Profit in question. But those 'imperfect' videos and imagery can no longer compete with the AI world of make-believe. This results in revenue loss and directly impacts the organizations which help real animals in the real world.

These dangerous Illusions are not just harmless entertainment. It's a distortion that carries real-world consequences, where wild animals misrepresented as cute pets fuel the demand for illegal trade. Where tourists and locals are misled into thinking wild animals are approachable, putting lives at risk. In real life, you cannot approach a wild lion or elephant or even just a porcupine without the likelihood of getting seriously injured or losing your life.

Fabricated interactions confuse the public about the natural behaviour of wild animals, trivializing the challenges conservationists face. If you face the reality of Wildlife Rehabilitation, you will know that real wildlife rescue is not glossy. It's messy, heart-breaking, and slow. Animals arrive injured, malnourished, traumatized. Recovery takes months, sometimes years, and not every story ends happily. These images don't go viral - they're too raw, too real. But they are the truth, and they are evidence of why conservation matters.

Humans would rather like and share an image of a couple playing with a full-grown lion, than support the work behind the real image – where a sedated lion is being operated on in the bush. Right there in the dirt.

If we're serious about wildlife conservation, we must value authenticity over perfection. Share the messy, real images that show the true cost of conservation. We have to question viral wildlife content. Especially if it has no references from a credible wildlife organization or news source. Especially if it's cute or awe-inspiring. If it looks too perfect, it probably is.

AI-generated wildlife imagery is more than a distraction - it's a threat. It distorts reality, fuels dangerous misconceptions, and buries the voices of those fighting to protect our planet's most vulnerable species. Real conservation is not picture-perfect, but it is profoundly important. In a world of short attention spans, we must choose to see, share, and support the truth.

We need to stand with charities, and help amplify their authentic stories so they aren't drowned out by synthetic spectacles. Wouldn't it be so much more satisfying if social media companies prioritized verified conservation content over AI fabrications? If you're in the market for a good time - There are many thousands of feel-good stories out there. Real ones. Find them, share them, support the work that resulted in those stories.

The attached image at the top is of a real veterinary intervention in the life of a wild lion. The bottom image is the one that most people would love and interact with, but it's not real.

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