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“Tuning In” to the Wildlife Conservation Society

An organization cannot be successful if the public is not aware of its existence. In order to make the public aware of its purpose and goals, organizations utilize television, the Internet, printed material, and even radio programs. Since radio programs are often short in length, a large amount of information must be presented in a minimal amount of time so that interest in both the subject and the organization can be generated. The Wildlife Conservation Society is an example of a successful organization that utilizes radio programs, among other forms of mass communication, to generate public interest in both the organization and the cause they are fighting for.

The New York Zoological Society was originally formed in 1895 to create a zoo for the public as a source of education and recreation, as well as to create interest in zoology and other similar subjects. Two years later, “the Society re-stated its purposes as public education, research in zoology, and the preservation of wildlife [History of WCS].” Over one hundred years later and recently renamed as the Wildlife Conservation Society, the organization continues its success as an advocate of wildlife preservation and sponsor of scientific research related to zoology. The zoo it was originally chartered to create, the Bronx Zoo, became one of several zoos and an aquarium in the New York area operated by the society. In order to generate new members and serve its educational goal, WCS sponsors many public events to inspire and educate, as well as publishing

Wildlife Conservation Magazine. Besides their public education goal, the society also sponsors research and many of its employees are involved in some form of animal research. The utilization of science is, according to the society, "the first and foremost tool used by all our experts in our mission to save wildlife and wild lands [Science]." The main goal to educate and generate interest in wildlife and conservation is readily apparent when one looks at the society's many publications, visits their zoos, or navigates their web pages.

Besides their many visual publications, WCS sponsors Radio Voyager Network, which was created by Finger Lakes Productions International, "a global leader in the production of environmental radio programming. [About FLPI]." Although this company produces other programs, only two are specifically supported by WCS: Nature Watch and Our Ocean World, formerly known as The Ocean Report. These radio programs, featured on many stations, can be heard in over 50 countries.

Although Our Ocean World does not officially announce that it is sponsored by WCS, WCS does state in its website that it features The Ocean Report, the former name of Our Ocean World, and provides links to listen to past programs. Nature Watch, on the otherhand, does state in every program and on its website that it is sponsored by WCS. The difference between sponsorship is indistinguishable on the WCS website; one might be led to believe that WCS is directly involved in both programs even though more careful research shows that WCS only directly sponsors Nature Watch and indirectly sponsors Our Ocean World by sponsoring its producer. Even though both programs are not equally sponsored by WCS, it seems that they are both supported by WCS because they accurately represent the society's mission to educate the public about wildlife and

wildlife conservation. This essay will now examine these two radio programs to determine how they are able to represent the society and generate public interest by analyzing the rhetoric of three main elements of the broadcasts: the words they use, their tone of voice, and the sound effects they utilize.

Words:

The words and phrases in these radio shows is the most obvious use^{of} of rhetoric. Many of the shows talk about a specific species of animal, discussing in relative detail a certain aspect of the life of this animal and often a detailed description so that the listener may more easily visualize it. These descriptions are never complete or describe every aspect of the animal, however, and most shows discuss different aspects of different animals. Often, one will feel the desire to know more than the tidbit of information that is given in the limited time of the broadcast, which is one of the most important functions of the show and a main goal of the organization that sponsors it, WCS.

A great many subjects are discussed on these programs. They range from certain animal species, to habitats, to human events and organizations involved with nature. A large variety of animal species are also discussed: both well-known and relatively unknown species. There seems to be no preference given to endangered species or animals that we generally look favorably upon. Even the much-hated mosquito has been featured in the past. After listening to the program about mosquitoes, one is likely to notice that the common view of mosquitoes as mere pests was not represented; instead, they were shown to be beneficial to other species as a source of food [NatureWatch "Mosquitoes"]. Other programs discuss human involvement in nature and how nature has affected humans. For example, some of the Our Ocean World programs discuss how

humans adapted to spending long durations at sea as sailors. A few shows in the past have specifically advocated that a particular species of animal needs to be protected, but a great many of the broadcasts do not. Despite this, one does not get the feeling that these other species do not require protection or are less important. Rather, there is an overall feeling that all animals are important and should be protected even when it is not directly stated. Having such a broad range of subjects that are discussed on these programs adds to the informative nature of the shows since no noticeable preference is ever given to certain types of animals, nor are certain types of animals noticeably avoided from discussion. In addition, it adds to the feeling the shows generate that all animal species are worth protecting, a belief held by WCS.

Tone:

The tone of the radio broadcasts is also a very important component of the rhetoric contained in these programs. The voice of the radio announcers of the two programs are very different, yet are suited to the type of broadcast that each program tends to be. From reading this essay thus far, one would likely believe that these two radio programs are nearly the same, differing only between aquatic and land-based animal life in their discussions. However, this is not the case as listening to these broadcasts creates very different impressions of the type of information that is being broadcasted. Listening to the Nature Watch program's announcer, one would likely assume that he is a middle-aged male. His tone of voice is pleasant to listen to, as if watching the animal in question in its natural habitat is a very relaxing and enjoyable experience. One might suppose that he is a frequent narrator of nature programs on the

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Discovery Channel as his tone is very similar. It is informative, but not monotone or boring.

Our Ocean World has an entirely different feel. One gets the sense that the program is similar to a brief news report as the information is often presented in this manner. Quite often a second person's opinion will be broadcasted as if the person had been interviewed, much like a news broadcast will interview other people for information about the subject being discussed. The tone of the broadcast is significantly different from the Nature Watch broadcast as well. The announcer is female, her tone is informative and serious, but also not monotone or boring, and she speaks slightly faster than the Nature Watch broadcaster, as if something is not done quickly about the subject in question, it will no longer exist. The news broadcast feel also makes the program seem much more important and current.

Sounds:

The many different sounds that can be heard in these radio programs are also an important aspect of the rhetoric contained in the shows. These radio programs use sounds relevant to the subject to increase the listener's awareness of the animal being discussed and its natural habitat. For example, an Our Ocean World show that discussed the ability of dolphins to recognize themselves in mirrors utilized recordings of dolphin sounds (Our Ocean World "Dolphin..."). Similarly, the Nature Watch program that discussed mosquitoes used recordings taken from a swamp to add the effect of where many mosquitoes originate. Recordings of mosquitoes were also used (Nature Watch "Mosquitoes"). In this way, the shows are able to make the listener visualize the habitat or the actual animal much easier than by merely describing them in words. In addition,

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valuable airtime is conserved by reducing the need to explain an animal's habitat when mere sound effects will suffice. Visualizing the animal creates much more interest in the listener because not all details can be visualized, which can make the listener want to know more to fill in those missing details and hence add to the interest stimulation factor, a main goal of WCS.

Conclusion:

From the careful use and tone of words, to the relevant and soothing background sounds, both of these radio programs, supported by WCS, have managed to outline the main goals of the organization without explicitly declaring them in words. The use of words is important because the shows, like WCS, are informative in nature, which they accomplish by being very descriptive, but only to a certain extent. It is left to the listener to learn more about the subject on his own. In addition, the programs discuss only the positive aspects of animal species, even those that are generally disliked such as mosquitoes. The background sounds play a major role as well. The soothing natural and animal sounds make it very easy for the listener to imagine the animal or habitat and make the listener feel like he is there, but only for the brief time of the program. The tone of the announcers creates very different impressions of the broadcasts, one being purely informative of events that are happening now and seemingly have always happened, the other describing events that are occurring now or will in the near future. The Nature Watch program generates interest in the subject, whereas Our Ocean World makes one feel action is necessary. Combined, the elements of rhetoric contained in these radio broadcasts show the educational incentives of WCS and their belief that all

animal life should be protected, while remaining entertaining for the audience and stimulating interest in both their cause and their organization.

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