

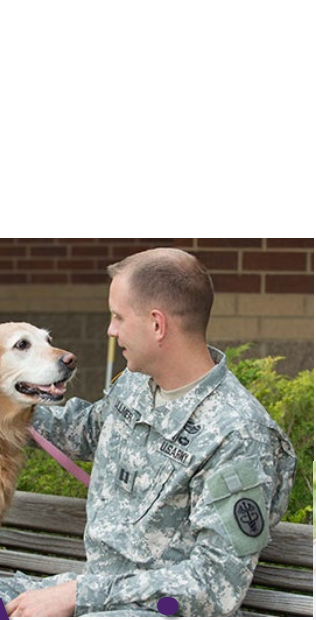
The Value of an Animal Encounter: Is it Worth it?



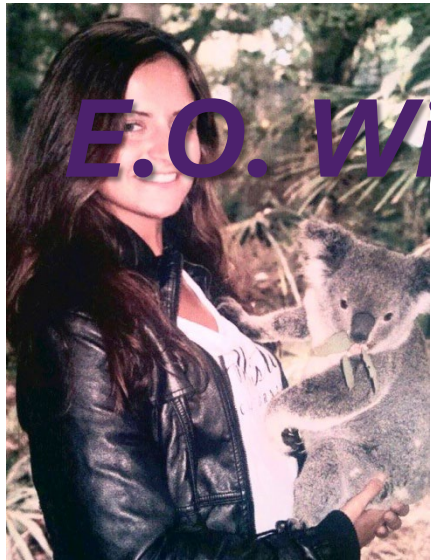
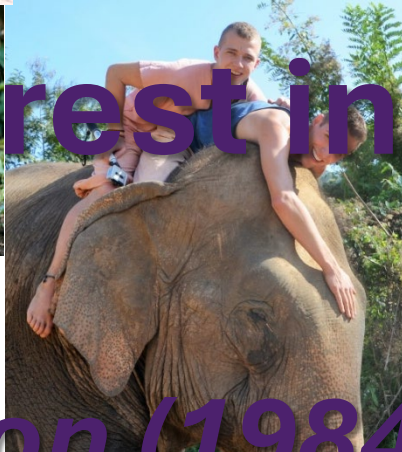
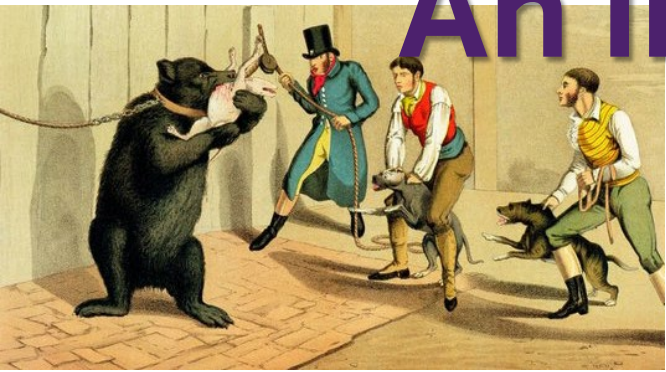
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BIOPHILIA: An innate interest in nature



CAPITALISING ON BIOPHILIA

- Zoos need funding - entry fees, sponsorships, government/council support, donations
- Getting close to animals is a popular reason for visiting zoos (Hosey, 2005)
 - Animal encounters (Doodson et al., 2024; Kreger & Mench, 1994)
- Analysis of 84 zoos/wildlife parks in Australia: 76.19% offer a paid animal encounter (Kemp et al., 2025)
- Costs ranged from \$5AUD (£2.5) to \$150AUD (£75)
- Visitors are obviously willing to pay these prices – but we don't know:
 - What value they place on the experience
 - The impact on the animals

DONATION GIVING

- Multiple approaches with donation giving boxes tend to be: broad category or species-specific
- Donation giving is affected by age, income, education, strength of compassion, and empathy (Bennet, 2018) and increased cost of living (Spooner et al., 2023)
- Zoos need to maximise donation giving, but must get them



DONATION GIVING

- Multiple approaches within the zoo – boxes tend to be: broad category or species-specific
- However, donation boxes have mixed effectiveness, depending on associated species (if any), placement, and design



AFFECTING CHANGE

- Bringing biophilia into the equation

Interactive experience = higher donations

- Taronga Zoo (Australia) bird presentation
 - Big crowds
 - Successful donation box
 - Conservation message
 - Invitation to donate
 - Bird taking donations from visitors
 - \$5+ additional incentive



VALUE OF AN ANIMAL ENCOUNTER

- Proof of concept

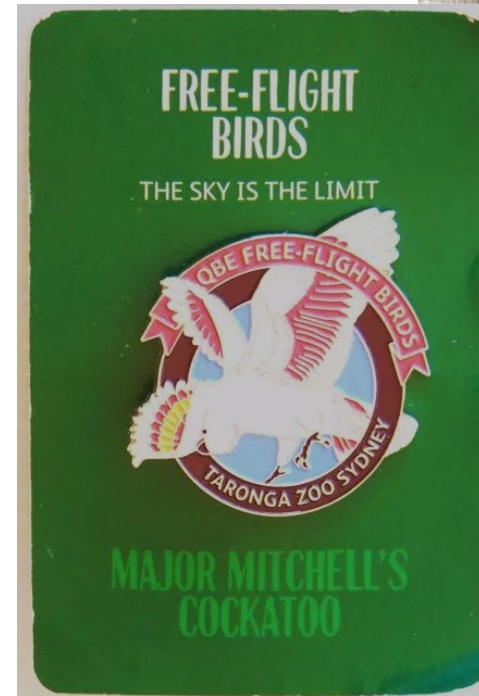
Interactive experience = higher donations

- 3 treatments with 2 conditions
 - Bird taking donation (Treatment 1)
 - Bird present but not taking donation (Treatment 2)
 - No bird (Treatment 3)
 - With “\$5+ = Badge” message (Condition A)
 - Without “\$5+ = Badge” message (Condition B)
- 19 trials per treatment, 6 of each Condition B

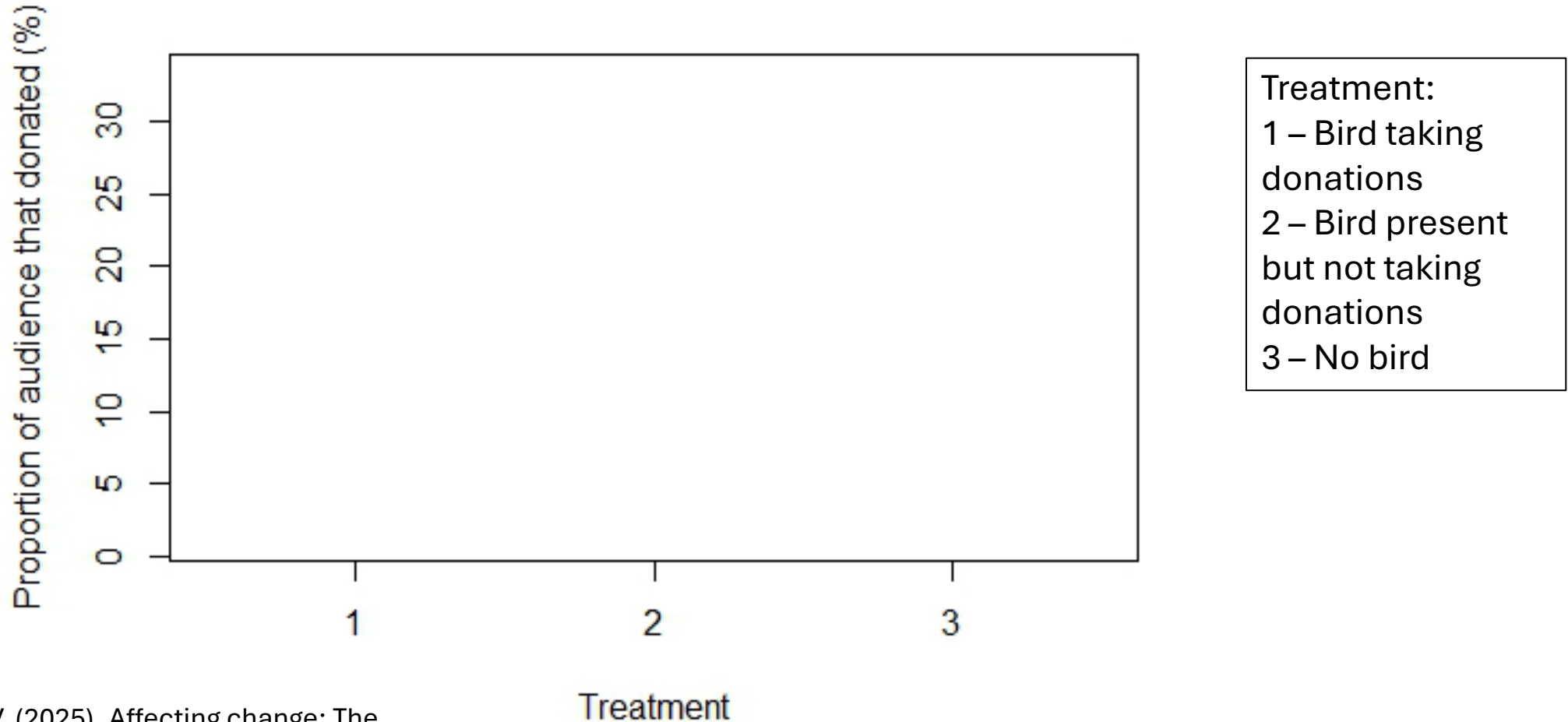


AFFECTING CHANGE

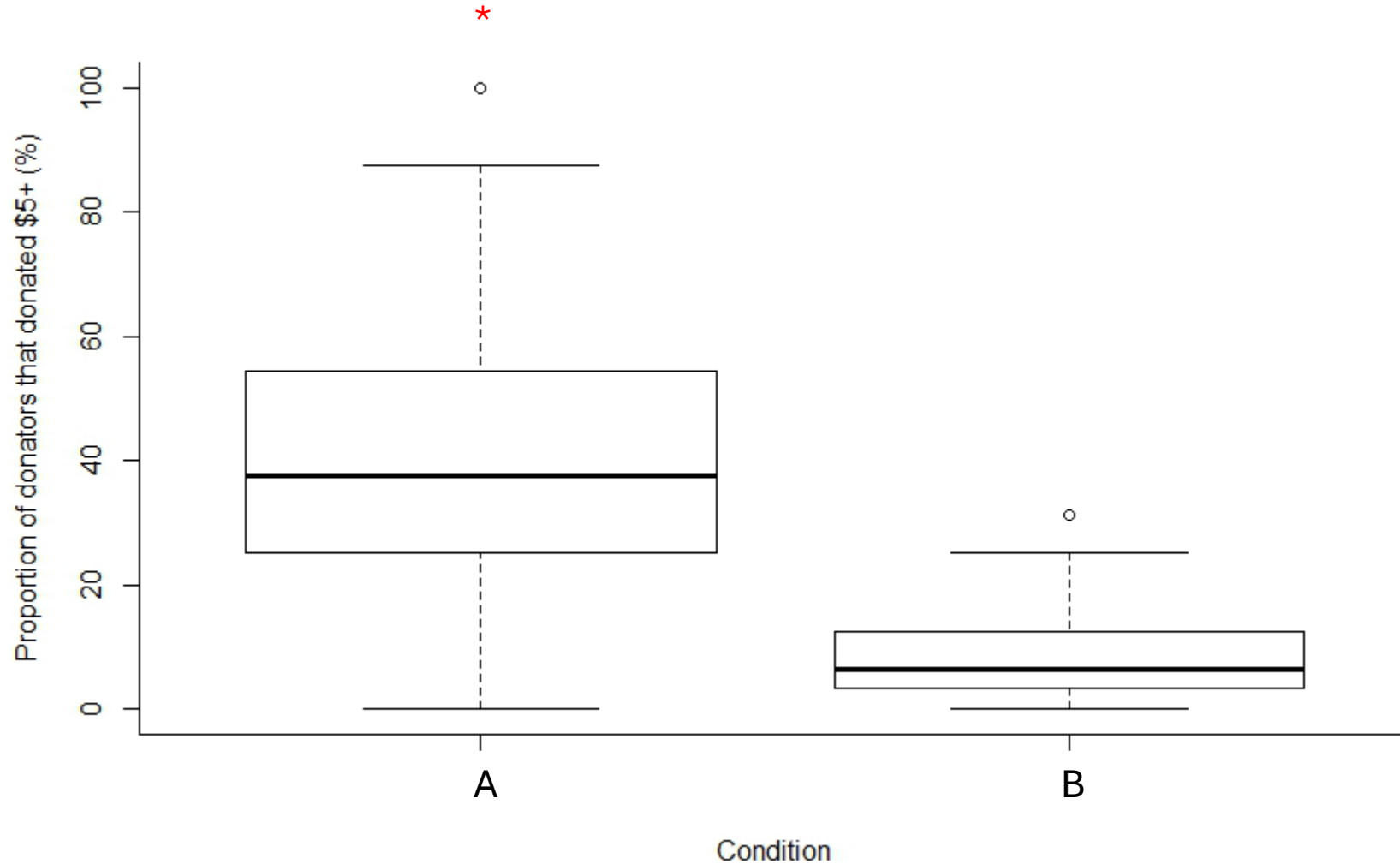
- Impact on:
 - Queue (as proportion of audience who donated)
 - Large donations (proportion of queue donated \$5+)
 - Average donations (per donator & per audience member)
 - Badge profits
 - Total takings



PROPORTION OF AUDIENCE WHO DONATED BY TREATMENT

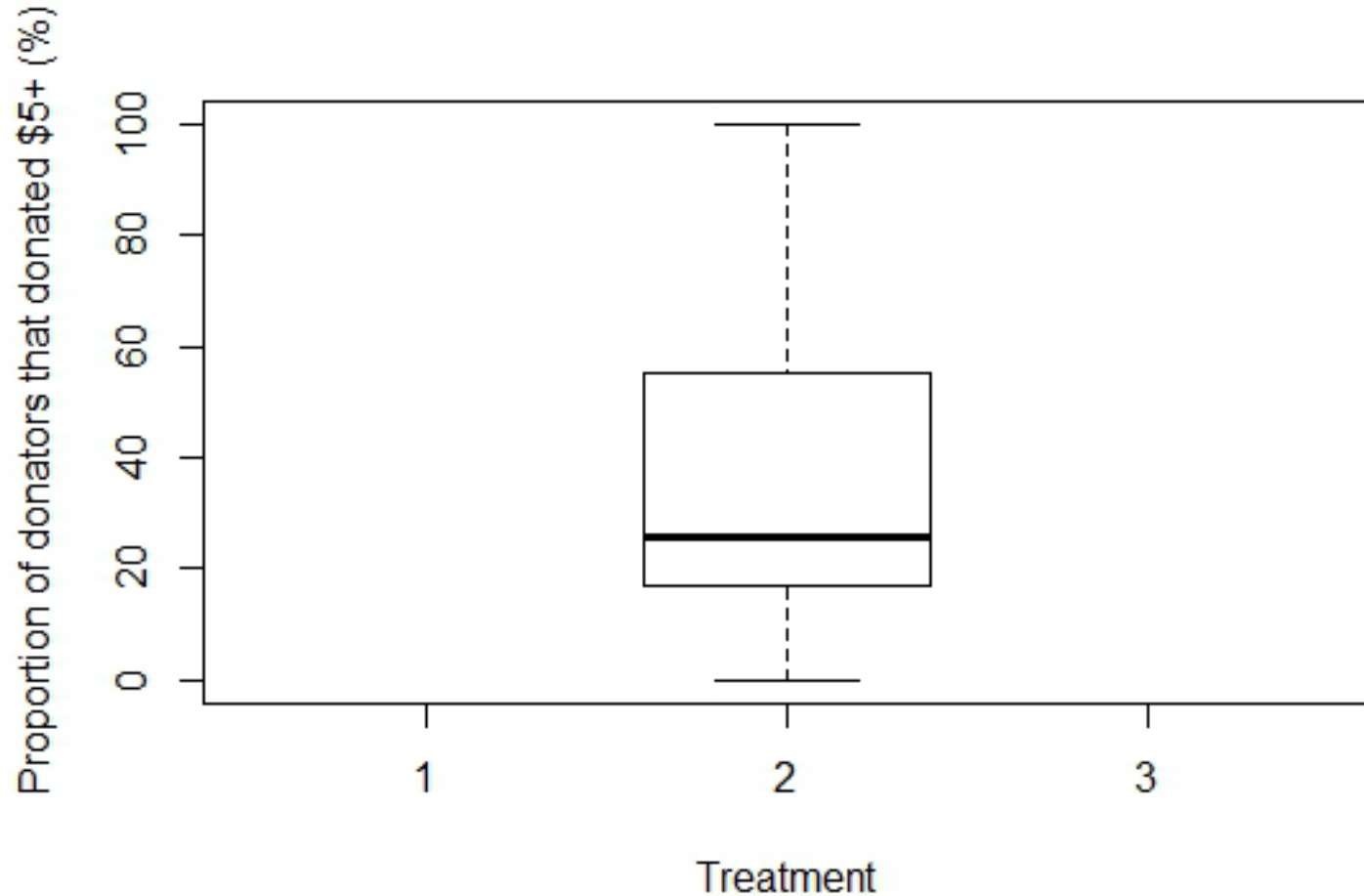


PROPORTION OF DONATORS WHO DONATED \$5+ BY CONDITION



Condition:
A – Mention of an incentive to donate \$5+
B – No mention of incentive

PROPORTION OF DONATORS WHO DONATED \$5+ BY TREATMENT

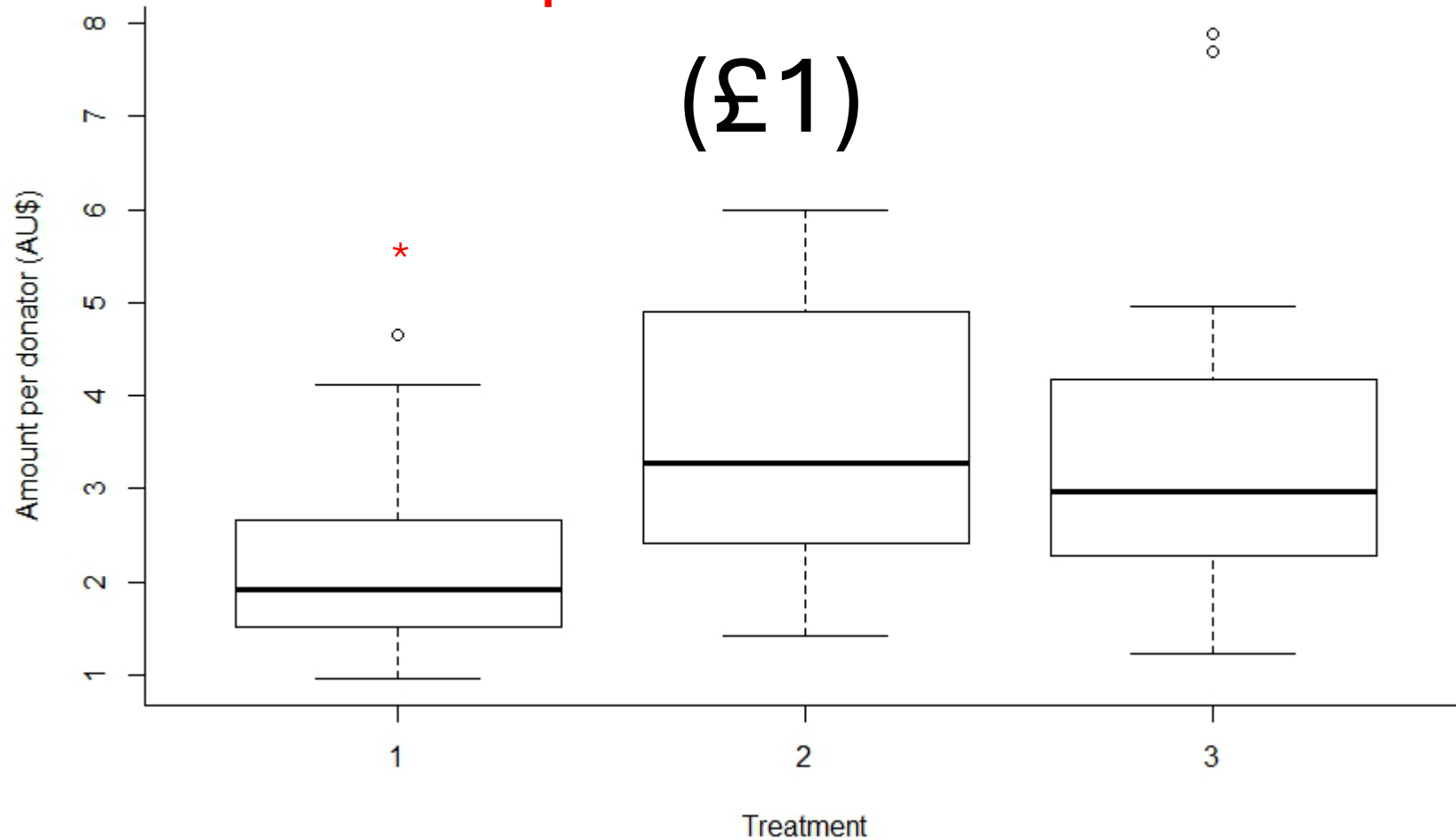


Treatment:
1 – Bird taking donations
2 – Bird present but not taking donations
3 – No bird

DONATIONS PER DONATOR BY TREATMENT

\$2.23AUD

(£1)



Treatment:
1 – Bird taking donations
2 – Bird present but not taking donations
3 – No bird

DONATIONS PER AUDIENCE MEMBER

\$0.34(AUD)

(£0.16)

VALUE FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

- Potential welfare effects on the donation birds
 - Abnormal behaviours were higher post show for Treatments 1 and 2 compared to Treatment 3, even into the following morning
 - Staff removed the interactive experience from donation giving as a result
 - Now the most profitable donation box in the zoo by \$5kAUD (£2,400)



THE VALUE OF AN ANIMAL ENCOUNTER

- Proof of concept

~~Interactive experience = higher donations~~

- Compassion was not the main motivator for donation giving at this box
- An animal interaction is not valued highly by visitors
- Incentivising donation giving can work
- Revenue raising does not need to sacrifice animal welfare
- As always, more research is needed – birds vs mammals?

THANK YOU!

- Taronga Zoo Bird Show staff
- Taronga Zoo finance team
- Elle Bombanarto
- Alicia Burns
- Jessica Meade
- Amy Smart
- Emma Dawe
- Trudy Sharp
- The BSU volunteers
- Christine Wilson
- Rebecca Spindler
- TCSA
- Grahame Coleman
- Paul Hemsworth
- Zoos Victoria
- Unitec



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