



Ecotourism and nature-reserve sustainability in environmentally fragile poor areas: the case of the Ordos Relict Gull Reserve in China

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This article explores the applicability of the conventional wisdom that economic growth is paramount to environmental sustainability by examining ecotourism and nature-reserve sustainability in environmentally fragile poor regions. The discussion focuses on the Ordos Relict Gull Reserve in the Inner Mongolia region of China. The study evaluated reserve records of water and soil conditions and interpreted satellite images to identify lake-level and land-cover changes at the reserve. The Ordos Relict Gulls seem to have abandoned the reserve following ecotourism development and established new colonies in northern Shaanxi. We argue that ecotourism-especially ersatz ecotourism-in certain nature reserves is an unsustainable practice rooted in the conventional wisdom that economic development spurs environmental protection as suggested by the environmental Kuznets curve (EKC). The article concludes that environmental protection rather than economic growth is of vital importance in nature-society interactions in environmentally fragile poor areas. We call for prohibitions on tourism in such nature reserves to enhance sustainability.

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