

## **ABSTRACT**

Wildlife tourism industry as a form of nature based tourism was a rapidly growing niche market segment & has developed a revenue platform for many economies. Outstretching the Pandemic of COVID-19, its related travel restrictions had a significant influence on controlling global spreading and community transmission. This situation badly hit with wildlife tourism sector too. . Nevertheless, it is a contemporary need to rejuvenate the current market segments to reconstruct tourism industry potentials. Wildlife tourism is one of the specialized markets that cant be promoted extensively. The current scenario offered an opportunity to re-launch the sector and turn to a new direction for a more sustainable future. This study explores the ways and means to revival of wildlife tourism operations with the challenges of COVID-19 and has overlooked the service providers' perspective of Minneriya National Park. This study aimed to identify existing challenges for wildlife service providers during COVID-19 & identify the readiness to rejuvenate the wildlife tourism industry during pandemics. This study used a qualitative research approach. Primary data was collected from 16 wildlife service providers at Minneriya national park using the purposive sampling technique. Content analysis was used to analyze the data. The study's findings revealed operational, financial, labor-related, communication, technology & economic impact as the existing challenges in wildlife tourism operations during pandemics & introducing recreational activities, health & safety measures, technology, policy planning, etc. should be key priorities to revive the wildlife tourism sector in a post-COVID-19 scenario. Based on the results, there should be strong transformational strategies to avoid the worst effects of future operation: such as government involvement, financial facilities, promotions, and research & development. This study identified a response mechanism to attract travelers to achieve a niche market segment. It will manifest the significance to the future generation, policymakers, and academic students to grab value scale for future operation in new normal conditions and post-COVID-19.

**Key Words: Wildlife Tourism, COVID-19, Challenges, Readiness, Service Providers**