

Editorial

Why *Animal Conservation*?

Conservation biology is a discipline that has come of age. Over the past ten–fifteen years we have seen it develop, from a topic that many academics saw as peripheral and quirky into mainstream biological science. Conservation biology is now routinely taught on degree level courses, the number of papers published in the specialist academic literature has risen exponentially, and the citation rates of those journals continue to increase.

Our view that there is a niche for a new journal in conservation biology emerges from this maturing of the discipline. Now there is the opportunity and the need for more specialized fora, focusing on aspects of the subject as a whole. Our experiences, and those of colleagues, also indicate that there is no appropriate journal for rapid publication of significant findings in conservation biology. Increasingly, we have seen studies published in mainstream ecological or evolutionary journals, and therefore by-passing some people who should be their target audience.

So where does our focus lie? We intend the journal to address scientific studies of past, present and future factors influencing the conservation of animal species and their habitats. Our focus is on rigorous studies of an empirical or theoretical nature, relating to species and population biology. A central theme is to publish important new ideas and findings from evolutionary biology and ecology that contribute towards the scientific basis of conservation biology. We see the role of ecology, genetics and evolution as central to conservation planning. Uniquely in this context, there are biological units whose interactions can be studied and understood, and then used to make informed predictions about the future, and to devise management plans to cope with persistence in a rapidly changing world. We worry that many environmental decisions are made on the basis of broad generalization, ill-informed science or simple extrapolation from the past, and fail to incorporate ecological and evolutionary processes whose preservation is actually critical for the persistence

of a species or community. The fields we see as significant here are (in no order of importance or priority) ecology, behavioural ecology, wildlife biology, wildlife disease and epidemiology, evolutionary ecology and genetics, population biology, systematic biology and phylogenetics, palaeobiology, biodiversity and biogeography and species management (including translocation and sustainable use). We particularly encourage cross-disciplinary papers, suggesting new and synthetic approaches.

We hope to encourage a truly international flavour to *Animal Conservation*. By focusing on research-based empirical and theoretical studies, the papers should have relevance and application across political and biological units. At present we as editors are located in the UK and the USA. We have tried, despite our own biases, to include on our editorial board scientists representing a wide range of disciplines and geographical areas. Although we hope that articles will always be relevant and useful for conservation planning, we are not intending to include commentary dealing specifically with policy or implementation.

A principal objective is to ensure that new and original research is published within six months of submission. This seems to us to be increasingly critical both for making results available promptly, and for encouraging important articles into specialist rather than generalist journals. This means that as the journal grows, we anticipate producing issues more frequently, rather than simply increasing page numbers.

However, you, the readers, are our constituency. We would like to hear your views, good and bad, about the choices we have made in establishing and setting a niche for this journal. Please, read on, and then let us know what you think.

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