



## PUBLISHING FOR THE PROTECTED AREA COMMUNITY: A VISION FOR PARKS FROM ITS EDITORIAL BOARD

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### ABSTRACT

In this editorial essay, members of the Editorial Board of *PARKS* review the status of conservation literature. Three problems are identified: 1) the growing gap between the formal conservation literature and the so-called 'grey literature' of project reports, studies and working papers; 2) the effectiveness of the majority of conservation literature in promoting good conservation; and 3) the lack of open access to much of the conservation literature currently available. The article sets out the vision of this journal: *PARKS*, the International Journal of Protected Areas and Conservation, published by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) expert World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA). *PARKS* aims to encourage new writers, including younger researchers, conservation professionals who do not generally write for peer-reviewed publications and people from developing countries, including indigenous and local people, to share their best practices in protected area management. *PARKS* is published twice a year as an online, open-access and peer reviewed journal and welcomes submissions of papers from all protected area professionals worldwide.

**Key words:** protected area management, conservation, lessons learned, academic publishing

### INTRODUCTION

The once-a-decade World Parks Congress has created a series of milestones in the philosophy of protected areas; each Congress reflecting the practice over the last 10 years and stimulating changes in approach, audience and challenges. The new directions emerging at the 2014 IUCN World Parks Congress in Sydney have been

explored in a previous editorial for *PARKS* (Sandwith et al., 2014) and will be expanded in papers featured in this and subsequent issues of the journal. In this context it is time to reflect on the role of *PARKS* itself, or more fundamentally on the interface between the researchers and practitioners who make up the core audience of a journal like *PARKS*.



Researcher showing slides to Seringalzinho inhabitants, Jaú National Park, Brazil © Juan Pratginestos / WWF-Canon

### CONSERVATION LITERATURE: DOES IT INFORM CONSERVATION PRACTICE?

Over the last two decades, there has been a growing gap between the formal conservation literature of academia, with its peer-reviewed papers and sophisticated impact rating systems, and the so-called 'grey literature' of project reports, articles, NGO studies and working papers. In some topics it almost seems as if there are three conversations running in parallel: the first, a highly theoretical discussion amongst professional academics, many of whom know each other; a second more practical, less formal and much more fragmented debate going on amongst field practitioners and conservationists; and a third set of conversations taking place between people locally and which unfortunately seldom get communicated to a wider audience.

There are a number of reasons for this split. The success of academic journals is measured by their 'Impact Factor', the number of times that its articles have been cited, which rewards journals for publishing articles with a broad geographical scope, that offer novel findings. Case studies, or single-species studies, while often reporting findings highly relevant to conservation practitioners, are less likely to be highly cited and are therefore less likely to be accepted by major journals.

In the same way, for conservation academics (i.e. those employed in a university position) 'success' is generally measured in the frequency and Impact Factor of scientific journal publications. The term 'publish or perish' is well known to post-doctoral researchers, employed on short-term contracts, competing for limited academic positions, and therefore under intense pressure to publish frequently in high-impact publications. This often means that research projects that focus on case

studies and involve long periods of fieldwork are overlooked in favour of studies with a larger potential readership that can be completed relatively quickly. The incentive structure for conservation academics therefore currently does not often reward or fund the publication and dissemination of conservation 'best practice' examples.

Conversely, there are disincentives for conservation practitioners to publish their best-practice findings in peer-reviewed journals. Few conservation projects receive ring-fenced funding for peer-reviewed publication of project results, and practitioners seldom have the free time required to write journal articles which require specific formats and several lengthy periods of revision before publication. There are also significant geographical biases in authorship; the majority of international journals are published in English, and therefore the pool of successful authors is narrowed to those who are native English speakers, excellent linguists or can afford to have an English editor look through their work. In addition, turn-around times from submission to publication for many journals exceeds one year, delaying dissemination of project findings, which might reach a practitioner audience more swiftly and comprehensibly through 'grey literature' publication.

These issues are backed up by survey findings. A survey in 2009 of 268 ecological scientists found that although 43 per cent reported that scientific papers were the most important factor in assessing their academic performance, only 15 per cent believed that peer-reviewed journals were effective in promoting conservation (Shanley & Lopez, 2009). Maybe unsurprisingly, the very elements that increase the

conservation impact of an academic article are those that make its publication in the academic literature less likely. A survey of authors of all the species-based research articles published in five major conservation journals during 2000–2005 found that articles with the most conservation impact were those with a non-academic corresponding author, where the study was part of a long-term conservation project, undertaken with NGO support, and where results had been disseminated in formats other than peer-reviewed publication (Milner-Gulland et al., 2009).

These disparities result in a rapid growth in publications dealing with conservation and development that are poorly connected to the practice. Thus there is a far stronger emphasis on planning than on implementation, monitoring and reporting; little critical review of results and outcomes; and a lack of readily accessible up-to-date information on new tools and techniques that are likely to be practicable for a busy and under-staffed protected area manager or other practitioners.

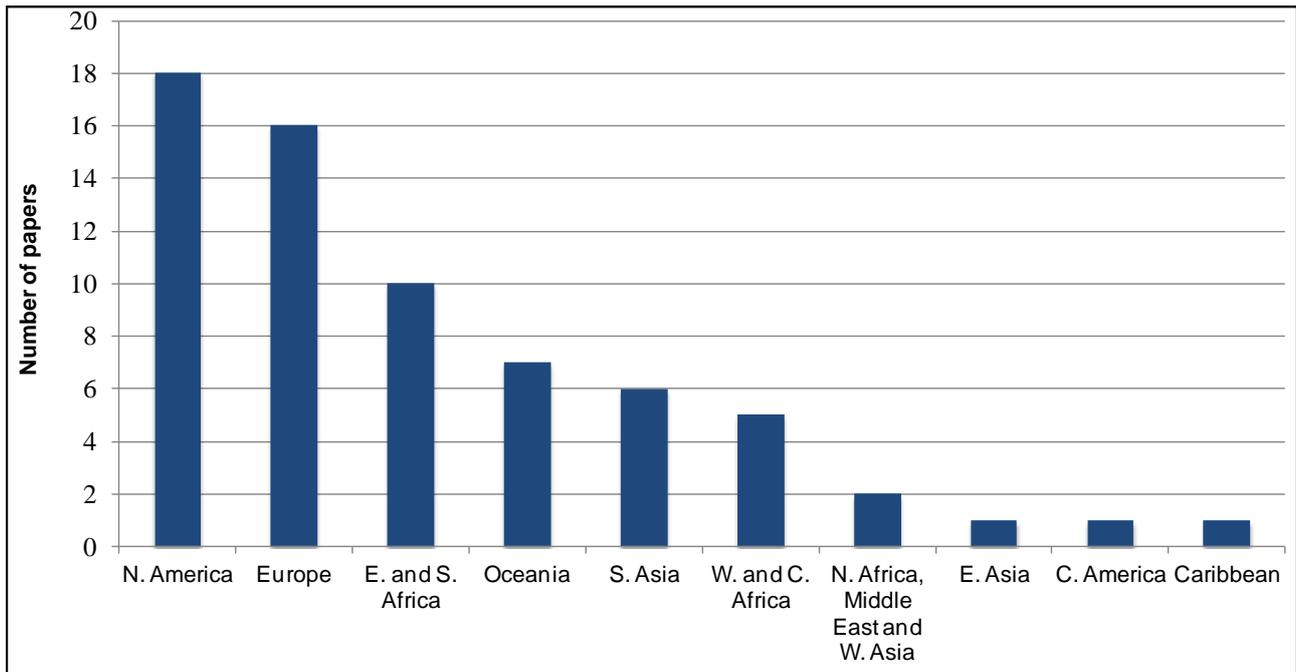
There are a very small number of journals that attempt to address these issues.

- *Conservation Letters* (founded in 2008) specialises in publishing short papers of immediate relevance for policy debates and management solutions ([www.conbio.org/publications/conservation-letters](http://www.conbio.org/publications/conservation-letters)). It has succeeded in cutting the time to publication significantly while retaining a rigorous peer review system. However, papers are heavily dominated by academics from the 'north': a rapid review of first author contact details in the May/June 2014 issue of the journal reveals that in 19 of 23 articles the first author listed a university affiliation and in 22 of 23 articles they listed an affiliation in North America, Europe (principally the UK) or Australia.
- Flora and Fauna International's journal *Oryx* also prioritises papers that inform conservation practice and attempts to: 'support the publishing and communication aspirations of conservation practitioners and researchers worldwide', for example through training workshops on science writing ([www.oryxthejournal.org/](http://www.oryxthejournal.org/)). This approach is reflected in the diversity of contributing authors: in the July 2014 issue, only 14 of 28 first authors listed a university affiliation and only 18 listed an affiliation in Europe, North America or Australia; other countries represented included China (three articles), Thailand (two articles), South Africa (two articles) and one article each from Namibia, Cape Verde, Uganda, Bolivia.
- *Conservation Evidence* (founded in 2004) is an open-access journal that publishes research, monitoring results and case studies on the effects of conservation interventions ([www.conservationevidence.com](http://www.conservationevidence.com)). All papers include some monitoring of the effects of the intervention and are written by, or in partnership with, those who did the conservation work. Issue 11 (2014) accessed in August 2014 had seven papers. Of these three were from the UK and one each from Brazil, New Zealand, Singapore and Sri Lanka.

One final, but critically important issue is that most journals also charge for full papers to be accessed. A recent survey (Fuller et al., 2014) of scientific research published since the year 2000 in 20 conservation science journals, found that of the 19,207 papers published, only 1,667 (just over eight per cent) are freely downloadable from an official repository and only 938 papers (i.e. less than five per cent) meet the standard definition of open access in which material can be freely reused providing that attribution to the authors is given. Fuller et al. conclude that it would cost some US\$ 51 million to make all conservation science published since 2000 freely available. This situation is hopefully set to change soon as many academic journals have or are moving from a model where authors publish for free and readers pay for access to a model where authors will pay a fee to publish and access will be free. This change will be a huge improvement in terms of access to the academic literature, but of course the downside is that it will create a new barrier to publication by practitioners, because the fees for publication are likely to be substantial.

## **PARKS: A NEW VISION FOR PROTECTED AREA PUBLISHING**

The new incarnation of *PARKS* aims to bridge some of the gaps between conservation academia and conservation practice and join those journals listed above in trying to improve the relevance of journal publications, with a particular emphasis on protected areas. We are aiming for academic rigour but are more interested in practical insights for conservation practice than in contributions to theory. For example, *PARKS* publishes far more case studies and overviews than would be the case for many journals, although only if the authors have taken the trouble to analyse and draw lessons from them. In this way, they are of use to other readers facing similar challenges as well as to those that seek to draw on a new strand of peer reviewed conservation literature. More generally, papers are only accepted if they can be shown to have a clear management message. We are also 'open access' so all papers are free to download and there are no publishing



**Figure 1: Lead author nationality of *PARKS* papers by WCPA Region— issues 18.1 to 20.2**

fees as we rely on the goodwill of the IUCN WCPA membership to help coordinate, edit, review and publicise the journal. While we currently only publish in English, the editors and many peer reviewers are keen to work with authors who have great research or experience to report but are struggling to articulate this in the English language. *PARKS* encourages new writers, including younger researchers, conservation professionals who do not generally write for peer-reviewed publications and people from developing countries, including indigenous and local people who still often fail to have a voice in these debates or are pushed to the back of a list of authors. However we also encourage established and more senior researchers and academics to submit relevant, applied articles in the journal – not because of the academic standing of the journal but as a way to communicate more directly with conservation practitioners. We are working to develop a clear ethical framework for researchers operating in protected areas (see Hockings et al., 2013).

So far the approach seems to be paying off. To date (issue 18.1 to 20.2) about half our authors have been from outside Europe, North America and Australia (see figure 1 broken down by WCPA region, note that Oceania includes Australia and New Zealand and the islands of the Pacific, which have been the source of some papers). We are impressed and grateful for the amount of time that reviewers have been prepared to put into ensuring that non-academic authors, and those with English as a second language, get the support they need to publish high-quality research. Feedback has been good. But we remain too much of a hidden resource; some of the

material published is not getting out to the right people and we need help from the IUCN WCPA network and beyond to reach potential authors who have experiences to share with their peers. A new dedicated website and a publicity push at the World Parks Congress will hopefully help to address this.

With this current issue we also welcome a new editor, Dr Lauren Coad of Oxford University, currently based in Indonesia at the Center for International Forestry Research. *PARKS* remains open to contributions, feedback and ideas, particularly practical, inspirational research that focuses on solutions. We encourage contributions particular from those who do not generally report their findings in peer review literature: practitioners, rangers, community groups, indigenous people and those not working primarily in the English language. Please let us know your thoughts.

### About the Authors

**Thora Amend** is an ethnologist and geographer, with several decades of experience in protected area management, concept development, training and communication. She has worked for the German development cooperation (GIZ and others) for the integration of conservation and development needs, especially at local scales, but also at systems level.

**Tom Brooks** heads Science and Knowledge at IUCN. His background is in tropical forest bird conservation (Kenya, Paraguay, Indonesia, Philippines). He has previously worked at NatureServe, CI, and TNC, served on the Conservation Leadership Programme's Executive Committee, and co-chaired the WCPA/SSC Biodiversity and Protected Areas Taskforce. He has authored 210 publications.

**BC Choudhury** was with the Wildlife Institute of India till his retirement in 2012 teaching wildlife management largely focused on wetlands and coastal and marine situations. Currently he works on several marine species and habitat restoration projects and in capacity building for NGOs making their activism scientific information based.

**Lauren Coad** is a member of the Forest Governance Group at the University of Oxford, and the WCPA. Her research focuses on the effectiveness of protected area management and the impacts, and potential management, of the wild meat trade in Central Africa and South East Asia. She has previously lived and worked in Gabon and Cambodia, and is now based in Java, Indonesia.

**Nigel Dudley** is a co-editor of *PARKS*, partner in Equilibrium Research and Industry Fellow, School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Management at the University of Queensland. His work focuses mainly on the planning and management of protected areas with a particular interest in their wider benefits.

**Marc Hockings** is Professor and Program Director in the School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Management at the University of Queensland. His research covers broad aspects of protected area management with a focus on management effectiveness. Marc is Vice-Chair for Science for WCPA and a member of the Commission's Executive Committee.

**Cyril Kormos** is Vice President for policy at The WILD Foundation and IUCN-WCPA Vice-Chair for World Heritage. Cyril holds a B.A. in English from the University of California, Berkeley, an M.Sc. in Politics of the World Economy from the London School of

Economics and a J.D. from the George Washington University.

**Nikita (Nik) Lopoukhine** retired in 2005 as Director General of National Parks, Parks Canada. He subsequently served for eight years as Chair of the IUCN WCPA. Nik was recently honoured with the Golden Leaf and J.B. Harkin Awards for his life-long commitment to Canadian conservation.

**Wayne Lotter** is a director of the PAMS Foundation in Tanzania. He has 23 years of experience in protected area management, law enforcement, community development, risk management systems and certification. He has an exceptional track record in the fields of wildlife crime law enforcement and invasive alien vegetation control.

**Kathy MacKinnon** is Deputy Chair, WCPA. She was formerly Lead Biodiversity Specialist at the World Bank and has considerable experience in planning and managing protected areas in developing countries, especially in Asia.

**Helen Newing** is a lecturer at the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE) at the University of Kent, UK. She has worked in international conservation since the 1980s, both as an academic and in policy and practice. Her PhD was on antelope ecology in West Africa but she now works as a social scientist on community conservation issues. In 2011 she published the first comprehensive textbook on social science research methods in conservation.

**Kent H. Redford** is a conservationist working on protected areas, the practice of conservation and the intersection between conservation and synthetic biology. He is principal at Archipelago Consulting, based in Portland, Maine (USA).

**Sue Stolton** is the co-editor of *PARKS*. She is a partner in Equilibrium Research which for 25 years has promoted positive environmental and social change by linking targeted research to field application. A member of IUCN WCPA she specialises in protected area management issues and the wider social, economic and cultural arguments for protection.

**Bas Verschuuren** has 20 years of experience in linking practical biocultural conservation work and applied scientific research. Bas is co-chair to the IUCN WCPA Specialist Group on Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas, coordinator for the Sacred Natural Sites Initiative and researcher at the department of Sociology of Development and Change at Wageningen University.

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## RESUMEN

En este ensayo editorial, los miembros del Consejo Editorial de PARKS examinan la situación de la literatura relacionada con la conservación. Se identificaron tres problemas: 1) la brecha creciente entre la literatura formal sobre conservación y la llamada "literatura gris" de los informes sobre proyectos, estudios y documentos de trabajo; 2) la eficacia de la mayoría de la literatura relacionada con la conservación en la promoción de prácticas adecuadas para la conservación; y 3) la falta de acceso libre a gran parte de la literatura sobre conservación actualmente disponible. El artículo expone la visión de esta revista: PARKS, la revista internacional que se ocupa de las áreas protegidas y la conservación, es publicada por la Comisión Mundial de Áreas Protegidas (CMAP) de la Unión Internacional para la Conservación de la Naturaleza (UICN). PARKS tiene por objeto alentar a nuevos escritores, incluyendo a investigadores más jóvenes, profesionales de la conservación, que por lo general no escriben para publicaciones revisadas por pares y a personas de países en desarrollo, incluidos los pueblos indígenas y las comunidades locales, a compartir sus prácticas óptimas en la gestión de áreas protegidas. PARKS se publica dos veces al año como una revista en línea, de acceso libre y arbitrada, y acoge favorablemente los trabajos presentados por los profesionales de las áreas protegidas de todo el mundo.

## RESUME

Dans cet essai éditorial, les membres du comité de rédaction de PARKS examinent la situation de la littérature sur la conservation. On peut identifier trois problèmes : 1) l'écart croissant entre la littérature réglementaire sur la conservation et la littérature dite 'grise' des rapports de projet, des études et des documents de travail; 2) le niveau d'efficacité de la plupart de la littérature sur la conservation dans sa promotion d'une bonne conservation; et 3) le manque d'accès libre à la majorité des ouvrages sur la conservation actuellement disponibles. L'article présente la vision de ce journal: PARKS, le Journal international des aires protégées et de la conservation, publié par la Commission mondiale des aires protégées (CMAP), composée d'experts de l'Union internationale pour la conservation de la nature (UICN). PARKS vise à encourager les nouveaux écrivains, y compris les chercheurs les plus jeunes, et des professionnels de la conservation qui généralement n'écrivent que peu souvent pour des publications examinées par leurs pairs, ainsi que des personnes provenant de pays en voie de développement, y compris des personnes indigènes et locales, à partager leurs meilleures pratiques dans la gestion des aires protégées. PARKS est un journal en ligne en libre accès, revu par des pairs, et publié deux fois par an, qui accueille des propositions de communications en provenance de tous professionnels des aires protégées dans le monde entier.