

Sociology and Ecology – choosing what to value most

Calls for 'compassionate conservation' (the protection of individual wild animals, regardless of whether they are native or an introduced invasive species) may be rebuffed by ecologists, citing any number of examples of the environmental harm caused by invasive species and the environmental benefits that come from their control or eradication.

Recent examples include:

- The loss of Hawaiian tree snails due to introduced rosy wolf-snails - <https://blog.invasive-species.org/2019/01/11/invasives-killed-the-biodiversity-star/>
- The recovery of vegetation and bird life on Macquarie Island following the removal of introduced pest species - <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-08-06/macquarie-island-marks-station-milestone/10075720>

The science seems clear and ecologists are endeavouring to show that culling over-abundant or exotic species is the most compassionate thing to do, when the full gambit of species and individual animals is concerned. Examples include:

- The net benefit from culling, in terms of animal welfare - <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/cobi.13249>
- The benefits of modelling to help in such discussions - https://www.zoology.ubc.ca/~krebs/ecological_rants/on-culling-overabundant-wildlife/

However, aspects of sociology may need addressing before science-based arguments convince 'compassionate conservationists', as there are several social questions embedded within the approach.

Self-rights versus self-sacrifice is one. Should an individual animal, or species, suffer for the betterment of others, at the hands of humans?

World-view is another. Is a homogeneous, globalised society and ecology un-avoidable (or desirable), or should distinct cultures, diversity and ecologies be retained – and where does bio-security, or disease control, fit in that?

Perspectives on animals and humans is a third. They include views such as:

- *Homo sapiens* are just another animal – we're all part of intertwined food chains, and everything eats something.
- Humans are above the animals – animals are here for human use.
- All humans have 'rights' and animals share them as well – it is therefore abhorrent to kill any animal. This can also have religious aspects, as in the recent New Zealand case of Buddhists performing the 'mercy release' of pest species - https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=12188334

Ecologists may need to specifically address the sociology of controlling invasive, or over-abundant, animals as well as the scientific basis of environmental management and conservation. Debate addressing social and ecological issues can be expected in order for this topic to progress. Examples include:

- Summoning compassion - https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324801356_Summoning_compassion_to_address_the_challenges_of_conservation
- Under-addressed animal welfare issues - <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/cobi.13267>
- Science denialism - https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/cobi.13273?purchase_referrer=t.co&tracking_action=preview_click&r3_referer=wol&show_checkout=1