

This is a repository copy of *Managing for nitrogen, the lesser of two evils. A response to Maes et al.*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:  
<http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/113624/>

Version: Accepted Version

---

**Article:**

Payne, Richard John (2017) *Managing for nitrogen, the lesser of two evils. A response to Maes et al.* *Biological Conservation*. pp. 495-496. ISSN 0006-3207

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2017.03.002>

---

**Reuse**

This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs (CC BY-NC-ND) licence. This licence only allows you to download this work and share it with others as long as you credit the authors, but you can't change the article in any way or use it commercially. More information and the full terms of the licence here: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

**Takedown**

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing [eprints@whiterose.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@whiterose.ac.uk) including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

## Manuscript Details

<b>Manuscript number</b>	BIOC_2017_308
<b>Title</b>	Managing for nitrogen, the lesser of two evils. A response to Maes et al.
<b>Article type</b>	Correspondence
<b>Keywords</b>	scale; trophic cascades; restoration success
<b>Taxonomy</b>	Ecological Restoration, Global Ecological Change
<b>Corresponding Author</b>	Lawrence Jones
<b>Corresponding Author's Institution</b>	Centre for Ecology and Hydrology
<b>Order of Authors</b>	Lawrence Jones, Carly Stevens, Ed Rowe, Richard Payne, Simon Caporn, Christopher Evans, Christopher Field, Sarah Dale

## Submission Files Included in this PDF

### File Name [File Type]

Jones et al. Letter to Editor.docx [Cover Letter]

Jones et al.\_Response to Maes et al.docx [Manuscript File]

To view all the submission files, including those not included in the PDF, click on the manuscript title on your EVISE Homepage, then click 'Download zip file'.

Dear Editor,

We would like to submit this letter in reply to a response by Maes et al. on our article “Can on-site management mitigate nitrogen deposition impacts in non-wooded habitats?” in Biological Conservation.

We have run the letter by the Editor-in-chief Vincent Devictor, and he has agreed it can be submitted.

With best wishes,  
Laurence Jones

1 Jones L., Stevens C., Rowe, E.C., Payne R., Caporn S.J.M., Evans C.D., Field, C., Dale, S.

2 Managing for nitrogen, the lesser of two evils. A response to Maes et al.

3

4 We thank Maes et al. for their commentary on our paper, with which we largely agree. In response  
5 we would like to explore particular issues in greater depth, and add some caveats to their  
6 recommendations.

7

8 In much of western Europe, oligotrophic habitats now represent small islands in a far larger  
9 eutrophic landscape. This is in contrast to the situation before large-scale human intervention,  
10 beginning in the Neolithic, when the rarer species were those which depended on small localised  
11 areas of high fertility arising from soil disturbance, animal dunging or bird colonies for example.  
12 Since these localities were patchy in space and time, eutrophic species are often good dispersers.  
13 Thus, while we recognise the concerns of Maes et al. about other species groups, many of the  
14 threatened invertebrates, mammals and birds are reliant on the same conditions as rare plants:  
15 shorter, open vegetation, in sites with low fertility.

16

17 Our review focused on plant species as key primary producers which support many other trophic  
18 levels but also because, as recognised by Maes et al., there are relatively few published studies of  
19 nitrogen impacts on other species groups. Yet, there is increasing evidence of clear links between  
20 eutrophication and decline of conservation priority species. For instance, in sand dune systems there  
21 is evidence that nitrogen impacts on Marram grass (*Ammophila arenaria*) in Denmark and The  
22 Netherlands cascade up to affect populations of Red-backed shrike (*Lanius collurio*), a Red List  
23 passerine bird (Dise et al. 2011). Nitrogen increases the grass cover, thereby reducing the bare sand  
24 available to large coleoptera larvae and lizards, which in turn reduces shrike populations since these  
25 are key food items. In northern USA, evidence chains link acidification from nitrogen and sulfur to  
26 reduced abundance of the snowshoe hare (*Lepus americanus*). Reduced growth rate and increased  
27 crown dieback of balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*) reduces both cover and forage available for the hare  
28 (Irvine et al. in press)

29

30 Appropriate conservation management requires assessing the balance of harm. While conservation  
31 measures to ameliorate N deposition impacts may themselves do harm to some species in the short  
32 term, this needs to be balanced against often greater harm if no action is taken. Maes et al. link  
33 detrimental management effects in heathlands to lizard populations, yet without management to  
34 open up the canopy and increase the area of bare ground, the habitat would become wholly

35 unsuitable for those same lizards in the longer term. There is also a tension between the scale  
36 required for conservation success and a need to balance the immediate adverse impacts of  
37 restoration measures on desirable flora and fauna. Small scale interventions often revert rapidly to  
38 previous conditions, and the mismatch between the spatial and/or temporal scales of ecological  
39 processes and those adopted to conduct conservation plans is a factor which can limit success of  
40 restoration efforts (Perring et al. 2015). Retention of high nutrient islands to protect existing species  
41 can also be a source of nitrophiles which may re-invade restored areas.

42

43 We agree with Maes et al. that management should be conducted sensitively and, in the main,  
44 support their recommendations. Perhaps the aim of restoration in conservation areas should be to  
45 retain a mosaic of very low and moderate nutrient levels, to support a broad range of species.  
46 Meanwhile, the requirements of species dependent on high nutrient levels can be considered of  
47 lower priority in this context, since those conditions are so prevalent in the wider landscape. Such  
48 difficult management decisions arise because of widespread eutrophication. This reinforces the need  
49 to reduce nitrogen emissions at source and, in particular, to safeguard those areas which are, as yet,  
50 little affected by nitrogen deposition.

51

## 52 **References**

53 Irvine, I.C., Greaver, T., Phelan, J., Sabo, R.D., Van Houtven, G. (in press). Terrestrial acidification and  
54 ecosystem services: Effects of acid rain on bunnies, baseball and Christmas trees. *Ecosphere*.

55

56 Dise, N.B., Ashmore, M., Belyazid, S., Bleeker, A., Bobbink, R., deVries, W., Erisman, J.W., Spranger,  
57 T., Stevens, C. and Van den Berg, L., 2011. Nitrogen deposition as a threat to European terrestrial  
58 biodiversity. *The European Nitrogen Assessment: Sources, Effects and Policy Perspectives*.  
59 Cambridge University Press. ISBN, pp.978-1.

60

61 Maes, D., Decler, K., De Keersmaeker, L., Van Uytvanck, J., Louette, G., Intensified habitat  
62 management to mitigate negative effects of nitrogen pollution can be detrimental for faunal  
63 diversity: a comment on Jones et al., 2017

64

65 Perring, M.P., Standish, R.J., Price, J.N., Craig, M.D., Erickson, T.E., Ruthrof, K.X., Whiteley, A.S.,  
66 Valentine, L.E. and Hobbs, R.J., 2015. Advances in restoration ecology: rising to the challenges of the  
67 coming decades. *Ecosphere*, 6(8), pp.1-25.

68

69

70

71