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Introduction to “Diversifying Voices in Conservation”

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In her seminal work, “Whose Conservation,” British ecologist and former Society for Conservation Biology president Georgina Mace (2014) wrote of her view that conservation had progressed from “nature for itself” to “nature despite people” and finally to “nature for people.” She articulated a transition of conservation from its being embedded in Western and colonial exclusionary practices toward “people and nature” thinking, in which big C conservation involves multiple disciplines and academic traditions, including social and natural perspectives, and views conservation work as embedded in complex socioecological networks and practices. And while Mace was the one to articulate it in this specific way, that view, of multiple phases coexisting simultaneously, sometimes with fractious results because alternating ontologies, epistemologies, measures of success, and action plans occasionally run in opposition is broadly reflective of the diversity of approaches we see within the Society for Conservation Biology

(SCB). From this plurality of approaches we recognize though, that we each have gifts to bring to our community of knowledge and practice, and there is value in engaging with in these tensions. Conservation is a big tent and sometimes that means being noisy and uncomfortable (Matulis and Moyer, 2017).

In this special issue, we seek to extend and operationalize the last stage of Mace's assessment, based on bringing together established academic voices, and in doing so expand the range of voices participating in this raucous, engaging, and vibrant community. Specifically, seeking and including those languages, experiences, views, and values that have been excluded or omitted from mainstream conservation debates. We believe that being inclusive will allow for more effective, ethical and just solutions to conservation; will address historical inequalities in the conservation community (Taylor 2016) and the communities conservationists are privileged to work alongside; address issues of epistemic justice (Nyssa et al, in this issue); will foster more authentic and equitable relationships among partner communities; and, ultimately, will produce stronger, more ethical, and more effective conservation outcomes (Pascual et al. 2023). In doing so, we argue that this expansion brings with it a more ethical and just approach to conservation. There is both room and opportunity to operationalize Mace's "people and nature" phase and a necessity to do so. For example, "nature for itself" and its exclusionary conservation practices are largely viewed as untenable and unethical in light of Indigenous conservation worldviews, values, histories, and epistemologies (Domínguez and Louma 2020). Frequently, however, even calls for greater inclusion of multiple voices in conservation have extended only to different parts of academia, rather than considering actors and perspectives beyond this, and what might be preventing them from being heard, intentionally or otherwise.

With this special issue, we sought to open up conservation's big tent and welcome voices that have been frequently forced outside for too long. We celebrate a variety of research, some of it on our very community, and recognize that some of the information shared herein may make some readers uncomfortable, but our goal is to establish bridges of understanding and not reinforce polarized positions. As such, from looking at the lived experiences of SCB members from marginalized identities, to considering those conservation scholars and practitioners who strive to approach conservation from different methodological frameworks, we find that the our community can - and must - do better. The articles in this special issue highlight the benefits of opening up the tent and address some of the opportunities and obstacles to doing so. From learning about the convivial conservation of elephants and tea pickers in India to the ways funerals further conservation outcomes in Fiji, we build on Mace's "people and nature" phase of conservation by exploring which peoples' voices are prioritized and expanding the range of voices and methodologies that are highlighted in academic and practitioner circles. In effect, we encourage giving the mic to those voices that have been silenced for too long. Moreover, we hope this expansion reverberate outside academic circles and fundamentally improve the way conservation resonates on the ground- a more inclusive approach that more accurately reflects and elevates communities' prioritizations and needs.

This proposed expansion does not come without costs, however. Throughout the compilation of this issue, we, the editors, have explored how structural efforts in the publishing world have reinforced hegemonic approaches to conservation. Things like word limits and the results-discussion-conclusion structure of academic papers can privilege some types of information

reporting and exclude others, particularly qualitative and narrative accounts. Figures can be more than graphic illustrations of data; they can tell stories. The editorial process itself can serve as gatekeeping relative to what is real science worthy of sharing and what is not. As such, we editors truly thank the diverse, courageous, and vastly overworked individuals who served as reviewers for this project. We also thank the editorial staff of *Conservation Biology*, who worked with us to find ways to make these stories shine. Without the belief of all participants in this new phase of conservation, we would not be here today. Readers, we invite you to look through this issue and ask yourselves who you are currently working with and how your work might be improved by opening the tent for a more equitable, diversity, and inclusive model of conservation that achieves more sustainable and just outcomes (McElwee et al. 2020; Pascual et al. 2023).

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