

Key Topics in Conservation Biology

Dedication

This book celebrates the move of Oxford's WildCRU to its own centre, Tubney House, and is thus dedicated to the memory of Miles and Briony Blackwell and to the Trustees of the Tubney Trust who made this possible.

The Student Panel

(whose members commented on drafts of every chapter)

Ewan Macdonald, Edinburgh University, UK

Michael Mills, Cape Town University, RSA

Stephanie Pimm, Carleton College, USA

Ryan Waples, Wesleyan University, USA

Ross Wrangham, Colorado University, USA

When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much he had learned in seven years.

(Mark Twain, 'Old Times on the Mississippi', *Atlantic Monthly*, 1874)

Key Topics in Conservation Biology

Edited by

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of the Wildlife Conservation Research Unit,
University of Oxford

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of the University of East London

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Contents

List of Contributors	vii
List of Boxes	xiv
Preface	xv
1 The pathology of biodiversity loss: the practice of conservation C.R. DICKMAN, S.L. PIMM AND M. CARDILLO	1
2 Prioritizing choices in conservation G.M. MACE, H.P. POSSINGHAM AND N. LEADER-WILLIAMS	17
3 What is biodiversity worth? Economics as a problem and a solution D. PEARCE, S. HECHT AND F. VORHIES	35
4 Impacts of modern molecular genetic techniques on conservation biology E. GEFFEN, G. LUIKART AND R.S. WAPLES	46
5 The role of metapopulations in conservation H.R. AKÇAKAYA, G. MILLS AND C.P. DONCASTER	64
6 Managing biodiversity in the light of climate change: current biological effects and future impacts T.L. ROOT, D. LIVERMAN AND C. NEWMAN	85
7 Technology in conservation: a boon but with small print S.A. ELLWOOD, R.P. WILSON AND A.C. ADDISON	105
8 Animal welfare and conservation: measuring stress in the wild G. MCLAREN, C. BONACIC AND A. ROWAN	120
9 Does modelling have a role in conservation? M.S. BOYCE, S.P. RUSHTON AND T. LYNAM	134
10 Conservation in the tropics: evolving roles for governments, international donors and non-government organizations S. COBB, J. GINSBERG AND J. THOMSEN	145

11	Do parasites matter? Infectious diseases and the conservation of host populations	156
	P. RIORDAN, P. HUDSON AND S. ALBON	
12	The nature of the beast: using biological processes in vertebrate pest management	173
	S. BAKER, G. SINGLETON AND R. SMITH	
13	Introduced species and the line between biodiversity conservation and naturalistic eugenics	186
	D.W. MACDONALD, C.M. KING AND R. STRACHAN	
14	Bushmeat: the challenge of balancing human and wildlife needs in African moist tropical forests	206
	J.E. FA, L. ALBRECHTSEN AND D. BROWN	
15	Does sport hunting benefit conservation?	222
	A.J. LOVERIDGE, J.C. REYNOLDS AND E.J. MILNER-GULLAND	
16	Can farming and wildlife coexist?	239
	R.E. FEBER, E.J. ASTERAKI AND L.G. FIRBANK	
17	Living with wildlife: the roots of conflict and the solutions	253
	C. SILLERO-ZUBIRI, R. SUKUMAR AND A. TREVES	
18	Principles, practice and priorities: the quest for 'alignment'	271
	D.W. MACDONALD, N.M. COLLINS AND R. WRANGHAM	
	Index	291

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Boxes

Box 1.1	Case histories	6
Box 1.2	The IUCN Red List categories and criteria	8
Box 5.1	Reintroduction of wild dogs in South Africa	68
Box 6.1	El Niño and climate change	88
Box 6.2	Studies from Wytham Woods: from great tits to badgers	96
Box 7.1	Illustrations from animal tracking	106
Box 7.2	Digital camera traps: shedding light on predator–prey relationships	108
Box 7.3	Radio frequency identification (RFID)	108
Box 7.4	High-technology cameras: a window on a hidden world	109
Box 7.5	Loggers used in marine research	110
Box 7.6	Smart Dust: Sensor plus network-on-a-chip	111
Box 12.1	Application of ecologically based rodent management in Indonesia	181
Box 13.1	The American mink abroad	192
Box 13.2	Galápagos invasion	193
Box 14.1	Seeking better estimates of the problem – the Cross–Sanaga rivers study	211
Box 14.2	When bushmeat is less important as a food source	214

Preface

It's easy to think that as a result of the extinction of the dodo we are now sadder and wiser, but there's a lot of evidence to suggest that we are merely sadder and better informed.

(Douglas Adams and Mark Carwardine, *Last Chance To See*, 1990.)

Why bother?

It seems only fair to the reader, at the start of any book, to explain why the trouble was taken to write it. In the case of *Key Topics in Conservation Biology*, the question has answers at two different levels – the first explains why the topic itself is rivetingly relevant for everyone who gives even a jot, not just about Nature, but about the future of the human enterprise worldwide (and surely that makes it relevant to just about everybody), whereas the second explains why we tackled it in this particular way – an answer which reveals, unusually, that in this case the process is almost as interesting as the product.

At the first level, the reason why the key topics of wildlife conservation are relevant are not only because we are in the midst of an extinction crisis, but also because countless species not yet facing extinction, and their

habitats, are nonetheless facing grave change (almost always for the worse), invariably due ultimately to the hand of Man and often with consequences that also affect people. The extinction crisis itself is the topic of the first essay, by Pimm, Dickman and Cardillo, so there is no need to repeat the detail here. Similarly, issues such as bushmeat, hunting, pest control, agriculture and other forms of conflict are each the topic of other essays, as are such issues as infectious disease, invasive species and climate change. Again, other than drawing attention to the breadth of these topics, our purpose here is not to summarize these essays, but rather to direct the reader to them.

Like medicine, conservation biology is a mission-driven science. Physicians take it for granted that we all care about saving and extending human lives. Thus motivated, they study the pathology of ill health and practice methods to prevent or minimize it. Although