

## **Reconnecting People to Nature is a Prerequisite for the Future Conservation Agenda: Response from Swaisgood and Sheppard**

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as shrewdly suggested by Jenkins and Maxwell, and would promote novel implementation pathways where there is no “established implementation process” to “escort recommendations through.”

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### Hope and Realism in Conservation Biology

Swaigood and Sheppard (*BioScience* 60: 626–630) have reminded us that hope is an essential component of effective conservation biology. Without this, conservation biologists lose credibility, the public loses interest, despair prevails among scientists, and only defeat is anticipated. These authors advocate better balance between realism and hope, and I offer two suggestions to help find that optimal balance.

Swaigood and Sheppard focus on conservation of biodiversity. While saving biodiversity is indisputably a major element in the larger context of our species' environmental problems, reality demands that we emphasize

how biodiversity concerns are entangled with the human predicament generally. In support of this enlarged context, my second suggestion is to compile two lists, one containing things that inspire hope and a second listing things that make hope (or optimism) difficult. With these lists, we can evaluate how our individual efforts contribute to improving the hope-to-despair ratio in the context of the conservation nexus as a whole. We also can suggest promising directions for future research (and funding). In this spirit, I offer the following preliminary lists.

#### Things that give reason for hope:

- human ingenuity
- increasing awareness of the human predicament among the world's peoples
- increasing awareness of this predicament among national and state governments
- many successful achievements by nongovernmental organizations and governments
- rapidly accumulating scientific knowledge of how ecological and social systems work
- increasing interest in ecologically based economics
- technological innovations relevant to conservation
- increasing public awareness of ecosystem services
- energy efficiency improvements
- development of sustainable energy sources

#### Things that give reason for despair:

- accelerating biodiversity losses
- the human ecological footprint now exceeds estimated biocapacity of the planet
- continuing human population growth with its inherent inertia
- human population growth remains a taboo topic for politicians
- increasing per capita food scarcity and declining fresh water supplies
- anthropogenic climate change
- threats of nuclear warfare

- threats of social disintegration
- growing demands for energy
- economic decline and corporate oligarchy
- increasing consumption per capita
- political polarization and government paralysis
- no politically viable alternative to the universal goal of rapid economic growth
- increasing ignorance of science
- decreasing support for higher education
- rising poverty coupled with increasing inequality of wealth distribution
- terrorism
- declining marine fisheries
- increase in infectious diseases
- growing complexity of the human enterprise requiring an increasing percent of resources devoted to maintenance

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### Reconnecting People to Nature Is a Prerequisite for the Future Conservation Agenda: Response from Swaisgood and Sheppard

We welcome William Lidicker's thoughtful comments on balancing hope and realism. We are glad that our article is fulfilling its intended role of stimulating dialogue and we agree that taking stock of objective reasons for hope and despair will help move conservation goals forward. Clearly, there is more empirical reason for pessimism than hope, in Lidicker's list and in reality. Therefore, we caution against a literal balancing act between hope and despair. Fortunately, Lidicker did not take us down this path; instead, he suggests we use this equation to evaluate “how our individual efforts contribute to improving the hope-to-despair ratio.” This is a useful metric as long as it is kept in proper perspective.

Our point is not that hope is the logical alternative but that it is the *necessary* alternative—for if we extrapolate the legion scenarios of despair to their conclusion then we are merely fighting with time over an inevitably bleak future. Empirical research by conservation psychologists tells us that if we do not find reason for hope, motivation will falter, and so will conservation action. How can we call to action the next generation of conservation heroes in an atmosphere of defeat?

Here, we raise an additional reason for despair: the growing disconnect between human society and nature. This basal problem underlies several of Lidicker's reasons for despair and threatens to erode public support for environmental issues. That children (and their parents) are spending less

time in nature is well documented, placing the discipline—and perhaps the cause—of conservation biology in jeopardy. Television is not likely to inculcate the next generation of conservation professionals—only direct experience in nature can do that. If people don't connect with nature, where will our next generation of environmental stewards come from?

Who better to meet this challenge than conservation professionals? If conservation professionals do not answer this call to action, who will? Public support for science is eroding as the cultural gap between laypeople and scientists, sequestered in their ivory towers, widens. Conservation biology will likewise face a growing divide with the public if people value science *and* nature less. To address this rising problem head on, conservation

professionals will be called upon to engage the public, to reach out and share what they know, believe, and even feel about nature. Conservation professionals can become an important source of inspiration for reconnecting people to nature.

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