

Reaching out!

Kartik Shanker and Ankila Hiremath

Amongst the many challenges of conservation in the 21st century is the business of effective communication of information. Both theory and practice seem to suggest that unless conservation and environmental stewardship have a much larger constituency than they currently do, they are unlikely to succeed in the long term. In order to do this, we have to communicate to a large audience not only the threats that face the environment today, which the popular media does to some extent, but the state of the art research in conservation science, accounts of success and failure, and stories from a diversity of landscapes.

One of the ironies of conservation is that while it is a fundamentally human enterprise, it has been dominated by biologists and other natural scientists. In almost all conservation contexts, there are human actions or societies that need to be managed, and yet, little emphasis has been given to understand these communities, their perceptions, and needs, which may be required to bring about social change. Several journals now deal with the interface between conservation and society. In their introductory editorial to *Conservation and Society*, “Why do we need a new journal on conservation?” Kamaljit Bawa and Vasant Saberwal commented on the need to publish rigorous research from interdisciplinary perspectives and to make information available to readers in the Third World. *Conservation and Society*, open access since 2005, has certainly achieved its primary goal.

Nevertheless, though it is an open access journal with subsidised subscriptions to the developing world, *Conservation and Society* still has a limited readership,

restricted to a largely academic audience. As a rigorous academic journal, it has little appeal for the interested lay reader. Conservation information, however, needs to reach out to a much wider cross-section of civil society and to a greater diversity of stakeholders.

With *Current Conservation* we look to fill this gap by providing the latest in conservation research in an attractive and accessible format, through open access online content and a hard copy version at affordable prices. *Current Conservation* will carry the latest in research news from the natural- and social-science facets of conservation, such as conservation biology, environmental history, anthropology and sociology, ecological economics, landscape ecology, etc. *Current Conservation* will also periodically translate the content of *Conservation and Society*, reprinting the articles in language that is accessible to a wide readership.

Current Conservation is similar to *Conservation and Society* in its objective of showcasing work representing various facets of conservation. Like *Conservation and Society*, it too will focus—though will not restrict itself—to information from the developing world. We hope that these two ventures will complement each other and help contribute to meeting the massive challenge that confronts conservation communication today.

Kartik Shanker is Assistant Professor at the Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute Bangalore and an Adjunct Fellow at the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), Bangalore (kshanker@ces.iisc.ernet.in).

Ankila Hiremath is a Fellow at the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), Bangalore and New Delhi (hiremath@atree.org).

Why do we need a new journal on conservation?

Kamaljit S. Bawa and Vasant Saberwal

We live in an era of tremendous economic and environmental change. This change has significant consequences not only for the fate of natural ecosystems, but also for the human societies that are largely responsible for such change. We hope that *Conservation and Society* will serve as a platform for debate on the politics, the science and the history of change as well as the conservation of natural resources.

We are aware that there are several excellent journals devoted to conservation. The vast majority of them, however, are located in the West, with two consequences: First, most of these journals are expensive and hence difficult to access in the Third World. Second, much of what is published in these journals has relevance to the First rather than the Third World. We hope to make *Conservation and Society* available to readers at relatively cheap rates, readily accessible over the internet. We also hope to provide the space that will enable a more involved discussion around issues that have immediate relevance to the Third rather than the First World.

Our primary mandate is to bring interdisciplinary perspectives to bear upon the problem of environmental impoverishment. As can be seen from the editorial board, we have consciously chosen to work with both biologists and social scientists in the hope that we can initiate real discussions across the current disciplinary divides we are all familiar with.

Putting this first issue together has demonstrated just how challenging this task is likely to be. Even within the editorial board there have been differences over what

constitutes rigorous research. Editorial discussions have tended to follow disciplinary divides such that biologists have seen the absence of quantitative data as indicative of a piece being soft and lacking in analytical rigour. Equally, social scientists have struggled with work that is highly quantitative, often failing to understand the nuances or implications of data presented in some articles.

Navigating this divide is of the utmost importance from a conservation perspective. Academics and professionals in the social and natural sciences profess to having identical interests with regard to conserving and better using natural resources. Yet these same individuals have rarely managed to engage in fruitful conversation with one another.

Pulling this journal together will push our limits as we attempt to work across disciplinary boundaries. We will write about these experiences as we go along for we feel that the very act of managing this journal is part of

a much larger process of unpacking the constituent elements of the disciplinary divide. We are hopeful that many of you will join what promises to be a challenging, and thoroughly bumpy ride.

We invite comments and manuscripts from our readers. Apart from letters, essays, reviews, commentaries and research contributions, we also welcome guest editorials. The journal will obviously be shaped by its contributors; hopefully many of these contributions will help shape contemporary debates on the question of the interaction between society and the environment.

We anticipate publishing the journal twice a year to start with, but are working our way towards a quarterly publication. While our editorial team has a definite slant towards South Asia (India really), we are hoping to have a more diverse board in time. We are committed, however, to publishing articles from across the world, and on any part of the world. Our only condition in accepting articles for review is that they fit our mandate of publishing articles on conservation with a demonstrable link to society.

This first issue of *Conservation and Society* is dedicated to the memory of Dr T.N. Khoshoo. Khoshoo’s work and commitment inspired a generation of scientists, including many on the editorial board of *Conservation and Society*.

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Kamaljit Singh Bawa is a Distinguished Professor of Biology at University of Massachusetts, Boston and Senior Fellow and founder of the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), Bangalore. (kamal.bawa@umb.edu).

Vasant Saberwal is a Programme Officer at the Ford Foundation, New Delhi (v.Saberwal@fordfound.org).

