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Editorial

Erratum: In the original publication of this article a typographical error was present in the second paragraph. The PDF was corrected on 24 October 2024.

Twenty years of the “radical middle ground” – our work has only just begun

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This year marks 20 years of *Avian Conservation and Ecology*, from its humble beginnings and positioning itself at the interface of ecology and conservation - a notion that we take for granted now but that was much more “radical” then, as opined by the first editors Thomas Nudds and Marc-Andre Villard (Nudds and Villard 2005). In that time the journal has thrived, receiving ever more submissions touching on new and emerging threats to birds, technologies to understand their ecology, and analyses to protect and conserve the ecosystems on which they depend. We are indebted to all the authors, reviewers, and editors, the team at our not-for-profit publisher, Resilience Alliance, and our two sponsoring organizations, Birds Canada and the Society of Canadian Ornithologists-Société des ornithologistes du Canada, for making *ACE* a success.

But despite advances in our understanding of the natural world, the tools we can employ to study it, and the growing discussion about the need to conserve species and places in everyday life, birds continue to face a perilous future (Lees et al. 2022). There have been 2.9 billion birds lost since 1970 in North America (Rosenberg et al. 2019), and 600 million lost in Europe since 1980 (Burns et al. 2021). In Canada, shorebirds, aerial insectivores, and grassland birds have declined by 42%, 43%, and 67% since 1970 (Birds Canada and Environment and Climate Change Canada 2024). More than 1400 species are currently at risk of extinction, 231 of those critically so (Birdlife International 2024). Globally, 1 in 5 species is of conservation concern (BirdLife International 2022). Since 1500 we have lost nearly 200 species (Hume 2017), and 436 species are at a higher extinction risk globally now than they were in 1988. Window collisions (Klem 2009), illegal hunting (Brochet et al. 2016), the songbird trade (Marshall et al. 2020), invasive species (Dueñas et al. 2021), fisheries bycatch (Dias et al. 2019), chemical (Whitney and Cristol 2018), light (Cabrera-Cruz et al. 2018), noise (Senzaki et al. 2020), air (Barton et al. 2023), and plastic pollution (van Franeker and Law 2015), habitat loss, fragmentation, and degradation (Lees et al. 2022), and the rapid breakdown of the planet’s climate (Dunn and Møller 2019) are all contributing to the loss of avian biodiversity.

The evidence is unequivocal: the state of the natural world, and the world’s birds, is worse today than when *Avian Conservation and Ecology* began in 2005 (Lees et al. 2022, Richardson et al. 2023).

Are there wins? Yes, absolutely! And those should be rightly celebrated. For example, the huge success in securing island populations by eradicating introduced invasive rodents (Howald et al. 2007), the recovery of species previously on the brink:- California Condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*) and the Lord Howe Woodhen (*Hypotaenidia sylvestris*) are just two examples (Bakker et al. 2024, O’Dwyer et al. 2024). But we mustn’t be blinded by undue optimism at the larger scale.

The argument “should scientists also be advocates” has been debated for nearly 50 years (Armstrong 1979, Nielsen 2001, Nelson and Vucetich 2009). But in those 50 years, scientists have watched the places they care deeply about and the species they study wither and even disappear forever. Bearing witness to humanity’s seemingly unstoppable impacts on our natural world exacts a great mental and emotional toil for those on the front lines (Cunsolo and Ellis 2018). There has never been a more apt time for scientists to advocate for the natural world and employ *pathos*, one of the three modes of persuasion, alongside *logos*, the appeal to reason, and *ethos*, the appeal to authority.

If we are to arrest the seemingly inevitable trajectory of bird populations globally and the unfathomable destruction of the habitats on which they depend, we must remain resolved and unwavering, speak truths that can sometimes be uncomfortable, and most importantly support each other as we all push in a unified direction. Those on the front lines of conservation, doing boots-on-the-ground work, are undervalued, underfunded, suffer from insecure and poorly compensated employment, and increasingly are also fighting disinformation (Fournier and Bond 2015, McKenzie 2021, Omari 2024). We must all work to improve these areas and encourage greater funding for the environment; it IS available, if we prioritize it (Balmford and Whitten 2003, Wintle et al. 2019).

Although the vision for *Avian Conservation and Ecology* might no longer be called “radical” or even represent a middle ground, it continues to fill a critical niche at a time when it is needed more than ever. We can—and MUST!—conserve species and spaces using a sound ecological foundation. And work together to support those who do. This is the niche that *Avian Conservation and Ecology* will continue to fill.

Our hope is that this radical spirit continues and that in another 20 years' time, we have learned some lessons from the previous 20 years.

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