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Editorial

In 2002, the former *Zeitschrift für Ökologie und Naturschutz* started its new phase as an international journal written entirely in English, the *Journal for Nature Conservation* (JNC). Since then, and after being integrated in the Elsevier family of journals, the JNC has seen a steady growth. The journal was soon covered by Thomson Reuters' Science Citation Index, the Impact Factor is developing well, and the number of manuscripts being submitted is increasing rapidly. Our aim is still the same: to provide both scientists and practitioners in conservation theory, policy and management with comprehensive and applicable information and ideas. The need is there.

We are very pleased with the positive development of the JNC. However, we have one small concern. Many submissions are returned to the authors prior to reviewing, because they are not within the scope of our Editorial policy. Needless to say, nature conservation is a field of activity not free of tension and controversies between different approaches, and therefore we feel obliged to further explain our particular view herein.

Pure science is not value laden, so that when introducing any purpose or valuation criteria to it, we should speak of applied science. Applied ecology or biology, for instance, are needed for understanding and improving crop production in agriculture, to advance human health in medicine or to achieve strategic advantage in a military context. The scientific knowledge in biology and ecology applied to conservation (of nature) is usually termed conservation biology. It represents the scientific underpinning of conservation, but, in a strict sense, nature conservation is a technology; like architecture or medicine it is supported by science, but also advanced by experience and evidence.

Thus, as in the practice of medicine (seeking health of humans), conservation practice (seeking health of nature) is linked with science, but also with politics, particularly with legislation and funding, as well as with society (e.g. perception, communication, participation). Of these four spheres, the scientific, the technical, the political and the social, the JNC focuses mainly on conservation biology, methodology and evidence-based approaches. We want to share with our readers the good and bad experiences submitted by our authors, their reviews, their ideas, strategies, methods and recommendations. This dialectic process contributes to building a sort of "conservation doctrine", which is rapidly consolidating in the last decades. That is our business.

A different question, perhaps more controversial, is the extent of the concept of nature as related to nature conservation. What is nature? I discussed in-depth the term naturalness as a state descriptor (Machado, 2004), and it is obvious that present earth

systems range from purely natural to purely artificial or anthropically managed systems (I used a naturalness index ranking from 10 to 0, respectively). The aim of nature conservation is to keep or recover the naturalness – processes and elements – of any given system. Some areas (e.g. reserves, parks) have been specially established and should be managed towards as natural a state as possible. However, other and often the more extensive areas are managed to keep semi-natural conditions (usually between levels 7 and 3 of naturalness) under sustainable development criteria. Both can benefit from conservation techniques and from the papers that we want to publish.

We agree with the editorial of Ghazoul (2007) in placing humans at the heart of conservation, meaning that conservation is for humans, not an activity *per se*, enclosed in itself. Preserving biodiversity – one of the new paradigms – is part of nature conservation, particularly when one speaks of wild species and natural habitats, but not when the targets are anthropogenic cultivars or animal races. Similarly, the JNC is not active where the emphasis is on human-dominated processes, and the interest in nature is marginal, for example, in intensive agriculture, aquaculture or of environment affairs (usually, industrial).

Instead the JNC focuses on directly linked studies or applications to nature conservation, provided they are of scientific quality and are not mere the reporting of projects of only local interest. Contributions should be involved mainly and directly with conservation, have a wide outreach and tell something new or useful to our international audience. Basic research in biology, genetics, or ecology that may be of use for conservation is better suited for specialised journals in these fields, such as, for example, *Acta Oecologica*, *Plant Ecology* or *Journal of Animal Ecology*.

With the above comments, we hope our potential authors get a more clear idea of the kind of articles the JNC is very keen to accept. And having said this, in the name of the JNC Editorial team I wish to thank all authors that have trusted our journal for publishing their work, and all those to come.

Editor-in-Chief
Antonio Machado

References

- Ghazoul, J. (2007). Placing humans at the heart of conservation. *Biotropica*, 39(5), 565–566.
Machado, A. (2004). An index of naturalness. *Journal for Nature Conservation*, 12(2), 95–110.