

Reconciling just preservation

Commentary on [Treves et al.](#) on *Just Preservation*

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Abstract: Treves et al.'s target article can play an important role in reconciling the needs of future generations and non-human animals in conservation. Human capacities are adequate for interpreting and defining many non-human animal needs. Worldviews are more complex, however, and conservation science, like the target article itself, suffers from a lack of diversity and inclusiveness. This may pose practical impediments to realizing just preservation.

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Just preservation raises the bar for the moral consideration of non-human animals in conservation, advancing long overdue calls for consilience in science (Wilson 1998). Treves et al. (2019) argue that we need to “level the playing field for human and non-human animals” for the sake of just preservation.

In 2012, leading scientists from around the world agreed that:

“Convergent evidence indicates that non-human animals have the neuroanatomical, neurochemical, and neurophysiological substrates of conscious states along with the capacity to exhibit intentional behaviors. Consequently, the weight of evidence indicates that humans are not unique in possessing the neurological substrates that generate consciousness. Non-human animals, including all mammals and birds, and many other creatures, including octopuses, also possess these neurological substrates.” (Low 2012)

The need to recognize non-human animal sentience is as pressing in conservation science as in other fields. Philosophical debates about individual animal welfare have either been ignored on the grounds of human exceptionalism (Dawkins 1990; Chapman & Huffman 2018) or rejected as “emotional” reasoning. In conservation science, some endorse a form of “moral blindness” (Bauman & Donskis 2013) about the needs of their own research subjects. Treves et al. are taking an important step toward remedying this.

Reconciling Species Needs. Treves et al. pose thoughtful questions about whether “advocate-trustees” could adequately represent or define the interests of non-human animals. Disciplines

that have explored similar questions for decades (e.g., ecophilosophy, feminist geography, animal geography) may provide some insight. Multi-species ethnographic studies recognize that sentience is not a unique capacity to humans (Smart 2014, Lynn 1998). A human analogue can sometimes suffice to define the needs of non-human animals (Horowitz 2016). Non-human animals can understand relationships, space, and patterns well enough to ascribe meaning to landscapes (Cresswell 1996, Paquet & Alexander 2019). As individual animals are dying *en masse* and many species are on the brink of extinction, there is an urgent need to broaden our perspective on the needs of sentient life on our planet (Haraway 1991, Nightingale 2003).

Reconciling Voices – Achievable and Practical? Treves et al. write: “anything less than ... balancing the well-being of humans and nonhumans, now and into the future, would be anthropocentric and unjust.” Worldviews are reasonably well considered in the climate change debate (Joyce et al. 2010, Koltko-Rivera 2004), but anthropocentric worldviews as they relate to wildlife are not well studied; anthropocentrism covers a spectrum of ethics and behaviours, from killing animals in order to maintain ecosystem balance, to killing animals in order to end the suffering of sick or injured animals, to loving wild animals to death (by feeding them) (Alexander & Draper 2019).

The empirical evidence on sentience suggests that leveling the playing field amongst humans and non-humans is the morally correct approach; but this calls for greater inclusivity and representation (of disciplines, demographics, species, etc.). Treves et al. write that the “adult” world created an *unjust* preservation paradigm. Laying the blame on “adults” seems to gloss over a huge gender and ethnic inequity chasm in conservation science. In the past, voices of women and girls — indigenous and ethnically diverse — were ignored. Their inclusion might have made a difference much earlier on and could certainly enrich the conversation today. It has taken (mostly) male voices such as Treves et al.’s to legitimize animal welfare and rights in conservation science. Yet the same considerations have been raised by other genders and ethnic groups for decades (Haraway 1991). We should diversify authorship in all of our publications. If we preservation scientists cannot address this lack of inclusivity and representation, how can we convince an entire planet to accept just preservation for non-human animals?

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