Oryx

Beyond the usual voices: who should shape conservation conversations?

By Simon Pooley, Viola Ross-Smith and Julia Hochbach, 22nd October 2026

What is the purpose of an academic journal on biodiversity conservation?

The traditional answer is straightforward enough: to publish rigorous research, advance knowledge and inform policy and practice. But conservation is ultimately about more than just disseminating knowledge; it is about changing the relationship between people and the natural world. The global biodiversity and climate crisis is not merely—and perhaps not even primarily—a scientific or intellectual challenge. We already know a great deal about why species are declining and ecosystems degrading, and which effects this is likely to have. We even know what the solutions might be. Yet progress remains frustratingly slow. The barriers to humanity living sustainably on this planet and in harmony with nature are more social, cultural and political than scientific. And arguably, the lack of progress on making the changes we need amounts to a failure of the imagination.

This raises a question for those of us involved in academic research and publishing on the topic of nature conservation. If living in harmony with nature requires action from all of society, is it right—and is it effective—that a peer-reviewed journal such as *Oryx* should be restricted to a relatively narrow set of voices?

Many people care deeply about the future of nature without ever publishing a scientific paper. For example, artists, musicians, writers, filmmakers, religious leaders, chefs, volunteers, campaigners and community members all shape how people think and feel about the natural world. They tell stories, create artworks and experiences, challenge assumptions and invite people to imagine different futures. This October, for instance, professor of literature and environmental humanities Robert Macfarlane will be discussing “how scientists, writers, artists and activists around the world are contesting the story of human exceptionalism in order to realise a hopeful, viable future on Earth” in the BBC Reith Lectures.

A Casual Destruction by Stephen Redpath. “One of the joys of my life is to walk in the countryside around my home, with binoculars in one hand and a sketchbook in the other. I paint watercolour landscapes in response to these experiences. This particular painting was completed 2 years ago, after watching some of the best local habitat for wading birds being ‘improved’ for farming. I felt sorrow, anger, grief and helplessness and I wanted to allow these emotions to express themselves on paper in a very intuitive way.” © Stephen Redpath (2026)

Yet, these perspectives rarely find a place in the scholarly conservation literature. And conservation scientists themselves often engage in other forms of expression outside their professional roles. They not only rationally observe, document and recommend, they also respond emotionally to biodiversity loss. They write poetry, perform comedy, make films, create art and join campaigns, yet these activities are usually treated as separate from their scientific work, despite being motivated by the same desire: to help build a future in which people thrive as part of a thriving natural world.

These stories, narratives and wider forms of expression matter. Making space for them provides the opportunity to include a much wider range of voices and perspectives in conservation, and open up to imaginative thinking about which futures seem desirable and possible, and which actions feel worth taking.

So, what would happen if conservation journals created more space for these conversations? What might we learn from people whose expertise comes not from academic training but from lived experience, creative practice or long-term relationships with particular places and species? How might conservation change if we paid more attention to culture, imagination, emotion and storytelling alongside scientific evidence? There are of course journals that tackle head on the politics of conservation, or critique conservation from the outside; this is not our focus here. We ask whether we could open up space for envisioning the futures we do want, in addition to the

prevailing focus on the scenarios we want to avoid, and on the behaviours we seek to discourage. We are keen to explore what new forms of collaboration might emerge if people who rarely encounter one another in academic settings were invited into the same conversation.

These are not entirely new questions; *Oryx* has long sought to broaden conservation debates, including through championing the work of practitioners and early-career conservationists, and the inclusion of Indigenous voices. But we believe there is scope to go further. Over the coming months, we will be exploring ways to open the pages of *Oryx* to new voices, perspectives and forms of engagement alongside our existing formats. This may involve contributions that incorporate narrative, artwork, sound, video or other creative approaches. It may include transdisciplinary collaborations, between academics and non-academics, or reflections on aspects of conservation that are difficult to capture in conventional research papers.

Importantly, similar standards will apply to the editorial process; we hope to publish really good, meaningful contributions in new formats, rather than reserve high editorial standards only for scientific contributions. This will be a challenge, and we do not have all the answers: there will be practical questions about formats, peer review, authorship and accessibility.

Some people may argue that academic journals are not the place for such experimentation—and *Oryx* will continue to do what it does well as a conservation science journal; this is designed to augment, not transform, the journal. Others may wonder whether these approaches can genuinely contribute to conservation. Those are exactly the kinds of conversations we hope to have.

Most crucially, we want this initiative to be shaped collectively. If you have ideas, critiques, examples, recommendations or proposals, we would love to hear from you. Who is missing from conservation conversations? Which perspectives deserve greater visibility? What kinds (and formats) of contributions would help us think differently about conservation and its future, and inspire action?

Conservation will only succeed if it becomes a truly shared enterprise. If we are serious about living in harmony with nature, we need to expand who gets to participate in imagining that future.

We welcome ideas, critiques, proposals and offers of collaboration at oryx@fauna-flora.org.

Our editorial ‘Towards a more open, inclusive and creative conservation journal’, co-authored with members of the *Oryx* editorial board who are helping to shape this initiative, is available open access at doi.org/10.1017/S0030605326104128.

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