Oryx

New issue: Plant Conservation

By Emma Sinnett, 13th January 2025

The latest issue of *Oryx* includes two editorials highlighting the work of conservationist Bill Adams, as he steps down from the Editorial Board of *Oryx* after more than 25 years. In *Homo conservationensis* Bill considers how the changing world of conservation has been reflected in the pages of *Oryx* since its first issue in 1950, and in a separate piece Julia Jones and E.J. Milner-Gulland reflect on Bill's extraordinary body of work and how it has profoundly influenced conservation science.

The thematic focus of this issue is on plant conservation, with 10 articles examining a wide range of topics. Botanic gardens play a crucial role in the preservation and restoration of threatened plant species, and two articles focus on their contributions: one on the diversity and optimization of the Cactaceae collection of the Rio de Janeiro Botanic Garden, and the other on the conservation of *Rhododendron* diversity in botanic gardens. Further articles in the section share insights on the conservation biology of insular species in Greece and of a threatened medicinal species in China, the conservation status of rediscovered and newly discovered species in Rwanda, Colombia, Argentina and Tanzania, the merits of traditional and automated conservation assessments for plants, and the potential influence of climate change on an Endangered magnolia in China.

The issue also includes a Briefly section with a spotlight on plants, a host of Conservation News items and three book reviews! Find out more about the issue's content, including our Editor's picks, below:

Editor's picks

1. *Homo conservationensis* – *Adams*
2. Bill Adams' scholarship has profoundly changed the way conservationists see the world – *Jones & Milner-Gulland*
3. Conservation biology of three threatened *Limonium* species endemic to Zakynthos Island (Ionian Islands, Greece) – *Valli et al.*
4. Exploring links between socio-ecological systems and psychological distress: a case study in rural Uganda – *Pienkowski et al.*

Limonium korakonisicum on the coast of Zakynthos. This endemic species is found exclusively in a single location in the Korakonisi area and is classified as Critically Endangered according to IUCN criteria (see Valli et al.). Photo: Anna-Thalassini Valli .

Plant conservation

- Cacti in distress: how to enhance ex situ conservation strategies through living collections –*Almeida et al.*
- Rhododendron diversity conservation in global botanic gardens: a case study of *Maddenia* species – *Hu et al.*
- Conservation biology of three threatened *Limonium* species endemic to Zakynthos Island (Ionian Islands, Greece) – *Valli et al.*
- Rediscovery of the waterlily *Nymphaea thermarum* Fisch. in Rwanda – *Abeli et al.*
- Rediscovery of the Neotropical orchid *Porroglossum parsonsii* and recommendations for its conservation – *Parra-Sanchez et al.*
- Lost and found: the rediscovery of the lost fern species *Asplenium achalense* (Aspleniaceae) and assessment of its conservation status – *Arana et al.*
- Conservation status of newly discovered subpopulations of two globally threatened tree species in the East Usambara Mountains, Tanzania – *Ndangalasi & Cordeiro*
- Comparing traditional and automated conservation assessments for Himalayan species of *Buddleja* – *Gurung et al.*
- Population age structure and conservation status of *Ferula sinkiangensis* (Apiaceae) in Xinjiang, China – *Liu et al.*
- Current conservation status and potential distribution under climate change of *Michelia lacei*, a Plant Species with Extremely Small Populations in Yunnan, China – *Liu et al.*

Buddleja delavayi, a perrenial shrub distributed in sparse montane forests and moist broad-leaved forests on hillsides in Dali, Yunnan. Following traditional and automated conservation assessments, Gurung et al. recommend *B. delavayi* should be categorized as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List.

Behind the cover

The cover illustrates the cactus *Echinopsis calochlora*, native to Bolivia and Brazil, flowering in the Rio de Janeiro Botanic Garden. In the lead article Almeida et al. evaluate the diversity of the Cactaceae collection of the Garden, recommending strategic actions to enhance its conservation value. The collection contains 156 cacti species that naturally occur in Brazil, including 43 species categorized as threatened on the Brazilian Red List and 57 categorized as threatened on the IUCN Red List.

The cactus *Echinopsis calochlora*, native to Bolivia and Brazil, flowering in the Rio de Janeiro Botanic Garden. Photo: Alexandre Machado.

Editorials

Homo conservationensis – *Bill Adams*

Stepping down from the Editorial Board after more than 25 years, Bill considers how the changing world of conservation has been reflected in the pages of *Oryx* since its first issue in 1950. He notes that while there have been big changes in some areas, in others, little progress has been made. For example, although much more attention is now being given to the social dimensions of conservation (formerly, most papers were about wildlife and people appeared mainly as threats), charismatic mammals continue to dominate much conservation research.

In highlighting both progress and the considerable work still to be done, Bill urges us to be better conservationists.

'If I am allowed one last observation, it is about how *Homo conservationensis writes*, and for whom. … the clipped, passive–aggressive style of academic writing often serves, as Latin did for medieval clerics, to distance ordinary people. Yet conservation depends on such people utterly, both conservationists on the ground, and the many other individuals, communities and interest groups affected by what they think, say and do.'

Bill Adams' scholarship has profoundly changed the way conservationists see the world – *Julia Jones & E.J. Milner-Gulland*

Julia Jones and E.J. Milner-Gulland reflect on Bill Adams' extraordinary body of work while also introducing a new audience to his writing. From his extensive and varied back catalogue they highlight some key pieces that illustrate the breadth of his thinking and emphasize four key lessons that shine through.

'As ever, Bill continues to look over the horizon, at the way conservation is changing, or needs to change. Conservation scholars, policy makers and practitioners will all benefit from Bill's continued insights as society navigates the huge environmental challenges we face.'

EDITORIALS

Oryx

Plant conservation

Homo conservationensis

WILLIAM M. ADAMS

The conservationist is a strange beast: *Homo conservationensis*, the human who cares for the rest of nature (Sandbrook, 2015). As I step off the editorial board of *Oryx*, I have been thinking a lot about what *Oryx* has to say about us. How has conservation changed since its first issue in 1950? Three things in particular strike me.

Firstly, the way we frame our concerns has certainly changed. The original incarnation of *Oryx* was as the *Journal of the Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire* in 1904. The society's members were big-game hunters, and their idea of preservation reflected Victorian notions of land and game ownership, of sporting codes and the suppression of poaching (Prendergast & Adams, 2003). Before the second world war, their journal offered an explicitly colonial view of the world of conservation and extinction: this was the metropolitan gaze of white men, looking out from the smoking rooms of London clubs or the residencies of colonial governors, remembering the crackle of camp fires and the view down rifle barrels. Now conservation is very different, seen through the lens of the natural sciences, structured by statistical analysis, shaped by modelling and GIS, powered by rafts of data from digital devices and automated research processes. Since *Oryx* began, conservation has lost much of its amateurism. It is now a major university subject, at undergraduate and graduate level, and is served by legions of conservation scientists. The result is greater rigour, greater attention to evidence, greater clarity and authority.

At the same time, despite all the science, the conservation gaze today remains Eurocentric—outsiders look at rural landscapes and societies, diagnose problems and prescribe rules to shape human relations with non-human nature. The knowledge of northern experts directs the flow of funds to protect wildlife. International agendas are dominated by Western ideas about humanity and non-human life (e.g. Kothari, 2021). Much has been written about the need to decolonize conservation, and about its diversity and divisions (e.g. Milner-Gulland, 2021), and this remains

Bill Adams' scholarship has profoundly changed the way conservationists see the world

JULIA P.G. JONES*[1,2] and E.J. MILNER-GULLAND[3]

It is unusual for academic writing, in and of itself, to fundamentally change policy and practice. However, Bill Adams' highly original and influential writing about conservation has demonstrated how this can be done. Bill retired as the Moran Professor of Conservation and Development at the University of Cambridge in 2022 and this year he stands down as a Senior Editor of *Oryx* after more than 25 years. Now is a good time to reflect on his extraordinary body of work and, we hope, introduce a new audience to his writing.

Reading Bill's extensive back catalogue is to have a wise and often sharply humorous voice talk you through the major debates in conservation over the last quarter of a century. He is incredibly well-read, and erudite in his references, but his writing has a light touch that is a pleasure to read. From amongst Bill's varied writings we highlight some key pieces that illustrate the breadth of his thinking. All are worth reading (or re-reading) in their own right, but they also illustrate four lessons that shine through.

Conservation needs a diversity of perspectives

Bill was ahead of his time in advocating for conservation to be interdisciplinary, to draw on relevant theories and insights from across scholarship. Unlike most conservationists of his generation, he came into conservation from geography (a discipline that combines social and natural sciences) rather than from a background in ecology or biology.

His 2007 editorial (Adams, 2007) is an insightful take on interdisciplinarity. Bill values disciplinary expertise, stating "without taxonomy, Tardigrades are just 'bugs'; without anthropology, ethnicity is just 'tribe', and any intelligent detailed discussion of biodiversity and society is stillborn". He notes that conservation needs to break free of the boundaries that traditionally constrain academic research, and that biologically trained conservationists need to engage with social sciences if they are to address the causes and consequences of biodiversity loss, which are embedded

Other content

- Exploring links between socio-ecological systems and psychological distress: a case study in rural Uganda – *Pienkowski et al.*
- Reproductive populations of the Critically Endangered bat *Phyllonycteris aphylla* at two new locations in Jamaica – *Oelbaum et al.*
- Multi-stakeholder identification and prioritization of human–tiger conflict reduction measures in Chitwan National Park, Nepal – *Dhungana et al.*
- First insights into the spatio-temporal ecology of sympatric large carnivores in Niokolo-Koba National Park, Senegal – *Horion et al.*

Phyllonycteris aphylla emerging from the Lake-Side Bat Exit, Green Grotto Caves, St. Ann Parish, Jamaica. The pale colour, pink forearms and legs are characteristic of the species. Find out more in Oelbaum et al.'s research and blog. Photo: Sherri and Brock Fenton.

Conservation news

- New BGCI report on the importance of botanic gardens in tackling the illegal plant trade – *Smith*
- Conservation Leadership Programme 2024 Team Awards announced – *Tointon*
- Decline of the Critically Endangered Tonkin snub-nosed monkey in Quan Ba forest, Vietnam – *Maheshwari et al.*
- Saving the Ryukyu rabbit tick *Haemaphysalis pentalagi* – *Kwak et al.*
- IUCN Species Survival Commission Wild Tulip Specialist Group established – *Wilson & Sultangaziev*
- IUCN Species Survival Commission Amphibian Specialist Group launches Eastern Asian Salamander Task Force – *Borzée et al.*
- New IUCN Species Survival Commission Wild Parrot Specialist Group – *Latas et al.*
- New National Species Specialist Group in Nigeria – *Ivande et al.*
- Center for Species Survival Nigeria launches programme of work – *Danmallam et al.*
- Biodiversity, renewable energy and maritime spatial planning in Europe: should offshore wind farms be located in marine protected areas? – *Stephenson*
- Collaborative national satellite event of World Species Congress for conservation in Indonesia – *Felicity et al.*
- Wildlife under siege in the Mexican Maya Forest – *Reyna-Hurtado*
- Ecology of the National Key Protected Wild Plants in the Xinjiang Region, China – *Jiancheng*
- Finding *Staphylea shweliensis*, a long-lost Critically Endangered plant species of China – *Li et*

al.

An Endangered Baird's tapir *Tapirus bairdii* in an ephemeral pond beside the road in the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve (see Reyna-Hurtado et al.). Photo: Gustavo Costa.

Book reviews

- A beaver, eight bears and an extinct auk: species books are back
- Hunt for the Shadow Wolf: The Lost History of Wolves in Britain and the Myths and Stories that Surround Them
- Corporate Nature: An Insider's Ethnography of Global Conservation

Header image: *Asplenium achalense* Hieron. (Aspleniaceae), a fern endemic to north-west and central Argentina. Photo: Marcelo Arana.

Emma Sinnett

Emma joined the Oryx team in 2022 after completing an MSc in wildlife conservation. She is particularly interested in African wildlife and the wildlife trade, and carried out her MSc research on the impact of wild meat hunting on duiker populations in Central Africa. Prior to her MSc, Emma worked in finance before volunteering at conservation organizations and training as a field guide in South Africa.