

Oryx

Why are some conservation actions applied while others are not?

By Cristian Pérez-Granados & Germán M. López-Iborra, 26th February 2021

Many conservation biologists are concerned about the low impact their research has on policy-making and management. This common phenomenon is known as the conservation research-practice gap. Research on Dupont's lark *Chersophilus duponti* is an illustrative example of this. Its European population has halved in the 21st century to 2,200 breeding pairs, restricted to Spain. It is a well-studied passerine, with dozens of conservation articles focused on the species. However, only a few of the conservation actions proposed by scientists have been implemented.



A Dupont's lark in its typical habitat. The species is characterized by its long and curved bill. Photo: Cristian Pérez-Granados

Since 2011, our team has lead a Dupont's lark monitoring programme in Valencia, Spain. This project has been promoted by the regional government, the Generalitat Valenciana, and is funded

by Levantina De Recursos Mineros, S.A.U. This private company is exploiting a quarry located within the species' range in this region and has worked with us to ensure the persistence of the species. In this climate of collaboration between institutions it was possible to implement habitat management interventions in 2015 and 2018. These actions were the fruit of many years of research and discussion with the social actors involved, and would have been difficult to achieve without a direct and constant dialogue with the conservation authorities. After such a positive experience, we were motivated to evaluate the conservation research-practice gap for Dupont's lark in Spain.



Left: Dupont's lark ringed. Individuals are ringed to obtain ecological information of the species, such as survival rate and dispersal movements. Right: A Dupont's lark singing in its typical habitat. The species is characterized by its long and curved bill. Photos: Adrián Barrero

Through a literature review, we identified the main conservation actions proposed by scientists and managers, as well as the main reasons why some managers opted for implementing certain conservation actions but others did not. We sent an online questionnaire to the heads of conservation departments in each of the regions where Dupont's lark is found. Although all managers eventually responded to our questionnaire, it was a drawn-out process as it took some more than 1 year to reply.



Left: A Dupont's lark in its typical habitat, a low shrub-steppe dominated by shrubs shorter than 20 cm. Photo: Adrián Barrero. Right: Habitat structure after performing shrub clearance to improve habitat quality for the Dupont's lark in Valencia province. An idea of the original, much denser, habitat structure can be seen in the background. Photo: Cristian Pérez-Granados

We found a large disparity between the recommendations most commonly proposed by conservationists and those implemented by managers. For example, managers implemented regulatory and monitoring measures almost two times more often than management interventions, probably related to their legal obligations for providing updated indices on population trends and to protect populations and areas occupied by threatened species. Managers indicated that time and budget limitations were the main reasons why management interventions were less likely to be implemented than other conservation actions. This result agrees with the fact that a larger number of conservation actions were implemented in those regions where the Dupont's lark is suffering a larger decline. It suggests that managers are more prone to applying conservation interventions when the species is facing worsening population trends. This may be because it is easier to obtain funds under these circumstances.

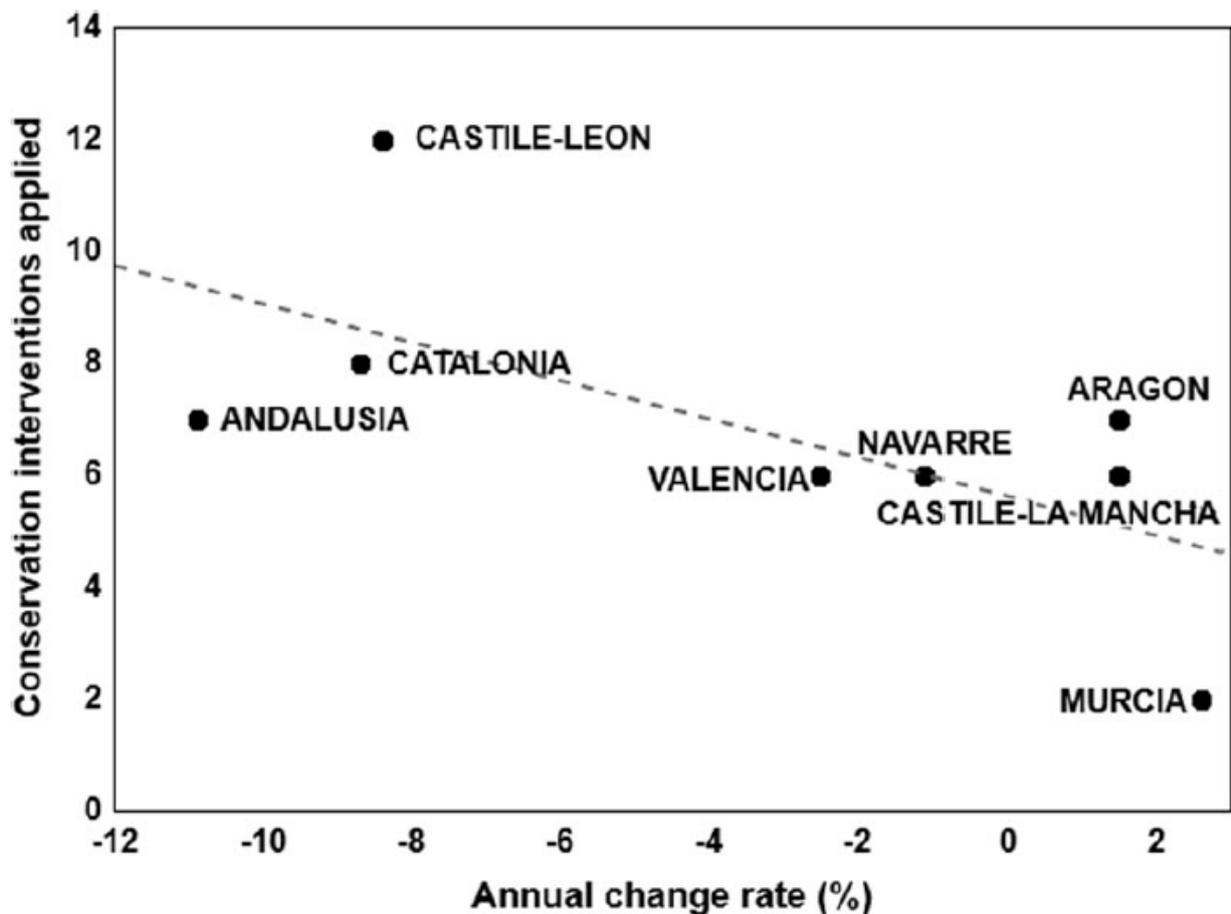


Figure 1: Relationship between annual change rate of Dupont's lark and number of conservation actions implemented in each region where the species occurs.

Managers commonly base their decisions on studies assessing the effectiveness of conservation interventions and thus the dissemination of this type of study is essential to implement evidence-based conservation. These studies should be disseminated regardless of the success of the conservation action implemented. Managers found it very difficult to take into account previous experience with the species, since there are very few published cases evaluating the effectiveness of the conservation actions implemented. Surprisingly, according to the questionnaire, managers often tested the efficacy of the interventions applied. Thus one of the following steps to reduce the gap between managers and scientists might be to initiate an iterative dialogue to evaluate and disseminate the efficacy of those interventions already implemented and evaluated. To give an example and try to reduce the conservation research-practice gap in the Dupont's lark, we have already sent the summary (translated to Spanish) and our article to the heads of conservation of the regions occupied by the Dupont's lark.

We hope that our study could be used by conservationists and managers as an example about how to evaluate the research-practice gap in other threatened species and to promote the recovery of our beloved Dupont's lark.



Left: Tree removal is one of the habitat management actions performed within the LIFE Ricotí project, aimed to improve the habitat quality of the species in Soria province. Right: The use of playbacks to attract co-specifics to unoccupied but potential sites is one of the few conservation interventions whose effectiveness test has been published. Photos: Cristian Pérez-Granados

The article [The conservation research-practice gap: a case study of a threatened bird](#) is available in *Oryx—The International Journal of Conservation*.



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