Conservation Biology

Comment

Also Seeking Common Ground in Conservation

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In his response to my recent editorial (Soule 2013), Kareiva (2014) seeks to "correct some misimpressions" while seeking common ground. I am grateful for Kareiva's collegial response and his agreement that nature (biodiversity) must be protected and conserved for its own sake as well as for utilitarian reasons.[1]

Kareiva celebrates the achievements of his employer, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), globally the most influential conservation NGO. TNC has been a powerful actor and an effective implementer of habitat protection as well as a key voice for educating the public about the threats to nature. Its scientists, staff, and donors deserve our gratitude. If TNC did not exist, conservationists would need to invent such an organization. Not only do I harbor no hostility to the hundreds of dedicated staff of TNC, I salute their manifold contributions to conservation.

Another point of agreement is that protected areas, by themselves, are too limited in size. Combined they constitute only about 13% of Earth (Le Saout et al. 2013), considered far too little to achieve comprehensive biodiversity protection (Noss et al. 2012). The solution is to create more protected areas and to improve their management when possible.

We agree, as well, that lands subject to resource extraction, agriculture, grazing, and logging must be managed in ways that minimize damage to biodiversity, in part because diverse ecosystems are more stable and resilient (Tilman 2012). But wishing does not make it so. Not nearly enough sensitively managed wildlife habitat is effectively protected in the Unites States or elsewhere to arrest the extinction crisis. In addition, ecological degradation is exacerbated by some government agencies such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services antipredator program and The U.S. Bureau of Land Management's aggressive leasing of public lands for fossil fuel exploration and extraction in Wyoming and other states (Beckman et al. 2012).

Globally and for the foreseeable future, biodiversity (flora, fauna, and ecosystems) will continue on a downward, dissipative slope. Although this conclusion is often expressed in rather crude, sexual terms, its essence is that biodiversity and wildness are being ravaged, plundered, and not-so-sensitively annihilated (Soule 1995). This is the consensus view of conservation biologists to whom I have spoken, including the most prominent members of the profession. I would hazard that this gloomy vista occupies much of "the common ground" on which we stand (or wobble) (Doak et al. 2013). To the extent that Kareiva retreats from his adamantly anthropocentric statements in the past, the extent of common ground increases.

I believe that some other issues distinguishing the views of Kareiva and myself rest on nearly irreconcilable, beliefs and ideologies not amenable to testing by empirical science. One of these beliefs is the notion that wild things and places have incalculable intrinsic value, at least as salient as the value of humanity.

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[1] *I address some of the issues raised by Peter Kareiva's essay on the "New Conservation." I contend that Kareiva's approach is not really conservation, and while possibly beneficial to some people in the short run, will be harmful to the mission and profession of conservation.*

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