

The Wildlife Ecology Community, How its Members Act, and What That Says About the Community

Abstract

The Wildlife, Fish, and Conservation Biology major at UC Davis is the opening to an entire community of scientists who dedicate their lives to the environment. Through the use of surveys, textbooks, and lectures, one can piece together how the community is perceived, how they want to be perceived, and how they really interact with one another. After analyzing the survey, it was found that the general public has a positive perception of the community. The textbook and lectures showed that the community values open, friendly, and passionate people who want to spread awareness; various articles and the major's UC Davis page support this claim.

Introduction

Wildlife Fish and Conservation Biology is a major at UC Davis that connects to the umbrella community of wildlife ecology. Scientists who are a part of this community dedicate their time and effort to helping the environment; sometimes they might focus on a specific animal, such as UC Davis professor Douglas Kelt, who specializes in kangaroo rats. Other times, a scientist in this field might work with a specific ecosystem, such as new UC Davis professor Eric Post, who dedicates his time to arctic habitats. These people can be scientists who work in the field, professors who teach students about wildlife conservation, or can work on the legislative side to help create laws regarding wildlife regulation and conservation. Many are involved with various forms of research that are important for the species they are trying to protect, such as Peter Moyle, fish

expert and author of the WFC 10 textbook, who worked on the Putah Creek to control how much water flows through it in order to benefit certain species of fish.

Methods

I first conducted a survey to see just how well-known the community is. The survey was taken by 39 people ranging from high school students to college graduates, the biggest demographic being college students. I asked them a few short questions to learn how much they knew about the field and what their initial opinions on it is. In doing this, I learned what kind of reputation the wildlife ecology community has; this is important, because if a community isn't thought of as interesting or important to people outside the community, they won't have enough support to tackle issues around the world, nor will there be many people joining the community. This can lead to the community slowly dying out, which can of course have a negative effect on the wildlife they study and on the environment.

Because I'm in Wildlife Conservation (WFC) 10, I have access to an introductory textbook to conservation ecology, *Protecting Life on Earth: An Introduction to the Science of Conservation*; analyzing this tool was also important for my research to find out how the community interacts. I looked at the book's use of visuals as well as the tone of the writing to make conclusions on the community's overall attitude. Using an introductory textbook is important, because although it's aimed towards students, it gives an insight to how the community wants to be viewed because this is oftentimes a student's first exposure to the field; I hypothesized that they would try to make the information try to sound as interesting as possible.

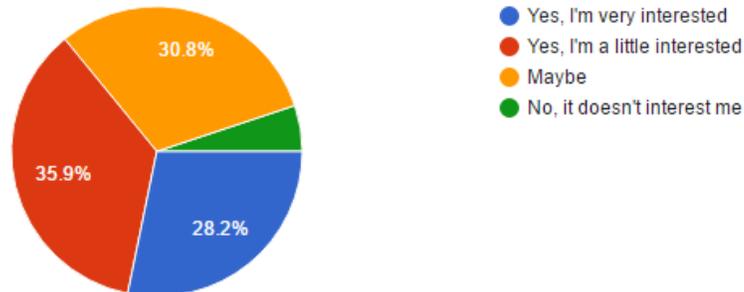
Being in WFC 10 was also very useful for me because it means that I was able to witness how the people in the community act with one another as well as help give insight as to what information or messages are important to them. I did this by making note of guest speakers' behaviors, such as how they preferred to teach and how passionate they were about the lessons they were teaching. I also observed how our professor interacted with the guest speakers, such as how much they talked before the beginning of class and how enthusiastic he was when introducing them. All of these observations were useful in determining how the community interacts with one another.

Results

I began to look at my survey results to see if there I could gain any insight as to how the community is viewed by others. Before the survey began, I made a description of what wildlife ecology is so they could answer the questions to the best of their ability. I asked the 39 participants if they had heard of wildlife ecology before the survey, and 89.8 percent of them- 35 people- said they had, or had heard of it "a little bit". I then asked if they thought it sounded like an important field, and all participants said it did. Finally, I asked if they would be interested in learning more about this kind of science, assuming they had the time. Of the 39 participants, 25 said that they were "a little" or "very" interested in learning more, and 12 participants said they might be interested.

Assuming you had the time, would you consider learning more about this type of science?

(39 responses)



The introductory textbook proved to be useful as well. I felt as though this piece of evidence would give valuable insight to how the community wants to be viewed; the readers of the textbook are mostly going to be students who are taking an introductory class because they are interested in the subject. Therefore, if the textbook further captures their interest, they might consider taking more related classes or even joining the community. While I was reading the textbook, I saw that the authors use a generous amount of visual representations; they had graphs, maps, and images of animals or people that they were talking about every few pages. I also looked for the tone that the authors were trying to convey to the audience. Although they talked about scientific theories and other topics that could be considered bland, they attempt to inject a bit of humor into it to make things more entertaining. For example, when talking about genetics, they asked, “if a friend broke her arms and then had babies afterward, would her kids be born with broken arms? Clearly this is a ridiculous question” (Marchetti & Moyle, 2010, p. 20). This line was obviously meant to inject humor into the lesson and make the reader

chuckle. Another example is when the authors are talking about the historic attitude that humans have had towards nature (Marchetti & Moyle, 2010, p. 7). They illustrate their point by adding a few woodcuts from a book written in the 1880s that are meant to antagonize wildlife; it's meant to poke fun at this negative attitude, and when Professor Kelt showed the pictures to the class in a PowerPoint, they elicited a few laughs.

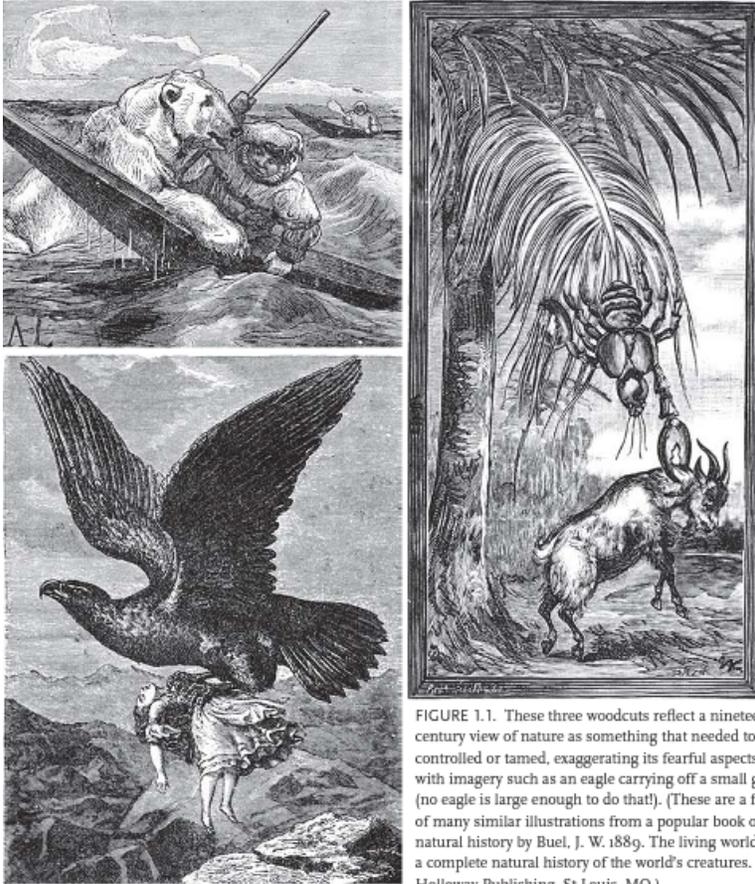


FIGURE 1.1. These three woodcuts reflect a nineteenth century view of nature as something that needed to be controlled or tamed, exaggerating its fearful aspects with imagery such as an eagle carrying off a small girl (no eagle is large enough to do that!). (These are a few of many similar illustrations from a popular book on natural history by Buel, J. W. 1889. *The living world: a complete natural history of the world's creatures*. Holloway Publishing, St. Louis, MO.)

Pictured: a polar bear

attacking a kayaker, a coconut crab snatching up a goat, and a bird carrying away a female. The caption pokes fun at this last image by stating, “no eagle is large enough to do that!” (Marchetti & Moyle, 2010, p. 7).

Furthermore, they routinely put in sentences that hint to the readers that they have strong opinions; when talking about how European settlement effected North America and the native tribes that lived there, they blatantly say, “Europeans viewed Native Americans as

‘lazy’” and that “it was much easier to justify taking land from people who were lazy” (Marchetti & Moyle, 2010, p. 5). These comments indicate to the reader that the authors have a personality and they aren’t concerned about hiding it in their textbook. █

Observing the interactions between the professors in WFC 10 was also a helpful indicator as to how the community acts, and the lectures they gave helped give insight as to what the community values. Each guest lecturer is able to teach the class about whatever they deem appropriate-- Professor Kelt often says that he doesn’t know what the lecture will be about, and he has to keep tabs on what information is given to us so he’ll know what he can test us on (Douglas Kelt, personal communication, November 2016). Oftentimes, the professor will chat with the guest lecturers before the beginning of class and when he introduces them he often refers to them as friends or well-known colleagues; sometimes, he’ll even throw in a joke or two about how they’re smarter or more attractive than he is (Douglas Kelt, personal communication, 2016). This friendly behavior strongly indicates that the community appreciates members that are humorous. To further this point, I was observing Jim Hobbs, a guest lecturer, as he prepared the slideshow for the day’s lecture; he was having difficulty with getting it set up, and at one point he threw his hands in the air and made an explosion noise, to indicate that nothing was working (Jim Hobbs, personal communication, November 21, 2016). The lectures that the professors give are insightful to the community as well. Because the guest lecturers have free reign over what they’re teaching, they always talk about what they specify in; lectures have ranged from the structure of the arctic ecosystem, to saving endangered species, to the fish that live in Putah Creek. These lecturers are passionate about what they talk about, and it shows- oftentimes, the guest

speaker can't finish their entire slideshow in time because they either have too much to say or they end up telling personal stories regarding their research. In the 50 minutes that they are speaking, they manage to convince you that the conservation issue they're addressing is the most serious one; that's not to say that they outright claim that one issue or the protection of one species is more important than another, but rather that they do a convincing job of teaching the class why the issue is important.

Discussion

The responses of the survey, particularly the ones regarding how the participant feels about wildlife ecology, are very important to the community. Although most of these participants probably won't go into this field, their obvious interest in it can prove to be useful when the community tries to speak out against issues regarding the environment. Videos and articles about wildlife conservation are only going to be viewed by those who are interested in learning more about the issues; without interest from people outside the community, there would be nobody to educate on wildlife conservation, leaving the community to slowly dissipate. The survey, however, indicates that college-aged people have an interest in the topic and the issues they have, and will therefore keep the community alive.

While the survey gave insight to how the public thinks of the community, the textbook gave an idea of how the community wishes to be viewed. The presence of so many visuals shows that they care about the reader's comprehension of the concepts that are being explained; the science itself is very focused on the things they can observe, given that they research the environment, and so it would make sense for them to want the readers to have similar visuals to help them understand the material. By adding in

humorous lines, such as the joke regarding genetics and a friend's broken arms, it reminds the reader that the authors are real people who have personalities and a sense of humor instead of being mindless or monotone. That, combined with their comments on how the Europeans treated Native Americans, indicates that the community appreciates humorous and strongly-opinionated individuals.

The observations made about the WFC class add to the idea that wildlife ecology community members tend to be friendly and opinionated people, due to the interactions between professors and the quirks that they have. Their passion when teaching also gives insight on their goals as an overall community: to educate and to inspire. Through my observations, it seems as though the lecturers goals are to invigorate the class into wanting to solve all of these conservation issues. This makes sense, because without support from the general public, the conservation movement wouldn't be as strong. If the professors can make the class care about, say, the habitat loss of freshwater fish, we can better understand why freshwater fish species matter and why it's important to conserve them. This goal of inspiring is even somewhat highlighted in the UC Davis Wildlife, Fish, & Conservation mission statement: their goal is "to promote research and understanding of the biology of wild vertebrates [... and] improving management of these species" (Mission Statement, n.d.).

The textbook and class, however, could be considered biased sources of observation- because they're both introductory, there's a motivation for the authors and professors to make the content as appealing as possible to students so they'll possibly join the community. A better way to gauge how wildlife ecologists interact with one another is through their interactions with one another in articles. Although this is supposed to be

a professional form of writing, it can still give insight to the community's goals and how members behave. One article gives hints to the community's goals in the first sentence of its abstract, saying, "climate change is facilitating rapid changes in [...] vegetation" (Thompson et. al, 2016). Because climate change is a large factor in biodiversity, educating each other and the public on climate change and its effects is important to many wildlife ecologists. Though it's a professional article, the authors managed to put a little personality into it by putting "When Winners Become Losers" before the rest of the somewhat-bland and self-explanatory title; it's certainly not as loud or fun as the professors in WFC, or even as humorous as the textbook, but it shows they wanted the title of their article to stand out a little (Thompson et. al, 2016). This goal to educate and invigorate- particularly about global climate change- is also present in another article, from Cornell (2016), where the author explains how the Great Barrier Reef is suffering due to a rise in ocean temperatures. The author takes care, however, to make sure the information is not over-exaggerated, and even shoots down a magazine article by saying that parts of the Great Barrier Reef "are quite healthy, so [the article] was over-stated," showing a dedication to informing the public about issues, but not leaving out important or hopeful pieces of information.

Conclusion

Wildlife conservation ecology is a community that focuses on protecting the environment and the wildlife within it. It clearly draws in support from college-aged students, which is important in order for the community to grow. Through analyzing literature and observing people that are connected to this community, it's clear that it's a passionate community that is full of humorous and strongly opinionated people whose

main goal is to educate the younger generation to be as equally passionate about conservation issues. This want to educate can be further supported by looking at various wildlife ecology articles that are obviously focussed on informing people on the issues of global climate change.

References

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