

# Scientific misconduct is real, but rare

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(Phys.org)—Richard Primack, Boston University professor of biology and editor-in-chief of the journal *Biological Conservation*, observes in the current issue of that publication that while instances of scientific misconduct in the publication of research findings is a matter of serious concern, such occurrences are extremely rare. Primack shares his views on this matter in an editorial in the current issue of *Biological Conservation*.

Primack's observations are related to a case where certain results from a paper published in *Biological Conservation* had to be removed and the paper revised because data provided by one of the authors could not be verified. This is part of on-going [scandal](#) involving a Spanish wildlife ecologist in which many papers have been retracted ([elpais.com/elpais/2012/06/15/i...39761262\\_015565.html](http://elpais.com/elpais/2012/06/15/i...39761262_015565.html)). "Readers of this journal and other [scientific journals](#) might be concerned that this example and others reported in the press and scientific outlets suggest that [scientific misconduct](#) may be both widespread and increasing," says Primack. "However, we at *Biological Conservation* come to a very different conclusion."

To make his point, Primack [cites a study](#) (Steen, 2010) that suggests retractions of scientific papers occur at a rate of 1–3 papers per 10,000 published. "This is the first case of serious scientific misconduct that we have seen over the past nine years of the journal, during which time around 2000 papers have been published," says Primack.

Primack acknowledges that instances of scientific misconduct are cause

for concern, and cites a number of other recent cases that vary in severity, but these in effect are exceptions that prove the rule. "We have encountered a small number of papers that present [ethical issues](#), but fall somewhat short of real scientific misconduct." Recognizing it is possible there are undetected cases of misconduct, Primack argues that the likelihood of this is low: Over the years, these would have been discovered if they existed.

While Primack and his colleagues at [Biological Conservation](#) remain vigilant over the issue of scientific misconduct, their overall experience is that the vast majority of the scientific community maintains the highest ethical standards. Says Primack, "Considering the approximately 2000 papers that we have published in recent years, and the roughly 8000 papers that we have received and reviewed, this present case of scientific misconduct is not at all representative. Such cases of scientific misconduct are extremely rare, which is probably why they are so highly publicized when they occur."

Provided by Boston University

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