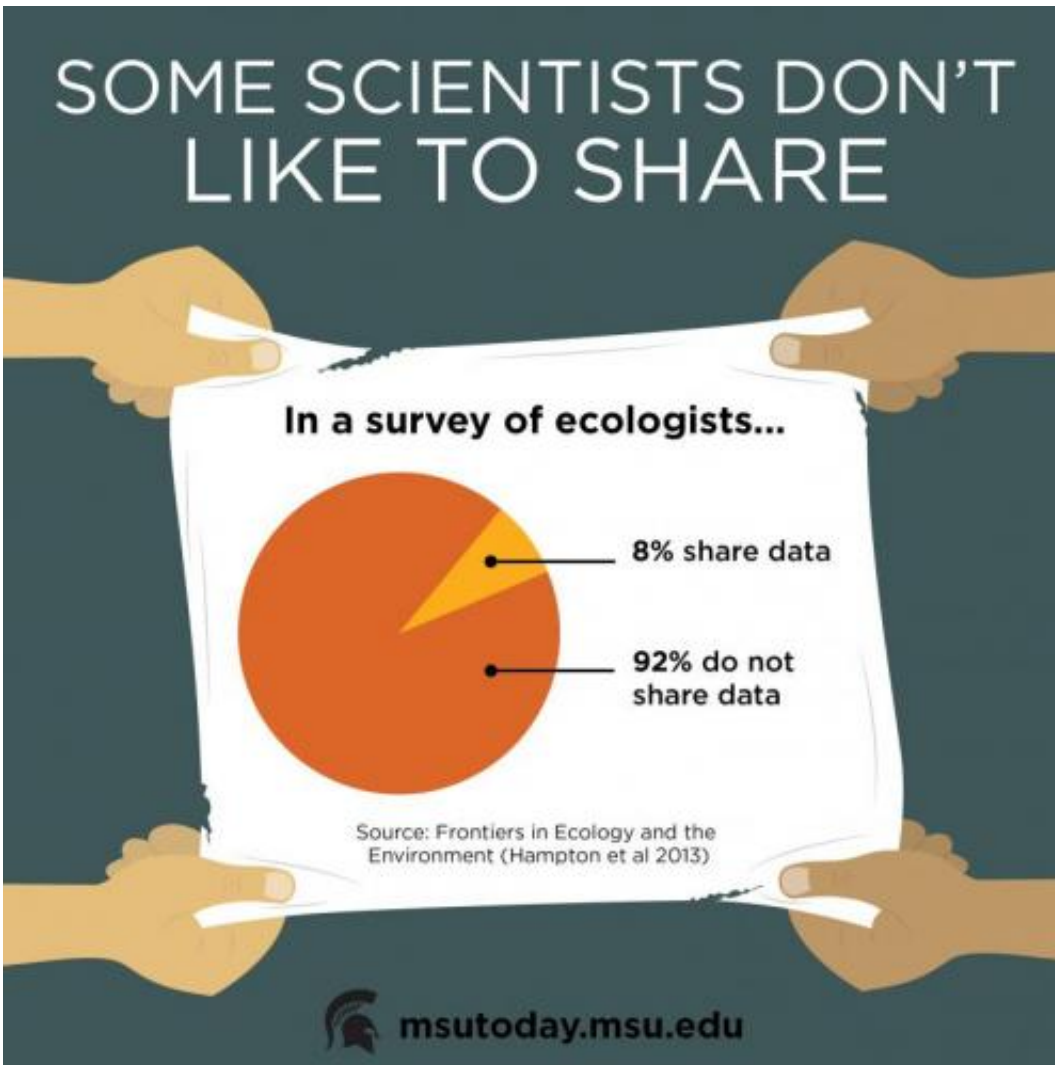


# Some scientists share better than others

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Some scientists share better than others. Credit: Andrea Raby

Some scientists share better than others. While astronomers and

geneticists embrace the concept, the culture of ecology still has a ways to go.

Research by Michigan State University, published in the current issue of *Bioscience*, explores the paradox that although ecologists share findings via scientific journals, they do not share the data on which the studies are built, said Patricia Soranno, MSU fisheries and wildlife professor and co-author of the paper.

"One reason for not sharing data is the fear of being scooped by another scientist; but if all data are available, then everyone is on the same playing field, there are more people to collaborate with, and you will have a bigger impact on science," said Soranno, an MSU AgBioResearch scientist. "Think of the advances being made in genomics, for example, due to the [human genome project](#) and the free-flowing findings and data. Genomics is advancing at an unprecedented rate, and it's having an impact on many other fields as well."

The paper's co-authors and the diverse fields they represent exemplify this new era for sharing in ecology and many other fields. The team comprised MSU researchers from the Lyman Briggs College, including Kendra Cheruvilil, fisheries and wildlife; Kevin Elliott, a philosopher in fisheries and wildlife; and Georgina Montgomery, history.

While many [environmental scientists](#) support the notion of sharing, the vast majority of them do not carry out their good intentions, according to a recent survey. Even with calls from funding organizations, [scientific journals](#) and even the White House, it's still yet to instill sharing as a matter of practice, Montgomery said.

"If you advocate for inclusion in science, if you believe scientists should be engaged with the public and decision makers in policy, then you should walk the walk and share your data," she said. "Collaboration,

rather than competition, is the best way to continue to advance science."

To improve the current culture, the team argues that increased data sharing will allow more diverse people to actively participate in research, such as early-career scientists and those from underrepresented groups; scientists from smaller or historically less-influential institutions; citizen-scientists; and scientists from the Global South, scientists from Africa, South and Central America, and much of Asia who are often excluded from leading research.

The culture is beginning to change, but now it's time to find ways to implement it, Cheruvilil added.

"We'll still need to work through the best way to make this the norm," she said. "We're not saying to share data as soon as it's gathered, and we understand that there's not a one-size-fits-all policy. Our hope is that scientists will change their practice because they are compelled by the argument that they are ethically obliged to, not because they are forced to share data."

Future research will focus on scientist-driven approaches to making data more shareable and increasing incentives at an institutional level. Universities offer few, if any, motivations to share data. It would help to offer credit for sharing rather than for solely emphasizing published papers, Cheruvilil added.

Outside of universities, sharing data is key because there are many efforts to include community-based monitoring groups to help inform decisions and policies about the environment.

"If environmental scientists truly espouse the ethical value of inclusivity, including diverse groups of people at the tables of research, decision making, policy and public debate, it is not only necessary to [share](#)

scientific [data](#), it is ethically obligatory," Elliott said.

Provided by Michigan State University

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