Conservation hindered by geographical mismatches between capacity and need

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Credit: University of Nottingham

New research suggests that geographical mismatches between conservation needs and expertise may hinder global conservation goals.

Experts from the University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus and other institutions have examined geographical patterns within the leadership of the conservation science publishing system focusing on the affiliation of journal editors, who serve as gatekeepers and leaders in the scientific process.

Their research, 'Striking underrepresentation of biodiversity-rich regions among editors of conservation journals' has been published in the scientific journal *Biological Conservation*.

The top 20 journals in the field of biodiversity and conservation biology were analysed, with the geographical distribution of editorial board

members examined and compared against the National Biodiversity Index, a key indicator of national biodiversity values.

1,210 editorial positions were included in the research which revealed that most of the countries with the highest biodiversity had few or no editors representing them at top conservation journals. Indonesia had the highest National Biodiversity Index but only one editor. Many other biodiversity-rich places including Colombia, Ecuador, Madagascar, and most of tropical Asia had no representation at all on the editorial board.

Similarly, China, India, Mexico, and Brazil are all large, biodiverse and populous countries with very few editors at top conservation journals. The United States, Canada and European countries, especially the United Kingdom and Germany, were strongly over-represented on editorial boards.

Dr Ahimsa Campos-Arceiz, from the School of Environmental and Geographical Sciences at the University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus led the research and said: "Journal editors decide what science gets published and whose research is highlighted. Our findings show that there is a distinct lack of representation of biodiversity-rich areas, which could have an impact on policy and funding decisions."

Professor Richard Primack, from Boston University and one of the authors of the study, said "this bias among journal editors mirrors other well-known biases in conservation science. For example, tropical regions are less studied and represented in biodiversity databases compared with less diverse temperate systems; much of research in tropical countries is not conducted by local researchers, most of reviewers for conservation journals are from English-speaking temperate countries such as USA, UK, Australia, and Canada."

Dr Martine Maron of the University of Queensland, another co-author

adds, "The good news is that addressing this bias is relatively easy and could help reducing biases elsewhere in conservation science. Conservation journals could develop policies to recruit editors from biodiversity-rich countries. Increasing geographical inclusion of journal editors would add diversity of ideas and expertise, which can be of great value for conservation science. It would also help develop conservation science leadership and capacity in biodiversity-rich regions, where it is most needed.

More information: Ahimsa Campos-Arceiz et al. Striking underrepresentation of biodiversity-rich regions among editors of conservation journals, *Biological Conservation* (2017). DOI: 10.1016/j.biocon.2017.07.028

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