

# Playing games to address conservation conflicts

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Credit: University of Aberdeen

A new study, led by Professor Steve Redpath at the University of Aberdeen, explores the role that playing games can have in helping us understand and deal with conflicts that impact on biodiversity and on people's lives.

Conflicts are common in conservation. For example, farmers may seek to maximise their profit from crops by minimising damage caused by

increasing numbers of geese. Yet attempts to reduce geese numbers would bring them into [conflict](#) with conservationists, who seek to protect geese populations.

The study, Games as tools to address conservation conflicts was published today (Wednesday, May 16) in *Trends in Ecology & Evolution* and focuses on three different types of games and how they can help address these sorts of conflicts.

Researchers from Universities of Aberdeen, Stirling, Edinburgh and Oxford in the UK, the University of Agricultural Sciences in Sweden and CIRAD in Montpellier in France, were involved in the project. Together they explored the challenges in understanding and managing conflict and on the utility of games to untangle the complexity.

They found that theoretical games that model player strategies can help identify novel solutions to real-world conflict; experimental games that explore player behaviour can help test the consequences of practical interventions in conflict; and role-playing games where the players help build the [game](#) and interact can aid those involved in the conflict to explore the different viewpoints of those involved.

Professor Redpath said: "Across the world, there are many species, such as wolves, lions and brown bears, whose presence in a landscape often leads to controversy and conflict. Managing these sorts of conflicts is notoriously complex and challenging. Yet games offer an opportunity to help us unlock these problems. We all like playing games, and we can use them to provide real insight into how we understand and manage conflicts.

"Games are fun to play, but they also provide a complementary approach to the more traditional methods of interviews and questionnaires and surveys that seek to gain insight into people's behaviour in conflict. Yet,

these approaches are underused in conservation conflicts and they can really help us develop solutions.

"The authors of this paper are all currently involved in projects using games to help understand conflicts over lions in Tanzania, over geese in Scotland and over elephants in Gabon. Testing the ideas and understanding which approaches are most effective will hopefully help us be more successful at reducing conflict and providing effective management solutions."

Dr. Aidan Keane from the University of Edinburgh added: "Ideally, actions aimed at reducing conflict should be chosen based on evidence of their effectiveness, but this can be difficult to obtain in real-world settings. Carefully designed games can help to predict which strategies are more likely to be successful."

Professor Nils Bunnefeld from the University of Stirling added: "Conflicts often involve emotions running high, leading to heated discussions which prevent the exchange of ideas. Games can provide an experimental safe space where hypothetical game scenarios can be explored and discussed".

Provided by University of Aberdeen

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