

# Conservation value of field research stations grossly misunderstood and underfunded, scientists say

March 4 2024

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Funding of field conservation research stations worldwide has been drastically reduced since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic,

raising the alarm of more than 170 conservation researchers representing 157 field stations in 56 countries in a paper published in *Conservation Letters*.

The authors contend that field research stations have a high return on investment and are essential and highly effective tools for [biodiversity conservation](#).

Trillions of U.S. dollars were mobilized in [economic recovery](#) following the pandemic, yet the authors raise concerns that resources to address biodiversity loss and the climate crises are constrained at a time when they are most urgently needed. The pandemic caused roughly half of the surveyed field stations to close partially, and about one-quarter have remained partially or completely closed, with most field stations seeing a reduction in funding altogether.

Dr. Timothy Eppley, lead author of the paper, Chief Conservation Officer of Wildlife Madagascar, and a former Post Doctoral Research Fellow with San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance, said, "A fundamental challenge is that governments and other [funding agencies](#) aren't factoring in the true conservation return on investment and don't realize the critical economic role of ecosystem services being protected by those field stations."

Eppley and co-authors suggest the work of field research stations is often interdisciplinary, and some of the direct and indirect benefits of the research, education, and [public engagement](#) that takes place at field stations have long-term objectives that the current models for cost-benefit analyses do not capture.

"Field stations often function autonomously, with few studies exploring the aggregate impact of their work. Cumulatively, they make a substantial contribution to conservation," said Eppley.

Dr. Russ Mittermeier, Chief Conservation Officer of Re:wild and senior author on the paper, shared a similar sentiment, saying, "Field research stations are a cost-effective and multifaceted tool to addressing global conservation challenges and not just places where esoteric research is conducted, as is often the perception. Almost invariably, one finds higher densities of wildlife in the vicinity of these field stations than in other parts of a particular region, even within protected areas."

The study consisted of a survey, which focused on field stations in mostly tropical and subtropical countries, to understand the impact of the pandemic on funding and evaluate the conservation benefits of the field stations.

Findings include improved habitat quality of the surrounding areas by reducing nearby deforestation, reducing rates of hunting, and improving enforcement of laws regarding wildlife use and resource extraction. Additionally, 93% hire locals, supporting the local economy, in addition to generating significant scientific output that informs conservation policies.

The authors advocate for greater recognition and investment in field research stations. "The benefits of supporting these stations extend beyond preserving biodiversity to advancing [scientific research](#), education, and local community development," said Mittermeier.

"Our research underscores the critical need for enhanced support for field research stations to ensure their ability to continue their indispensable work. Failing to include field stations in international policy frameworks that address the global biodiversity crisis represents a profound missed opportunity," said Eppley.

**More information:** Tropical field stations yield high conservation return on investment, *Conservation Letters* (2024).

[doi.org/10.1111/conl.13007](https://doi.org/10.1111/conl.13007)

Provided by San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance

Citation: Conservation value of field research stations grossly misunderstood and underfunded, scientists say (2024, March 4) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-03-field-stations-grossly-misunderstood-underfunded.html>

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