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Editorial: Women in human-wildlife dynamics: 2021

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Editorial on the Research Topic

Women in human-wildlife dynamics: 2021

Fewer than a third of the world's researchers identify as women (Marescotti et al., 2022). Historical and on-going biases, gender stereotypes and other barriers discourage women from entering science-related fields. Barriers come in all shapes and sizes and may often be unintended. Recent research by Huang et al. (2020) has revealed an increasing gender-based gap in publications, associated with high rates of career drop-outs among women. Eagly (2020) expands on this to consider the unequal impact of parenthood, the higher proportion of women in teaching roles within academia (where teaching productivity is typically inversely related to research productivity), and the issue of disproportionate access to (or bias against) internal and external funding, laboratory space, and other resources faced by women researchers. Outside of research, women in conservation face equivalent challenges to career progression and equality in this profession (Jones and Solomon, 2019). Focusing on the conservation field of human-wildlife dynamics (HWD), this special issue provided a platform to better understand the roles and challenges for women in HWD as:

- community members and/or leaders living with wildlife;
- practitioners and/or researchers working with others who live with wildlife;
- advocates, educators, artists and/or innovators for people and wildlife.

We invited formats such as storytelling narratives, and biographies which do not easily conform to scientific publishing. However, this facilitated more personal and professional insights into authors' experiences within the field of human-wildlife dynamics, which are largely invisible in empirical research. Guidance on reviewing atypical article types is rare within the natural science literature (but see Byrne, 2016) and we are extremely grateful to our reviewers in this process. Here are the highlights of the "Women in Human-Wildlife Dynamics" series of article collection

Women as professionals, mentors and volunteers in human-wildlife interventions

[Almuna et al.](#) share in their opinion piece their role as female professionals and facilitators in situations that address human-wildlife dynamics in rural landscapes of Chile. They compare their experiences across regions in Chile and emphasize the need for a gender-balanced perspective in conservation. [Sheherazade et al.](#) share their lessons learned in woman-to-woman mentorship in Indonesia. While the perspectives that authors share is based on their own experiences, the community case study article compares these experiences with the broader literature on mentor- and leadership. In Namibia, [Marker et al.](#), use the Cheetah Conservation Fund's long-standing volunteer programme to highlight a substantial gender-bias in the volunteering sector, at least for this conservation organisation. Although this bias appears in favour of women, this skewed representation unlikely favours women in conservation. Participants in [Marker et al.](#)'s survey revealed challenges they've faced in their career, namely their personal safety and credibility, and the integral role that volunteering has played for them in gaining employment. They emphasize the financial implications and barriers that this poses to future conservationists including the high risk that women without the financial means to undertake voluntary work may result in them being excluded from conservation.

Women as practitioners and community members

In Mongolia and India, [Alexander et al.](#) draw from their knowledge and experience in snow leopard conservation to describe the roles and responsibilities of women in livestock management and agriculture, and how those intersect with biodiversity conservation and ecosystem management. The case studies showcase how community-based conservation often builds on existing community structures and social norms, which often neglects women's roles, rights and decision-making power on biodiversity conservation. In parallel, [Akayezu et al.](#) investigated the effectiveness of tourism revenue in counterbalancing unsustainable resource use in Rwandan forest communities. These authors draw to our attention the importance of gendered community roles and the different functions that men and women play in activities of conservation concern, meaning that a more nuanced approach to conservation initiatives are likely to be more impactful. [Leong et al.](#) raise a similar concern with regards to stakeholder views on bat conservation in Singapore. Although none of these authors set out to explore the role of gender in human-wildlife dynamics specifically, their findings regarding gender inequality and gender-based differences in roles or impacts, highlight the need for more focused research in this area.

Women at the interface of wildlife trade, recreation and governance

In her contribution, [Davis](#) focuses on women's roles in illegal wildlife trade in Southeast Asia, with a specific lens on social drivers and processes of hunting and consumption of wildlife. While women play a fundamental role in Southeast Asia resident matrilineal and bilateral societies and can be fundamental in initiating change in conservation practices, their role is often overlooked in research. [Green et al.](#) reviewed 40 case studies from 34 countries on community-based approaches that target illegal wildlife trade of *Felidae* species. Based on a 'Theory of Change' framework, they synthesized approaches, successes, challenges and recommendations for community action on illegal wildlife trade.

In regard to governance and law enforcement, [Sommerville et al.](#) provide a community case study of activities to increase women's effective participation in wildlife in Zambia. The case study highlights that proactive steps to include and empower women in terms of wildlife governance and benefit-sharing yield improvements in terms of representation, access and in the sharing of benefits. Likewise, in a north American context, [Rizzolo et al.](#) researched visitors' recreational patterns in wildlife refuges in the United States and showcase how changes in consumptive activities regulation can cause differential and inequitable impacts on different groups of people participating in nature-based activities. Understanding how subgroups of visitors may respond to regulatory changes, especially women, is therefore important to avoid the displacement or alienation of such groups from visiting a site.

As an all-women editorial team, the need for patience, support and understanding was an unspoken agreement as we each battled to balance elusive work-life balance and carving out time for this voluntary editorial work. We are therefore thrilled to see this collaboration culminate in a collection of ten excellent articles for this Research Topic.

The authors' diverse perspectives on gender equality in HWD and conservation highlight the complexity of the topic. Effective policies and practices require empirical data and practitioner insights regarding what works and what does not ([Sutherland, 2022](#)). We call on researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to prioritize gender equality in conservation and collaborate to implement evidence-based solutions.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

Conflict of interest

Author KW-T was employed by company Toitu Envirocare.

The remaining authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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