**Six actions for ecologists in times of planetary crisis**

*Nathalie Pettorelli1, Kevin J. Gaston2, Jos Barlow3, Miguel Araujo4,5, Mercedes Maria da Cunha Bustamante6, Steven L. Chown7, Luisa Maria Diele-Viegas8,9, William F. Laurance10, Alexander Lees11, Felipe P.L. Melo12,13, E.J. Milner-Gulland14, Gretta Pecl15,16, Isabel Sousa-Pinto17*

Corresponding author: Nathalie Pettorelli [Nathalie.Pettorelli@ioz.ac.uk](mailto:Nathalie.Pettorelli@ioz.ac.uk)

Climate breakdown and unprecedented biodiversity loss put humanity at grave risk, threatening human lives, livelihoods and well-being globally. Ecologists have been instrumental in unveiling and detailing some of the mechanisms driving biodiversity decline, regularly calling for immediate action1. In response to this, a sense of emergency has entered public discourse, heightened with each new report and global summit; some ecological societies have been calling on their members to write to their political representatives, while many ecologists have been vocal about both scientific and societal issues on social media. Yet, despite these pockets of activity, it has been argued that the way the discipline of ecology operates could reflect more clearly the urgency of the situation2,3.

Several factors may contribute to the current mismatch. First, like any other scientists, ecologists have been encouraged to place themselves in a neutral, reporting, objective role4. Those deviating from this tack have encountered increasing threats to their academic freedom and activities, especially with the rise of political populism and nationalism around the world5. Second, the emergence of Conservation Biology in the 1980s provided a clear home for mission-driven ecologists who aspire to go beyond applied science6. Third, the scientific community is embedded in societies and economic systems primarily hardwired to economic growth, where (i) facts alone do little to address systemic issues underlying biodiversity loss and climate change, and (ii) high-level decisions about research funding are increasingly shaped by their perceived contribution to economic growth2,7.

While this disconnect between the systems studied and the urgency of the environmental crisis can be rationalised, a key question remains: if the ecological community is not fully expressing the urgency and developing responses, why should anyone else? This question demands a collective reflection on what individuals, employers, funders, publishers and learned societies could do better to accelerate the transition toward a future that safeguards the climate, biodiversity and ecological processes upon which humanity depends.

Here, we call on the ecological community to consider six actions that we believe could drive meaningful change:

**Explicitly recognise and address the biodiversity crisis**: Ecologists and their institutions need to embrace a culture that places efforts to stop and reverse biodiversity loss at its core. This commitment should be clearly articulated in mission statements, compelling ecologists to develop their own theory of change in terms of how their research helps address biodiversity loss and supports nature recovery. For us, this has meant prioritising certain research avenues over others based on their conservation importance, and acquiring new knowledge and skills beyond the ones we were originally trained in. It has also led us to articulate innovative curricula and increase our focus on educating and training new generations of ecologists with the necessary skills to face these challenges.

**Explore positive futures**: Ecological research should be extended to explore what sustainable futures for nature would look like7. This requires engaging with other disciplines and society at large to identify plausible positive ecological futures and effective strategies that promote biosphere-based sustainability at multiple scales, while contributing to initiatives such as Biosphere Futures (<https://biospherefutures.net/>). Funders and learned societies should actively support the development of scenarios for positive change, helping to steer both research and public discourse while providing spaces for dialogue to understand the needs and constraints of different stakeholders.

**Defend academic freedom:** As a group, we have witnessed our work, or the work of our colleagues, being miscommunicated, amended, or suppressed. We therefore believe more robust mechanisms are needed to enable direct, unfiltered, communication between scientists and policy makers, ensuring that scientific messages are not diluted or misrepresented8. Additionally, institutions and publishers should urgently collaborate to (i) create avenues for scientists who cannot openly express their views to contribute meaningfully to public and policy discussions9 and (ii) identify and safeguard critical ecological data at risk of being erased in political turmoil.

**Go political**: Science has always been political, yet we are constantly being told that it suffers when scientists become politically engaged. There’s never been a more important time for this neutrality myth to be put to rest. As well as assessing the environmental impacts of their research, we believe that ecologists must critically assess how their research activities and conclusions reinforce or disrupt existing power structures10. The field would benefit from greater engagement with social sciences, notably Political Ecology, which examine the economic, social, and political dynamics involved in systemic changes.

**Inspire society:** The impact of ecology as a discipline may be undermined if the actions of its representatives do not embody the changes they seek to promote. Role-modelling is a well-documented driver of behavioral shifts, and a practical means of testing approaches to reducing the environmental footprint of institutions, research and professional practices. For some of us, action on this has meant collaborating with schools and other community spaces to enhance scientific and ecological literacy, as well as connections with nature. For others, it has meant demanding and facilitating institutional changes so that our organisations monitor, report and annually reduce their carbon and biodiversity footprints.

**Address the colonial legacy of ecology**: Western dominance of ecology has had detrimental effects on local science communities and epistemologies that directly impact our ability to tacklethe biodiversity crisis. Resolving this requires dismantling extractive research models and building an ecological science community that is (i) inclusive, with an egalitarian contribution and representation of scientists from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, (ii) reparative and grounded in place-based justice, engaging with and promoting local and indigenous knowledge. For some of us, this has involved creating horizontal spaces for dialogue between academic and traditional knowledge systems, integrating community-defined priorities into research agendas, and redefining metrics of success to include societal relevance, reciprocity, and long-term engagement.

The current global environmental crisis we face entails a stronger shift in how ecologists, and other researchers, position themselves in society, prioritize their research and make decisions about their ways of working. The ecological community is large – ecological societies are larger, older and run more journals than their conservation biology counterparts – yet it must be, as a whole, more proactive and vocal on one of the key issues of our times. With the object of study of its discipline under unprecedented threat, the ecological community needs not be found wanting in, and ought to be at the forefront of, the response.

**Competing interests’ statement:** The authors declare no competing interests.

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**List of author affiliations**

1Institute of Zoology, Zoological Society of London (ZSL), Regent's Park, NW1 4RY, United Kingdom

2Environment & Sustainability Institute, University of Exeter, Penryn, Cornwall TR10 9FE, United Kingdom

3Lancaster Environnement Centre, Lancaster University, LA1 FYQ, United Kingdom

4Department of Biogeography and Global Change, Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC), 28006, Madrid, Spain

5Rui Nabeiro’ Biodiversity Chair, Mediterranean Institute for Agriculture, Environment and Development (MED), Global Change and Sustainability Institute (CHANGE), University of Évora, 7000-784, Évora, Portugal

6Department of Ecology, Institute of Biology, University of Brasília, Brasília, Brazil

7Securing Antarctica’s Environmental Future, Monash University, Victoria 3800, Australia

8Department of Biology, University of Mississippi, 214 Shoemaker Hall, Oxford, MS, United States 38677

9(Bio)Diversity in the Anthropocene Lab, Federal University of Bahia, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil

10Centre for Tropical Environmental and Sustainability Science, and College of Science and Engineering, James Cook University, Cairns, Queensland 4878, Australia

11Department of Natural Sciences, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester M1 5GD, UK

12School of Animal, Rural and Environmental Science, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham NG1 4FQ, United Kingdom

13Instituto de Biociências, Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, Recife, Brasil, 50670-901

14Department of Biology, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom

15Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies, University of Tasmania, Hobart, TAS, Australia

16Centre for Marine Socioecology, University of Tasmania, Hobart, TAS, Australia

17Ciimar and Department of Biology, Faculty of Sciences, University of Porto, Portugal