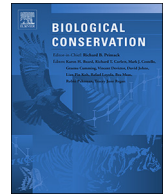




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Letter to the editor

## Response to comments on “Compassionate Conservation deserves a morally serious rather than dismissive response - reply to Callen et al., 2020”

### Critical questions for ‘compassionate conservation’

Conservation biologists have previously identified the ideological misnomer within ‘Compassionate Conservation’ (Callen et al., 2020), highlighting the flaws in this approach (Hayward et al., 2019). The successful merging of ‘Compassionate Conservation’ principles with effective conservation practice has not yet been demonstrated. Consequently, we and many others (Callen et al., 2020, Driscoll and Watson, 2019, Fleming, 2018, Hampton et al., 2019, Hayward et al., 2019, Johnson et al., 2019, Oommen et al., 2019, Rohwer and Marris, 2019, Russell and Blackburn, 2017) are concerned that the stated values of ‘Compassionate Conservation’ will not lead to advances in ethical practice nor that these will actually improve biodiversity conservation. We do not intend to debate ethical monism, an overly simplified and unpragmatic tool that is too blunt to deal with the complex challenges facing the survival of human and non-human species in the 21st century. Conservation biologists are more concerned with conserving biodiversity.

While ‘Compassionate Conservation’ ideology may still be in its infancy and developing its value-base, environmental ethics has a strong history of influence in biodiversity conservation through consideration of animal ethics (Smith, 2003; Kupper and Buning, 2011), dispelling any accusations that conservation biologists have not applied a moral barometer to conservation practice. Individual animal ethics and welfare is central and explicitly considered in almost everything conservation biologists do (for examples see NHMRC, 2013, SABS, 2008). Given this, it is still unclear how the fundamentals of conservation biology (Soulé, 1985), sentience-based ethics (Singer, 1975) and ecological ethics (Leopold, 1966) are lacking to the extent that there is a need for ‘Compassionate Conservation’ philosophy to improve animal welfare.

A number of environmental philosophers, ethicists and practitioners have reflected on the challenge of reconciling ethics with conservation practice for some of the world's most pressing ecological problems (for examples see Smith, 2003, Albrecht et al., 2009, Albrecht et al., 2013, Minter, 2011). They acknowledge the complexities associated with ethical decision-making when there are competing value orientations (Albrecht et al., 2009; Kerley et al., 2017) and identify the need for pragmatic, pluralistic approaches (Kupper and Buning, 2011; Minter, 2011). As practitioners who make conservation decisions within these complex environmental, ethical, economic and social systems on a daily basis all over the world, we invite proponents of ‘Compassionate Conservation’ to address a number of important questions that may allow conservation practitioners, conservation managers and wider society to better understand the ideology they propose.

Key questions to address include:

1. What is the literal or intended meaning of ‘Compassionate

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Conservation's principle of ‘First, do no harm’?

2. Does ‘Compassionate Conservation’ value all non-human species, or just some non-human species? Where is the line drawn on which species deserve to be treated compassionately, and how is this decision made?
3. How do human rights factor into ‘Compassionate Conservation’?
4. Does ‘Compassionate Conservation’ assert that non-human animals have the same moral status as humans? If so, do non-human animals also have the same moral obligations as humans?
5. How should conservationists respond when two species are in non-evolutionary conflict? Are humans allowed or required to act or intervene, or not?
6. How does a ‘Compassionate Conservation’ approach manage uncompassionate interspecies injustice (Albrecht et al., 2013) that occurs as a result of human actions (e.g. exotic species impacts, climate change)?
7. How does ‘Compassionate Conservation’ view the effects of non-sentient fauna (especially parasites, viruses and pathogens) on sentient fauna? What moral responsibilities, if any, are placed on conservationists to manage these effects?
8. Are there any examples of contemporary biodiversity conservation practices that fit the stated but (apparently) developing values of ‘Compassionate Conservation’ that have been objectively measured as successful (i.e. overall/net harm was reduced AND biodiversity was conserved), given that those already claimed under the umbrella of ‘Compassionate Conservation’ have been shown by Hayward et al., 2019 to violate one or more stated principles of ‘Compassionate Conservation’?

We believe that addressing these questions will clarify many misunderstandings that may exist between ‘Compassionate Conservationists’ and conservation biologists, help the ‘Compassionate Conservation’ movement to mature its thinking towards the practical application and outcomes of its developing ideas, and reduce the likelihood of wasting time on concepts unlikely to benefit and potentially harm the world's many imperilled fauna.

### Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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