

# People and Nature—A journal of relational thinking

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The vital importance of nature to people, and of people to the future of that nature, is self-evident. The understanding of those linkages is, nonetheless, being critically transformed and enriched by research that transcends the barriers between ecology and other traditional disciplines. Such studies are not new, but the dramatic growth in their number and influence is, and reflects the growing need for such work in rapidly changing times and circumstances. *People and Nature* is founded upon a recognition of these developments, and of the need of authors and readers for a journal that is focussed on them.

The motivation and opportunity to conduct interdisciplinary, cross-disciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary research involving ecology and related disciplines has blossomed in recent years (from this point on, we use interdisciplinary research as a catch-all also including cross-disciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary research, while recognising that these can refer to markedly different things). It is increasingly understood that knowledge of the interactions between people and nature is crucial to both. There is a need to sustain and foster creative dialogues between ecology and a host of other disciplines in order to elaborate understandings of people and nature that are both critical and applied in scope. This means dialogues across the natural sciences, social sciences and the humanities. *People and Nature* is a venue (and invitation) for disciplinary engagements that encompass, for example, economics, geography, history, law, literature, medicine, philosophy, politics, psychology, and sociology, as well as other related disciplines.

The British Ecological Society has added new titles to its family of journals as the field of ecology has developed, with the establishment of *Journal of Ecology* in 1913, *Journal of Animal Ecology* in 1932, *Journal of Applied Ecology* in 1964, *Functional Ecology* in 1987, and

*Methods in Ecology and Evolution* in 2010. *People and Nature* is a further extension of this highly successful approach. While these other internationally significant journals, and most conspicuously *Journal of Applied Ecology*, have published papers at the interface of ecology and other disciplines, the focus has been on ecology itself, and thus viewing interdisciplinary scholarship as the adjunct of questions that are fundamentally ecological in intent. *People and Nature* takes a rather broader view, which can loosely be characterised as a requirement that all contributions have something meaningful to say both about the “People” and the “Nature” components of its title.

## 1 | SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITY

Breaking down the barriers between disciplines brings its own challenges to authors, reviewers, and readers of articles. Although *People and Nature* presumes and encourages conversations across quite different arenas of knowledge production, this ambition can encounter remarkably durable disciplinary wisdoms about how research *should* be framed. *People and Nature* is committed to working to minimise the challenges associated with disciplinary difference. First, we feel strongly that researchers doing high-quality work should be able to expect a professional, respectful, and constructive publishing experience regardless of their disciplinary norms. We strive to welcome and evaluate every submission on its own terms; we cannot promise to “get it” on first read, but we can promise to try. We recognise that a large proportion of work within the scope of *People and Nature* is undertaken by researchers from disciplines beyond ecology, sometimes this is in collaboration with ecologists, but often it is not. Our ethos is

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inclusive and we have set up our submission, peer review, and publication processes with a number of features to ensure our journal caters to different needs. Importantly, we welcome conceptual and empirical research and we do not prioritise one over the other. All research styles have an important role to play when addressing issues within our scope. Relatedly, we are not prescriptive when it comes to word limits or section headings. Of course, our editorial board will assess manuscript formats for appropriateness but we recognise that different disciplines have different conventions and norms and therefore do not ask authors to conform to arbitrary word limits or fixed structures.

Second, when scoping the journal, we heard from a lot of researchers who had experienced painful review processes for their interdisciplinary work. We commit to being a leading light of interdisciplinary editing and peer review. It can be difficult for journal editors to make decisions on interdisciplinary work that is often necessarily reviewed by people working in very different spheres. Understandably, reviewers tend to comment more critically on aspects of work with which they are most familiar and provide fewer comments on aspects they know less about. This can be problematic for authors who, for example, use mixed methodologies. The editorial board we recruited is intimately familiar with interdisciplinary research and peer review, and has the tools and the confidence to make active and fair editorial decisions. The editors know that interpreting differences of opinions from contrasting peer reviews takes work, both for ourselves and for authors, but it is crucial to ensure that *People and Nature* articles can speak across boundaries.

Further to this, in recognition of the splintering of largely separate conversations in different niche (but often interdisciplinary) journals, we are working with authors to ensure that their papers actively speak to a range of relevant fields and disciplines. *People and Nature* thus aspires to be not a collection of unlike contributions to different literatures, but rather the nexus where these various literatures about human-nature relationships convene. This aspiration will take years to achieve, and steering from an editorial team expert in interdisciplinary integration. For this reason and its own sake, a diversity of voices on our growing editorial board is key: our Associate Editors currently hail from 18 countries and innumerable fields and disciplines, with a 46%:54% male:female gender balance.

As well as ensuring that the editorial board has the right tools to make objective decisions, we have introduced two important additions to our peer review process. We ask reviewers to specify in their reports which aspects of a manuscript they are most comfortable assessing. This is a small, but important, way to help handling editors assess reviews in their proper context. When we have received the required number of reviews on a manuscript, all of the comments to the authors are then passed first to all reviewers who are invited to enter into a conversation on fellow reviewers' reports. We hope that this will draw out disciplinary differences in reviews and help editors to ensure that any requested revisions to manuscripts are appropriate.

Third, while the primary audience of our journal will be academic researchers, we recognise that topics within our scope are of importance to practitioners and policymakers, and we want to ensure that we actively engage with them. We welcome submissions from these

groups and our Perspective article type is particularly suited to non-academic audiences. Access to primary research is a perennial problem for those who do not work for an academic institution and this is one reason we decided that the Journal would be fully open access—all articles are published under a CC-BY licence, free to read, and reuse. We also recognise that such a broad scope will in turn have a very broad readership and we hope that people will engage with all of our content, whether or not it is from their discipline. To facilitate this, like one of our sister BES journals, *Functional Ecology*, all articles have a plain language summary published alongside them as part of their supporting information. We recognise the international nature of research within our scope and, like all the BES journals, allow authors to publish their abstract in another language of their choice alongside the English abstract. In general, as a BES journal we benefit from a dedicated and highly experienced in-house editorial office team, giving us the ability to provide a level of service and additional promotion for authors that is unavailable to many journals.

Early interest in the journal has been excellent and, in order to help ensure fast publication for our authors, content is being published as soon as it is ready and will subsequently be collected into balanced issues published quarterly. We hope our first volume will help set the agenda in this interdisciplinary space, and that subsequent volumes will expand it further.

## 2 | BUILDING OUR COMMUNITY

As *People and Nature* develops, we will endeavour to learn from, and adapt, our processes to provide the best interdisciplinary publication experience that we can for authors, reviewers and readers. We cannot do this in isolation. We want to build a community around this exciting new venture. We have welcomed pre-submission enquiries since before we opened for submissions, and we are still happy to provide feedback to potential authors before they submit. We also welcome feedback from the community more broadly. Do you have suggestions to improve our peer review process or article layout, for example? Is your subject area not represented on our editorial board? If you have any feedback do get in touch with our office.

To foster a two-way conversation we have established a blog (which includes all of our plain language summaries of papers) and a Twitter feed, and encourage discussion and debate within the journal's pages. Please join us on this journey.

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