Online Only Summary

Despite decades of research, biodiversity continues to deteriorate. We argue that improving reflexivity is a powerful means to reconcile conservation science with the concerns of the diverse communities that depend upon and care about the natural world.

The concept of reflexivity has diverse meanings across scholarly traditions (Rose 1997, Lynch 2000, Boström et al. 2017). Reflexivity can mean taking a step back to critically assess one’s own assumptions. It can mean looking inward at one’s own identity and actions, but also outward to the relationships a researcher develops in the contexts in which they work. It can mean looking forwards to anticipate possible futures, or backwards to learn from the past. As such, scholars largely agree that there is no one way in which to ‘do reflexivity’. However, the concept signifies an approach to research that is self-critical, responsive and adaptable.

In this comment paper, we suggest that the frontiers of conservation science should be less concerned with finding ever-more precise facts about nature and more focused on cultivating research that serves the diverse communities that it seeks to inform, thereby improving utility and contribution of the research to the challenge of addressing the biodiversity crisis. We suggest that improving reflexivity is important to this endeavour and present some practical suggestions of how it can be done.