

EDITORIAL

The Florida panther: an editorial perspective

G. Cowlshaw, K. Crandall, J. L. Gittleman & E. J. Milner-Gulland
Editors

doi:10.1111/j.1469-1795.2006.00027.x

One of the most difficult questions in conservation science is when we as humans should intervene in natural ecological and evolutionary problems. Even when there are presumed successes, such as in bringing back populations from decline or ridding areas of invasive species, there is the feeling that we have not necessarily done the right thing – the natural process has to some extent been tampered with. Perhaps the hottest scientific topic in this regard is whether charismatic species (often carnivores) benefit genetically or ecologically when individuals from outside populations are introduced into declining ones. In this issue is a series of articles evaluating the successes, failures and contentious issues concerning introductions and consequent long-term management of the Florida panther. Because of the strong feelings aroused by this set of articles, we feel it is important to clarify the editorial process that took place.

The original manuscript by Pimm, Dollar & Bass (2006) was submitted on 28 September 2004. Accompanying the submission was an extensive cover letter explaining the context and history of the work, including a statement from Pimm acknowledging that the management of the Florida panther was controversial. Pimm stated that if *Animal Conservation* were to accept the paper, he would request that Dave Maehr, one of the principal researchers long involved with the panther issue, be sent the manuscript for comment. The manuscript was reviewed by two external referees. On 10 January 2005, the paper was rejected with encouragement to resubmit if the authors could respond thoroughly and effectively to the referees' comments. A revised manuscript was received on 16 April 2005. The paper was re-reviewed and acceptance was recommended following further revision.

The editors finally accepted the manuscript on 4 August 2005. We subsequently decided to select the paper as a

'featured article' and solicited invited replies from experts in the field (including David Maehr, Gus Mills, Scott Creel and others). Through the course of this process, concerns were raised about the provenance of the data used by Pimm *et al.* (2006), leading to a protracted series of reviews, commentaries and investigations. In the editorial office, we considered the extent to which Pimm *et al.* (2006) used only publicly accessible information (i.e. a government report by Land *et al.*, 2004) for their analyses. We satisfied ourselves that the information analyzed was appropriately gathered in a meta-analysis-type fashion; that is, individual animals, their relatedness and population structure could be gleaned from the databases publicly available. Following months of investigation, the editors concluded in January 2006 that the results were reliably based on data in the public domain. On this basis, we went ahead with the publication of the Pimm *et al.* (2006) paper.

Conservation science proceeds by examining new questions and collecting necessary information that will better inform whether panthers and other threatened species are more viable when we as humans do meddle. We hope that the publication of these papers will further this science by allowing others to effectively address these issues, both by verification and by extension.

References

- Land, D., Shindle, D., Cunningham, M., Lotz, M. & Ferree, B. (2004). *Florida panther genetic restorations and management*. (Annual Report.) Naples, FL: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.
- Pimm, S.L., Dollar, L. & Bass, O.L. Jr. (2006). The genetic rescue of the Florida panther. *Anim. Conserv.* doi: 10.1111/j.1469-1795.2005.00010.x